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Summary

Summary

“Araby” is narrated by a young, unnamed boy who lives with his aunt and uncle. He begins the story by talking about his home, located on a dead-end street with an abandoned, two-story house at the end. The rest of the houses on his street, inhabited by “decent” families, face one another. He says that a priest had lived and died in his house before his family moved in, and some of the priest’s belongings are still there—including a number of books and a rusty bicycle pump, which the narrator finds while wandering through the scraggly garden that comprises his backyard.

When playing during the winter months, night falls early, before dinner is ready. The narrator and the other neighborhood children run from yard to yard, through others’ gardens and even a stable. When evening fully sets in, the children hide in the shadows when an adult comes outside, because they do not want to be called in. The narrator’s friend, Mangan, has a sister, and she occasionally calls Mangan in for tea. As they do with the other adults, the children hide when she comes out, but she persists despite their hiding, and they reluctantly go inside for the night. While Mangan teases his sister and pretends that he will not come inside, the narrator stares at her figure in the lamplight, and he suggests that he is attracted to her, describing how her “dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.”

The narrator secretly watches Mangan’s sister from his window, and he regularly waits for her to leave in the morning so that he can follow her to school, although he is too shy to speak to her. He thinks of her regularly throughout the day. For instance, even during the chaos of going to the market with his aunt, he can only keep his mind on Mangan’s sister, and his emotional thoughts sometimes bring him to tears. “My body was like a harp,” he says, “and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.” One evening, the narrator goes into the room of his house in which the late priest’s books are kept. He presses his palms together as though praying, but his thoughts remain on Mangan’s sister, and he repeatedly utters the phrase “*O love!*”

The first time Mangan’s sister speaks to the narrator, she asks if he plans on going to Araby, a bazaar that will soon be coming to town. While she wishes she could go, she tells the narrator that she has a weeklong retreat with her convent and will be unable to. He promises her that if he goes, he will bring something back for her. After his promise, he can focus on nothing but Araby; his chores seem meaningless, and his interest in schoolwork begins to falter. All of the “serious work of life” becomes “ugly, monotonous child’s play.”

On the Saturday morning of the bazaar, the narrator reminds his uncle that he wants to go. His uncle, fussing with a hat brush, acknowledges him and goes back to his business. Not knowing what to do with himself, the narrator walks slowly to school. When he arrives back home for dinner, his uncle has still not returned. He goes upstairs to wait, looking out the window at his friends playing and occasionally looking at Mangan’s house, imagining that he sees Mangan’s sister standing in the lamplight.

When the narrator comes back downstairs, he finds that Mrs. Mercer, a family friend, is joining them, but his uncle has still not come home. Frustrated, he listens as Mrs. Mercer and his aunt gossip. When Mrs. Mercer leaves, the narrator begins pacing until his uncle arrives home at nine o’clock; his uncle had forgotten about the bazaar. The narrator asks his uncle for money, and although his uncle tells him that everyone is probably already asleep, his aunt tells her husband to give the narrator the money. Agreeing that “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” the narrator’s uncle provides him with a florin, asks if he knows the poem “The Arab’s Farewell to His Steed,” and sends him on his way.

The narrator takes a train to Araby and arrives just before ten o'clock. Paying a shilling to get into the main hall of the marketplace, the narrator notices that it is dark, many of the booths have already closed, and the entire hall is filled with a "silence like that which pervades a church after a service." He briefly becomes entranced by the sound of two men counting money, but he soon remembers his mission to buy a keepsake for Mangan's sister and wanders to an open booth. Inside, a woman and two men with English accents are talking, and when the woman notices the narrator, she unenthusiastically asks if he wants to make a purchase. After looking at some vases, he tells her that he will not, and she goes back to talking with the men.

The narrator stays at the stall for a moment to feign interest in buying something. As he is leaving the booth, there is a call for the bazaar to close, the lights in the upper part of the hall go out, and the narrator says,

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

Themes

Themes

Loss of Innocence

One of the major arcs in “Araby” is the narrator’s movement from innocence to experience. As the story begins, the narrator is one of many neighborhood children who play daily; he describes “the career of our play” as they run all over from the starting point of their street. There are, however, hints of the adult world to come in the remnants left behind by the priest who used to live in the narrator’s house—particularly the “central apple-tree,” which in the story’s deeply Catholic context evokes humans’ biblical expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The beginning of the narrator’s infatuation with Mangan’s sister is a clear point of transition. He creates an image of her rather than realistically interpreting her. He becomes obsessed, afraid that schoolwork or interruptions from others will force him to stop thinking about her. This is despite the fact that Mangan’s sister seems to have no special interest in the narrator, only speaking to him once within the story, and is described several times as “brown.” The reader is reminded that she is a girl like any other, and it is clear that the narrator’s depiction of her is highly subjective.

After the narrator begins to dream of Mangan’s sister, he isolates himself—feels differentiated, even, in the strength of his affections—and seems to stop playing with the other children on his street, instead seeing them from afar while he thinks of her instead. As he waits for his uncle to return home so he can go to Araby, he says,

From the front window I saw companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived.

The narrator’s journey to Araby, alone in a “bare carriage” of “a special train for the bazaar,” is itself set up as a sort of quest. Yet it signals the distance between the Araby of the narrator’s imagining—an “Eastern enchantment” that might just make Mangan’s sister return his affections—and the reality of his day. His uncle forgets about the bazaar entirely; the bazaar does not have the exotic spirit that the narrator imagined and is instead composed of English shopkeepers; the half-dark space of the hall late at night even recalls the too-familiar space of a church. Though a few afterimages of the narrator’s imagined outcome flicker (“two men . . . counting money on a salver” and “the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall”), the story’s end is characterized by the disappearance of light at the top of the hall and the narrator’s accompanying disenchantment. By the last sentence, the narrator feels “anguish and anger” at his “vanity” and his realization that what he had imagined is so far from the prosaic truth.

Religion, Public and Private

From the beginning of “Araby,” Joyce clearly marks the Catholic Church’s overarching public presence in the daily life of the narrator’s Dublin. The narrator explains that his street is near “the Christian Brothers’ School” and that his house had once been inhabited by a priest who “died in the back drawing-room.” The priest’s papers and books are still “littered” about a back room, and the very air, “musty from having been long enclosed,” seems infused with the priest’s presence as it “hung in all the rooms.” Throughout, the narrator’s scant descriptions of religious institutions are suffused with much the same mustiness. Religion is the air the characters of “Araby” breathe and move through, but it is more associated with tradition and mundanity than

with ecstasy.

It isn't clear exactly how devout a Catholic the narrator may be, but it is apparent that he is attuned to spiritual experience in a more private sense. He describes the mystical experience of playing with his friends after winter dusk: "The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed." As he realizes his romantic feelings for Mangan's sister, the narrator comes to revere her as one might a religious icon, and he uses extensive Catholic imagery in describing his care for her. He holds these feelings like a "chalice," the ceremonial wine cup used for the Eucharist; he repeats her name as in "strange prayers and praises." One evening, he goes into the room where the priest had died as one might go to a church, and he is overcome in prayer:

I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: "*O love! O love!*" many times.

When Mangan's sister finally speaks to the narrator, they stand on opposite sides of "the railings" on Mangan's steps, which are reminiscent of the altar rails at which Catholic churchgoers receive Communion. In this context, her bearing ("bowing her head towards me") and the narrator's light-saturated description are reminiscent of artistic depictions of the Virgin Mary.

The narrator's clearly religious associations with Mangan's sister seem derived from the dominance of the Catholic Church within his Irish upbringing. Because the Church of the time discourages and represses romantic and sexual feelings, particularly outside of marriage, the narrator is left with only religious language to describe such extremity of feeling. In fact, religious language is only used in the story as a point of comparison, as the narrator attempts to render his feelings about Mangan's sister—never in description of ordained religious experience. Joyce may be making the point that love is more sacred than belief ritualized and made mundane by the Church.

Characters

Characters

The Narrator

The unnamed narrator is a boy who lives with his aunt and uncle on North Richmond Street in Dublin. Throughout “Araby,” the narrator undergoes a journey of personal growth, from a carefree child playing in the street to a young boy who experiences his first encounter with what might be considered adult life. Over the course of the story, he finds himself falling into an obsessive love with his friend Mangan’s older sister. Hoping to find some sort of object or trinket to woo her, he goes to Araby, a bazaar, but finds himself ultimately disappointed by the experience.

The narrator is clearly impressionable. For instance, while his love for Mangan’s sister touches on blasphemy due to its religious nature (he prays to her and venerates her as the Virgin Mary), readers understand that he probably does not know any other way to express love. He has also learned that adult lovers buy one another keepsakes, and he mimics being an adult when he dismisses his schoolwork as child’s play. Even so, through the bulk of the story he is characterized most by innocence, and it is this innocence that is tainted at the end of the story.

Mangan’s Sister

Mangan’s sister is the object of the narrator’s affection. Still, readers know little about her, and any description of her is unreliable, as the narrator is infatuated with her. So little is known about her, in fact, that she is not given a name. This suggests that the idea of her is more important than her real-life presence. In the instances that she is physically in the story, she represents a counterpoint to the narrator’s romanticized infatuation with her.

Mangan’s sister is first mentioned as the one who fetches her brother to come in from playtime. Later, she appears in a scene where Mangan and two other boys are fighting over their caps. This offers a contrast between her, who does not engage in such foolishness, and her brother. Finally, readers learn that she would like to go to Araby but is instead attending a retreat with her convent. All of these instances suggest that, unlike the narrator, Mangan’s sister concerns herself with practical affairs and is generally responsible. Further, there is no evidence presented in the story that she is aware of the narrator’s affection for her.

The Narrator’s Aunt

The narrator lives with his aunt and uncle. His aunt takes him to the marketplace every Saturday and argues the narrator’s case when the narrator’s uncle is reluctant to provide him with money. Little else can be surmised about her, although she is likely Catholic and is concerned that Araby might be a “Freemason affair.” (The Catholic Church found the secret society of the Freemasons to be anti-Catholic.)

The Narrator’s Uncle

The narrator’s uncle is his other caretaker, and he is only mentioned because the narrator needs money from him to spend at Araby. This likely means that he is the primary source of income for the family. However, he is presented as unreliable and likely a drinker. Although the narrator reminds his uncle on Saturday morning that he needs money for Araby, his uncle does not come home until the bazaar is nearly closed. He has been

out all day, talks to himself as he enters the house, and needs to be reminded several times about the bazaar before he finally gives the narrator any money to go. When speaking to the narrator, he engages in a non sequitur, asking if the narrator knows a poem. These signs suggest that he may have been drinking.

Mrs. Mercer

Mrs. Mercer appears briefly in the story and is described as “a pawnbroker’s widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose.” She eats dinner with the narrator and his aunt on the night of Araby. With the name “Mercer,” which is similar to “mercantile,” and her status as a pawnbroker’s widow, she is clearly associated with money. She offers a parallel to the narrator’s religious quest, which is also to gain material possessions for his idol (Mangan’s sister). While the narrator realizes that his religious quest is, in fact, naive, there is no indication that Mrs. Mercer will stop collecting stamps for her own pious purpose. She acts as a symbol of the way that religion is inextricably associated with money, one of Joyce’s many criticisms of the Catholic Church.

The Shopkeeper

The narrator interacts with the shopkeeper at the end of the story. She is a seller at Araby, speaking with two English men when the narrator enters her stall. She dutifully asks the narrator if he would like to buy anything, though “the tone of her voice was not encouraging.” She seems to be the antithesis of the narrator’s idea of Araby. Rather than a friendly woman who sells exotic wares with which the narrator can woo his crush, she is associated with the English, generally understood as Ireland’s enemy, and clearly wishes to close her shop. She anticipates the epiphany that the narrator will have soon after interacting with her and represents the unromanticized boredom of adult life, a clear contrast to the narrator’s idolization of Mangan’s sister and his high hopes when he arrives at Araby.

Analysis

Analysis

To understand Joyce's aims in "Araby," it is first important to look at the book in which it appears: *Dubliners*, which was first published in 1914. *Dubliners* is a book of short stories, each focusing on different characters who live in or around Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century. This book was written during the height of Irish nationalism, a period in which Ireland was attempting to reclaim and reinvent its national identity as one that was separate from England, which had dominated Ireland for several centuries prior. In writing *Dubliners*, Joyce wanted to capture the spirit of Dublin as accurately as possible, including messy and unpleasant details that many other writers strove to avoid.

Scholars generally agree that *Dubliners* is divided in three approximate parts, representing the chronology of childhood, adolescence, and maturity. "Araby," as the third story in the *Dubliners*, focuses on a character in his late childhood. It is important to note that in the first story of the book, "The Sisters," Joyce introduces two motifs that appear in most of the short stories, including "Araby": paralysis and epiphany. These motifs appear in "Araby" as part of the narrator's personal growth.

The idea of personal growth is perhaps the main subject of "Araby." The story is considered a *bildungsroman*, which is a story that highlights a character's development. From the subject matter of the story—a boy developing feelings for his friend's sister—it is reasonable to assume that the narrator is a child approaching adolescence. In fact, Joyce himself spent much of his childhood living on North Richmond Street, the primary setting of "Araby," and when he was twelve, an oriental fair similar to Araby came through Dublin. The narrator of "Araby" is thus probably about twelve years old.

Over the course of only several pages, readers see the disposition of the narrator moving from that of a child to that of one approaching adolescence. The story opens with the narrator recounting childhood games with neighborhood children, and throughout most of the story, he is under the supervision of his aunt and uncle. These particular instances suggest that the narrator is firmly situated as a child, at least at the story's beginning.

However, as the narrator begins developing an interest in Mangan's sister, we begin to see his liminal status between childhood and adulthood, especially in the way that he begins to approach his schoolwork. In the text, the narrator refers to his schoolwork as "child's play, ugly monotonous child's play." This is a contrast to the child's play with which the story opens. Instead of embracing his schoolwork, the narrator dismisses it as something petty and lacking meaning.

Still, there is something childlike in the narrator's obsession with Mangan's sister, and various adult themes, such as religion and nationalism, escape him. He uses a metaphor, for instance, that describes Mangan's sister as playing him as one might a harp. At the height of Irish nationalism, and as one attempting to write about the state of Ireland, Joyce would have counted on readers recognizing that the harp is the national symbol of Ireland. Here, however, the narrator uses it as an unrelated metaphor, and the broader meaning of the harp symbol is lost. Similarly, when the narrator goes to the market with his mother, street performers sing songs about O'Donovan Rossa, an Irish nationalist and insurgent, as well as ballads about the fighting occurring between Ireland and England at the time. These street singers are a distraction to the narrator, who wishes only to think of his love.

Religion is treated in a similar fashion. For instance, the narrator associates Mangan's sister with Catholic imagery throughout the story, and when he isolates himself in the back room and prays, it is the image of

Mangan's sister that comes to his mind. In a collection of short stories that comments so extensively on Dublin, the narrator's relationship with Catholicism—one of the most prominent features of Irish life at the turn of the century—suggests that he is still largely a child, perhaps unable to either grasp the full import of the religious language he uses or to find an alternate language of his own to express his feelings.

By the end of the story, the narrator is thrown into an adult world in his journey to Araby. This again contrasts with the opening of the story, where he is surrounded by childhood playmates, as well as an earlier scene in which he attends a market with his aunt. Here, he experiences the reality and mundanity of adult life. The bazaar, though it promises the romantic exoticism of the orient, is populated by individuals with English accents. By the time he arrives, the hall is dark and mostly empty, and he cannot find the perfect gift for his crush. As he interacts with a shopkeeper, he realizes that what he had imagined is not possible. Here, readers see the two motifs that appear in most of the stories of *Dubliners*: paralysis, in that the narrator is unable to bring himself to buy anything for Mangan's sister, and growth in the form of epiphany, as he realizes that his desires have been an exercise in vanity.

Key Ideas and Commentary: Themes and Meanings

This is a story of the loss of innocence and the frustration of first love. The young boy's exaggerated expectations about the emotional rewards of his devotion to the little girl are cruelly deflated. He interprets the disappointing circumstances of his journey as a sign of the hollowness of the ideals with which he undertook that quest. He thus connects the frivolous banter among the young people and his own earlier brief conversation with Mangan's sister and thinks that he has perceived the banal reality behind the romantic image. However, his perceptions in each case are unreliable: His immaturity causes him to overreact in each direction. The story, then, shows that the temptations to both the romantic inflation and to the cynical devaluation of experience are but two sides of the same false coin.

"Araby" is the third of the fifteen stories in *Dubliners* (1914). These stories examine the hazards of the various stages in life, and "Araby" marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence. This protagonist begins his story as a boy amid his peers, full of childish energy and short-lived attention. The image of Mangan's sister gradually emerges from these confused impressions, however, gathering itself into a vision of desire, both erotic and religious. The growth of these feelings soon sets the boy apart from his fellows, and becomes even more consuming at the mention of the bazaar. He now connects his attitude toward the transcendent with the popular mystique of the Orient, each with an awakening sexual longing. No sooner are these connections made, however, than they are compromised: The girl cannot be possessed (because of her "retreat"), and in the compromise—the material gift—lie the seeds of the destruction of the dream. The rest of the story dramatizes the painful deflation of that dream: the human limitations of his uncle and aunt and the natural limitations of time and space all conspire to thwart the boy's search for fulfillment. He is therefore emotionally disposed to interpret the material elements of his adventure (the adult admission fee, the falling coins, the extinguishing lights, the casual talk of fibbing) as the signs of the end of the childish idealization of human values. From such a point of view, this is a story of initiation, marking the rites of passage from the Edenic domain of home to the uncertain terrain of adult life.

Similarly, the story can be viewed as a version of the medieval romance. The hero sets forth from surroundings of blissful innocence in pursuit of a distant ideal. In his solitary adventure through dark places, his spirits are buoyed up by the vision of remote beauty with which he hopes eventually to commune. He encounters and overcomes various obstacles and adversaries on his journey, finally gaining possession of the symbol of the truth that liberates him from ignorance and unites him with the beauty he desires. This literary mode is predominantly melancholic and nostalgic, focusing on the consciousness of the narrator or hero, emphasizing the chivalric virtues, and embracing a sense of Christian mystery. In its broad terms as well as in scores of details, "Araby" may be seen as designed in accordance with this story type, though rendering it in

an ironic vein. The promise of spiritual bliss is made but not delivered: The hero's aspirations are cultivated and then denied. The cacophony of the modern city clashes and breaks the harmony of the mood of nostalgia for a faith in an ideal order of nature and grace. Thus, the story conjoins the personal and archetypal stories in a beautiful blend of realistic detail, tonal control, and symbolic design.

Style, Form, and Literary Elements: Style and Technique

Told from the first-person point of view, the story is a convincing representation of the voice of an observant, impressionable, naïve young boy. At the same time, through the deft use of language, symbol, and allusion, a world of feeling beyond the boy's experience is conveyed to the attentive reader.

First, the story is firmly rooted in time and place: The Joyce family lived on North Richmond Street in 1894, and the young James (then twelve years old) attended the actual Araby bazaar held between May 14 and 18 of that year. All the historical, geographical, and cultural references in the story are true to life.

Second, the language is carefully designed so as to convey a complex, yet highly controlled range of meanings. Consider, for example, the use of the words "blind," and "set . . . free" in the first sentence, the various uses of "stall" in the body of the story, and "driven" and "eyes" in the last sentence. These motifs support the chivalric and religious themes in the story and subtly link them to its emotional core.

Third, the story is rich with the symbolism of romance, Roman Catholicism, and the Orientalism popular at the end of the last century. The various allusions—to Sir Walter Scott, James Clarence Mangan, Caroline Norton's poem *The Arab's Farewell to His Steed*, the Freemasons, Mrs. Mercer—can enlarge the relevance and appeal of the boy's private adventure for the attentive reader.

Finally, the story reaches its climax with what Joyce calls an "epiphany": a term borrowed from theology and applied to a moment of unexpected revelation or psychological insight. Such moments are not conventionally dramatic, nor are they explained to the reader. Here the epiphany occurs in the boy's consciousness when he overhears the petty and incomplete conversation at the bazaar. He believes himself to have been self-deluded: He has placed too much faith in Mangan's sister and the values she represents. His early religious training and ignorance of human relations have caused him to adore a mere petticoat.

Style, Form, and Literary Elements: Setting

"Araby" is set in North Richmond Street, Dublin, at the turn of the twentieth century. Joyce describes it as "a quiet street," with an "uninhabited house of two stories at the blind end," and lined on either side with brown houses facing each other. In addition to the streetscape, where the young narrator catches glimpses of Mangan's sister as she steps out of her house onto the doorstep, scenes in the story take place in the interior of the house the narrator shares with his aunt and uncle. The "musty" house had been previously occupied by a priest, who had died in the back drawing room, a room that provides a refuge for the narrator on a dark, rainy evening when he wants to be alone to think about his love for the girl. Upstairs are "high cold empty gloomy rooms." The final scene in the story is set in the Araby bazaar, a church-sponsored festival held in a "big hall girdled at half its height by a gallery." As the festival is closing, the lights are shut off and the narrator at last is left "gazing up into the darkness."

Style, Form, and Literary Elements: Literary Style

Through the use of a first person narrative, Joyce communicates the confused thoughts and dreams of his young male protagonist. Joyce uses this familiarity with the narrator's feelings to evoke in readers a response

similar to the boy's "epiphany"—a sudden moment of insight and understanding—at the turning point of the story.

Point of View

The first-person point of view in "Araby" means that readers see everything through the eyes of the narrator and know what he feels and thinks. If the narrator is confused about his feelings, then it is up to the readers to figure out how the narrator really feels and why he feels that way, using only the clues given by the author. For example, when the narrator first describes Mangan's sister, he says that "her figure [is] defined by the light from the half-opened door." In other words, she is lit from behind, giving her an unearthly "glow," like an angel or supernatural being such as the Virgin Mary. Readers are left to interpret the meaning behind the narrator's words, because the boy is not sophisticated enough to understand his own longings.

Symbolism

The symbolism Joyce includes also helps readers to fully understand all of the story's complexities. The former tenant of the narrator's house, the Catholic priest, could be said to represent the entire Catholic church. By extension, the books left in his room—which include non-religious and non-Catholic reading—represent a feeling of ambiguity toward religion in general and Catholicism in particular. The bazaar, Araby, represents the East—a part of the world that is exotic and mysterious to the Irish boy. It could also represent commercialism, since it is really just a fundraiser used to get people to spend money on the church. Mrs. Mercer, the pawnbroker's widow, represents the uncle's debt and irresponsibility; she too could represent greed and materialism. To the narrator, Mangan's sister is a symbol of purity and feminine perfection. These qualities are often associated with the Virgin Mary, who also symbolizes the Catholic church. While the boy is at Araby, the various, and often contrasting, meanings of these symbols converge to produce his epiphany.

Stream of Consciousness

Joyce is famous for using a stream-of-consciousness technique for storytelling. Although stream of consciousness does not figure prominently in "Araby," a reader can see the beginnings of Joyce's use of this technique, which he used extensively in his subsequent novels, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. A major feature of stream-of-consciousness storytelling is that the narration takes place inside the mind of main characters and follows their thoughts as they occur to them, whether those thoughts are complete sentences or not. Although this story uses complete sentences for its storytelling, the narration takes place inside the boy's mind. Another feature of stream-of-consciousness narration is that the narrator's thoughts are not explained for the reader. This is true of "Araby" as well, especially during and after the boy's epiphany.

Style, Form, and Literary Elements: Literary Qualities

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Historical and Social Context: Social Sensitivity

While Dublin has seen change since the turn of the twentieth century when Joyce wrote "Araby," many of the conditions present then remain today. In 1904, all of Ireland was under British control, which the Irish resented bitterly. The nationalist group, Sinn Féin (part of which later became the Irish Republican Army—the IRA), had not yet formed, but Irish politics were nonetheless vibrant and controversial. The question of Irish independence from Britain was one of primary importance to every citizen.

Ireland's major religion, Roman Catholicism, dominated Irish culture. Many families sent their children to schools run by Jesuit priests (like the school the narrator in "Araby" attends) and convent schools run by nuns (like the one Mangan's sister attends). Folklore, fairy tales, and homespun stories—told and retold for generations— provided a common form of family entertainment. Many turn-of-the-century stereotypes about the Irish came from their cultural traditions. Some common ones included large families, drunkenness, poverty, and imaginative storytelling.

The large families seen in Ireland at the turn of the century stemmed largely from the Catholic religion. Divorce went against church doctrine, and abortion and birth control were considered mortal sins. It was also a mortal sin for husbands and wives to refuse to engage in sexual relations to prevent having more children. As a consequence, it was not unusual for Irish Catholic families at the turn of the century to be quite large and for those families to live in poverty as a result. While the modern Catholic Church does not exercise quite as much influence, these issues still figure strongly in Irish culture today.

There were no televisions or radios for entertainment at the turn of the century. Many homes had no electricity and were heated only by a central fireplace. Therefore, the custom of storytelling after dinner (or "tea") was one of the few forms of entertainment available. In light of these living conditions, it is clear why an event like the bazaar in "Araby" could cause such great expectations.

The stereotype of the drunken Irishman owes partly to the level of poverty experienced by the majority of people in Ireland after the Great Potato Famine of the 1840s. Beer was cheap and often more sanitary than the water. The Irish were also famous for their whiskey, which many still claim to be the finest in the world. The local public house—or pub—was the central gathering place of the village, and also served as a small hotel for weary travelers. People were certain to find warm hospitality, good beer and mutton stew, and good stories around the hearth to lift their spirits. In the evening, the men would gather at the pub to drink, talk of politics or sports, and hear music. Unfortunately, this led to many men wasting their meager resources, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of the drunk, irresponsible Irishman. The narrator's uncle in "Araby," who keeps the narrator and the pawn broker's widow waiting before coming home drunk, fits this mold.

In larger cities like Dublin and Belfast, many Irish cultural stereotypes have disappeared as Ireland has become modernized. In many parts of Ireland, though, poverty still exists, and the pub is still the town's social center.

Historical and Social Context: Compare and Contrast

1906: The Abbey Theatre forms in Dublin as part of a push by notable literary figures such as W. B. Yeats to influence a cultural renaissance in Ireland.

Today: Irish theater and Irish playwrights, including Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*) achieve critical acclaim and popular success all over the world.

1906: Irish nationalist group, Sinn Féin (Gaelic for "We Ourselves") forms with the goal to achieve Irish independence from England, which rules all of Ireland.

Today: Although the majority of Ireland became a sovereign nation in 1948, Northern Ireland, which consists of six counties, is still under English rule. English troops occupy Northern Ireland, and the IRA (Irish Republican Army) continues its terrorist attacks.

1899: W. B. Yeats publishes *The Wind Among the Reeds*, a poetry collection that incorporates ancient Irish-Gaelic myths and cultural traditions into its subject matter.

Today: Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who mines Ireland's cultural and physical landscapes for his subject matter, wins the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Connections and Further Reading: Related Titles / Adaptations

The Dead, a film based on one of the stories in *Dubliners*, was directed by John Huston (starring his daughter, Anjelica) and produced by Vestron Pictures in 1987.

The fifteen short stories in Joyce's *Dubliners* are all loosely connected as each one describes people living in Dublin, Ireland, at the turn of the century.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Joyce's first novel, describes the early life of Stephen Dedalus, a sensitive, intelligent young Irishman struggling to understand life and his role in it.

Connections and Further Reading: Media Adaptations

The Dead, a film based on one of the stories in *Dubliners*, was directed by John Huston (starring his daughter, Anjelica) and produced by Vestron Pictures in 1987.

Connections and Further Reading: For Further Reference

Benstock, Bernard. *Essay on Joyce in Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 36. Edited by Thomas F. Staley. Detroit: Gale, 1985. Broad overview of Joyce's life and works.

Coulthard, A. R. "Joyce's 'Araby.'" *The Explicator* 52 (Winter 1994): 97-100. Coulthard contends that "Araby" is about a man's bitter reflection on the romanticism and naivete of his youth.

Ehrlich, Heyward. "'Araby' in Context: The 'Splendid Bazaar,' Irish Orientalism, and James Clarence Mangan." *James Joyce Quarterly* 35 (Winter-Spring 1998): 309-32. This essay focuses on the historical and social context of "Araby," including a discussion of an actual 1894 bazaar in Dublin that likely served as a model for the setting of the story.

Gordon, John. "'Dubliners' and the Art of Losing." *Studies in Short Fiction* 32 (Summer 1995): 343-353. Gordon discusses the "engineered absence of lovers, food, or symbols of life and death."

Norris, Margot. "Blind Streets and Seeing Houses: Araby's Dim Glass Revisited." *Studies in Short Fiction* 32 (Summer 1995): 309-19. This essay concentrates on Joyce's poetical language and the significance of voyeurism in "Araby."

Pound, Ezra. "'Dubliners' and Mr. James Joyce." *The Egoist* 1 (July 15, 1914): 267. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 35. Edited by Paula Kepos. Detroit: Gale, 1990. Pound praises *Dubliners* in this early review, citing the author's craftsmanship, literary prowess, and universal messages.

Wright, David G. "Interactive Stories in *Dubliners*." *Studies in Short Fiction* 32 (Summer 1995): 285-94. Wright discusses the interconnecting themes and characters

Bibliography: Bibliography and Further Reading

Sources

Scholes, Robert and A. Walton Litz, editors. *Dubliners Text, Criticism, and Notes*, Penguin, 1996.

Further Reading

apRoberts, R. P. "The Palimpsest of Criticism; or, Through a Glass Eye Darkly," in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. XXVI, 1966-67, pp. 469-89.

apRoberts's sarcastic attack on what he sees as Harry Stone's excessively reaching reading of "Araby." Where Stone holds that "Araby" must be seen in light of Joyce's other writing, apRoberts insists that it is self-contained.

Brown, Homer Obed. *James Joyce's Early Fiction*, Archon, 1975.

A study of the methods of Joyce's early fiction (primarily *Dubliners*) and the themes the work explores.

Levin, Harry. *James Joyce*, New Directions, 1960.

A general discussion of Joyce's work and his techniques, written in 1941, the year of Joyce's death.

Critical Essays

Araby, James Joyce: Introduction

“Araby” James Joyce

The following entry presents criticism on Joyce's short story “Araby” (1914). See also James Joyce Short Story Criticism.

Considered one of Joyce's best known short stories, “Araby” is the third story in his short fiction collection, *Dubliners*, which was published in 1914. It is perceived as a prime example of Joyce's use of epiphany—a sudden revelation of truth about life inspired by a seemingly trivial incident—as the young narrator realizes his disillusionment with his concept of ideal love when he attempts to buy a token of affection for a young girl. Critical interest in the story has remained intense in recent decades as each story in *Dubliners* has been closely examined within the context of the volume and as an individual narrative. As the third story, “Araby” is often viewed as an important step between the first two stories—“The Sisters” and “An Encounter”—and the rest of the collection.

Plot and Major Characters

The narrator of “Araby” is a young boy living with his aunt and uncle in a dark, untidy home in Dublin that was once the residence of a priest, now deceased. The boy is infatuated with his friend's older sister, and often follows her to school, never having the courage to talk to her. Finally she speaks to him, asking him if he is going to attend a visiting bazaar, known as the “Araby.” When she indicates that she cannot attend, he offers to bring her something from the bazaar, hoping to impress her. On the night he is to attend, his uncle is late coming home from work. By the time the young boy borrows money from his uncle and makes his way to the bazaar, most of the people have left and many of the stalls are closed. As he looks for something to buy his friend's sister, he overhears a banal young salesgirl flirt with two young men. When the disinterested salesgirl asks him if he needs help, he declines, and he walks through the dark, empty halls, disillusioned with himself and the world around him.

Major Themes

Each story in *Dubliners* contains an epiphanic moment toward which the controlled yet seemingly plotless narrative moves. Among the best-known epiphanies is the one that occurs in “Araby,” in which a young boy recognizes the vanity and falsity of ideal, romantic love. It has also been interpreted as a story about a boy's growing alienation with his family, religion, and the world around him. Moreover, it is viewed as autobiographical, reflecting Joyce's own disillusionment with religion and love. As such, *Dubliners* is considered a collection of stories that parallel the process of initiation: the early stories focus on the tribulations of childhood, then move on to the challenges and epiphanies of adulthood. A few critics have detected the theme of Irish nationalism, as Joyce employs Irish legends to indicate the vast discrepancy between the narrator's idealized view of the girl and the harsh reality of the bazaar. Moreover, the theme of the quest is a prevalent one in “Araby,” as the young narrator embarks on a dangerous journey to win the hand of a young maiden.

Critical Reception

For many decades *Dubliners* was considered little more than a slight volume of naturalist fiction evoking the repressed social milieu of turn-of-the-century Dublin. When critics began to explore the individual stories in

the collection, much attention was focused on the symbolism in “Araby,” particularly the religious imagery and the surrounding of the bazaar. In fact, some commentators have invested the story with many layers of meaning and religious symbolism; others urge a more superficial reading. Literary allusions, influences, and autobiographical aspects of the story have also been a rich area for study; in fact, commentators have found traces of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Dante's *Commedia*, and Homer's *The Odyssey* in Joyce's story. Much critical attention has focused on stylistic elements, especially the impact of the narrative voice in “Araby.” As scholars continue to mine Joyce's *Dubliners* for critical study, “Araby” remains one of the most highly regarded and popular stories in the volume.

Araby, James Joyce: Principal Works

Dubliners 1914

The Portable James Joyce 1947

The Essential James Joyce 1948

Chamber Music (poetry) 1907

A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man (novel) 1916

Exiles (drama) 1918

Ulysses (novel) 1922

Poems Penyeach (poetry) 1927

Collected Poems (poetry) 1936

Finnegans Wake (novel) 1939

Stephen Hero (unfinished novel) 1944

Letters 3 Vols. (letters) 1955–1966

Critical Writings of James Joyce (criticism) 1959

Criticism: William Bysshe Stein (essay date 1962)

SOURCE: “Joyce's ‘Araby’: Paradise Lost,” in *Perspective*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Spring, 1962, pp. 215–22.

[In the following essay, Stein surveys the religious imagery in “Araby.”]

As L. A. G. Strong has observed in *The Sacred River*, “Christianity for Joyce is inescapable, and his critics cannot escape it either.” And he is right. No matter the work, Joyce always views the order and disorder of the world in terms of the Catholic faith in which he was reared. Turn though he does at times to other sanctions for his beliefs, he never quite shakes off the power of “a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration.” Only the life of Christ objectifies the absolute moral standards by which man can make sense out of life.

This is true, in particular, of *Dubliners*. In their egoistic preoccupation with temporal pleasures and aspirations, the protagonists in this collection of stories forget that the willing sacrifice of Christ promises them deliverance from all the agonizing frustrations and sufferings in the material universe of time and space. Prey to all the fears of their darkened spirit, they lack the will to deny the temptations of sin and therefore paralyze the vitality of their souls. But, paradoxically, even when enslaved by their perverse and perverting desires, they still yearn for true selfhood—for the state of Adam in Paradise before he forfeited the perfection with which God endowed him. Thus, in all of these stories, the pathos and tragedy of the human predicament are projected in the fruitless efforts of the protagonists to substitute material for spiritual values and to imbue the former with the enduring substance of the latter. The extremely popular “Araby” illustrates the manner in which Joyce integrates this pattern of action with the intricate symbolism of his Catholic background.

At the outset of the story the physical and seasonal setting establishes the necessity of the youthful hero's quest for a redemptive ideal. “An uninhabited house ... at the blind end” of a street figures the spiritual inertia of the Irish Church. For when the boy prowls in the empty residence that formerly belonged to a now deceased priest, he is oppressed by its “musty” atmosphere. And when, in a littered room, he discovers Scott's “The Abbot” and “The Memoirs of Vidocq,” here is evidence that the priest had shirked the full responsibilities of his ministry and sought escape from his pastoral trusts in chronicles of romance and adventure. The “yellow” cover of one of these volumes (Joyce's symbolic color of betrayal, decay, and corruption) sustains this interpretation. Moreover, outside the building this defection from divine guidance is crystallized in an image of a blighted Garden of Eden:

The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

This passage, of course, reverberates with irony. In his preoccupation with worldly things the priest has ceased to heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the “rusty bicycle pump” (a parallel to the theosophical bicycle pump in the Circe episode of *Ulysses*) suggests, he had mechanized his responses to divine love. No wonder, then, that the familiar tree of temptation and death occupies a central position in the yard.

But even as this scene re-creates the moral paralysis of the boy's environment, it likewise offers a solution to his problem of disoriented faith. For in relating the dismal prospect to the seasonal setting in the next paragraph, “the short days of winter,” Joyce unobtrusively calls attention to the turn of the liturgical year—the Advent. This cycle of the Christian Year marks the preparation for Christmas and takes note of the miracle of the Incarnation (man's assurance of deliverance from the curse of the Fall). It therefore operates to evoke the tense expectation that preceded the coming of the Messiah—His birth in Bethlehem. And here it is well to recall the liturgy of the Advent, the “re-collection” of the penance and loving prayer by which “the people that walked in darkness” expressed their longing for redemption from sin and death. For against this background of the annual re-living of the life of Christ, Joyce projects the next development of his story. His hero is in an equivalent state of darkness. But since a tragic velleity of soul grips the Irish world, his position is almost helpless. With his father dead (and by extension the priesthood and the Church), there is no guiding light of wisdom and love to reveal the path of faith. As a consequence, he allows his instincts to give direction to his yearning for selfhood. Like so many other protagonists in *Dubliners*, he attempts to substitute the ephemeral titillations of romantic passion for the ineffable ecstasy of mystical participation in the Holy Passion.

Appropriately, Joyce resorts to inversions of the guiding light to dramatize the boy's susceptibility to the temptations of lust. For whenever he spies the object of his carnal curiosity (Mangan's sister), she is bathed in an artificial radiance that exhibits her coquettish charms:

She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railing looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

In another such tableau Joyce divulges her evil influence upon the youth's mind as she ridicules the significance of Advent penance. Unlike the chore of "a retreat that week in her convent," he, she observes, will be able to go to a "splendid bazaar" (an analogue of the *pompa diaboli* so vehemently deplored by the Church Fathers, certainly a commonplace to Joyce). Of course, her feline sensuality again numbs his spiritual awareness:

The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there, and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

In a final mutation of this enticing pose, Joyce clearly associates the girl with the derelict morality of Ireland. The rubric in this case is the casual reference to "brown," a symbolic color in *Dubliners* that is always connected with inward and outward decay and stagnation. It likewise prefigures, I think, the bleak futility of the quest undertaken by the boy with her warm encouragement:

I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below her dress.

The combination of lust and romantic illusion generated by these glimpses of Mangan's sister has an interesting parallel in "The Dead." Gabriel Conroy perceives his wife standing on the staircase in a similar position, and she too is rendered mysteriously enchanting by the play of light and shadow:

He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white.

And it is this vision that fires the sexual passion leading to an epiphany even more agonizing and disillusioning than the boy's.

In "Araby" the romantic and unconsciously wanton incarnation that woman assumes in the imagination of the hero enables Joyce to initiate a brilliant religious trope. Never discerned by any of his critics, it is signalled by the choric repetition of "name" and "word." Since the Advent is the liturgical setting of the story, the artist sets out to correlate the seasonal theme of the Incarnation with the boy's unvoiced passion. In this maneuver, even as in the execution of *Ulysses*, the action unfolds on several different levels of reality, at once paralleling and opposing one another, and it reflects the young protagonist's desperate effort to find an earthly replacement for the spiritual ideal denied him by his environment, as certainly this passage indicates: "I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: 'O love! O love!' many times." But in order to construe the moral implications of this transformation of desire, it must be approached "un-protestantly" through the doctrines of Catholic theology (certain assumptions of faith in regard to divine nature). Otherwise the critic cannot understand why Joyce is silent about the name of Mangan's sister. For whenever the hero conjures her vision, her name dies on his lips in mute rapture: "her name was like a summons to my foolish blood." This awe and reverence literally manifest an impulse towards deification—in the religious context of the story a blasphemous tendency. According to traditional Christian myth, only the One who from all eternity has existed ever commanded such love and veneration, the One whose secret and unutterable name was YHVH (Yahveh). So holy was this tetragrammaton that it was sacrilege for a layman to pronounce it. This pure being, in appearance the ineffable light of glory, was the Father who for always and always was generating and begetting the Son; and for always and always the Holy Spirit was proceeding from

the Father and the Son. And it was the Holy Spirit that engendered not only the Creation but also Jesus the Son of Mary.

Here it must be remembered that the rites of the Incarnation, which occur on Christmas, are centered upon the mystery of the appearance of light in the depth of darkness, of God “who hast made this most sacred night to shine forth with the brilliance of true light,” and of him who is begotten “from the womb before the day-star.” Significantly, on this day, the third Mass celebrates the eternal generation of the Divine Word from the Father, since the Child born this day is He who in the beginning created all worlds:

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God;
And the Word was God.
He was made in the beginning with God.
All things were made through Him,
And without Him was made nothing that has been made.
In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

(John I, 1–4)

As the youth's preoccupation with the illuminated figure of Mangan's sister suggests, he has forgotten that only the true light can redeem him from his earthly frustrations. Indeed, he profanely equates her with the miracle of the Eucharist:

These noises [the pandemonium of the Dublin streets] converged in a single sensation of life for me. I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. *I thought little of the future.*

(Italics mine)

Moreover, to emphasize this shocking blasphemy, Joyce deliberately connects this “confused adoration” with the perversion of the hymns, “the songs of the Holy Spirit”: “my body was like a harp and her words were like fingers running upon wires.” The harp, of course, is the conventional symbol of the Book of Psalms and of all songs and music that honor God. Here it is converted into an analogue of sensuality, an explicit rejection of spiritual love.

This pattern of inverted piety is also directly related to the hero's dereliction in his Advent devotions and to his distorted conception of Paradise:

I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me ... I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle.

Instead of suppressing his desire for earthly pleasures in accordance with the sacramental practices of the Church during this cycle of the Christian year, the youth experiences only the mortifications of frustration and delinquency. No thought of self-denial crosses his mind. His unruly instincts, disguising themselves in romantic sentiments, paralyze his awareness of God's gift of grace. Yet, ironically, his delusive “Eastern enchantment” would become a reality if he actually surrendered to the genuine aspirations of his soul. In this

allusion Joyce apparently improvises on the symbolism of the East so persistent in the writings of the Church Fathers, especially as influenced by its identification with Christ in Zacharias VI, 12 ("The Orient is His name.") and by the antiphon of the liturgy *O Oriens* (The great day of the everlasting life will no longer be illuminated by the visible sun, but by the true light, the sun of justice, which is called the Orient ...). In any event, as the Advent season contemplates the nativity of Christ, it also looks forward to the Resurrection and the fulfillment of His promise of salvation, man's attainment of Heaven. As the Book of Revelation puts it, there will be a re-creation of the Garden of Paradise in Eden, "a new heaven." These associations stem inevitably from Joyce's earlier reference to the scene of the Fall of Man, for, as the action unfolds from this point, it centers on the hero's yearning for a temporal Paradise. Tempted by unconscious sexual cravings, he substitutes Araby and its brown madonna for Heaven and its vision of the Divine Mary.

The balance of the story deals with his futile quest to gain the favor of Mangan's sister with an offering from the mock paradise of Araby. His disappointment is foreshadowed, however, in what might appear to be a sequence of harmless allusions to time ("I sat staring at the clock"; "it was after eight o'clock"; "At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the halldoor.").

Actually Joyce here reveals his hero's infatuation with *nunc fluens*, the present which is always flying away, as distinct from *nunc stans*, the eternal present which is the boon of Heaven. And it is possible that the florin with which the uncle provides the boy is an ironical reflection of this insulated absorption; for, as Joyce with his philological curiosity doubtlessly knew, the "godless" or "graceless florin" was minted during the last half of the nineteenth century. It was so designated because during one stage of its coinage the motto, *Dei Gratia*, was dropped from its face. In any event, all of these delicate symbolic repercussions seem to integrate with the boy's experience at the bazaar, his exposure to the wiles of the devil as reflected in the *pompa diaboli*.

His first impression of Araby, for instance, is colored with satanic corruption: "In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name." Magic, of course, implies a desire to circumvent divine omnipotence, and this idea is comprehended in the immorality of amusements designed to incite souls to their ruin, gaming "stalls" and musical entertainment at the "*Cafe Chantant*," the latter description probably disguising the cheap, indecent comedy of a burlesque show. And since the enterprise appears to be run by people with predominantly "English accents," the traditional enemies of the Irish are co-operating with the devil in promoting the moral degradation of the native population. Surely, in the youthful hero's glimpse of two men ... "counting money on a salver," there is a teasing echo of the betrayal of the Savior by Judas. These details operate, then, to expose the boy's complete disregard for his own and his country's salvation. This radical dissociation of religious sensibility is finally crystallized in his blasphemous fancy that in the hall there reigns "a silence like that which pervades a church after service."

As the story terminates, Joyce continues to enlarge the dimensions of this gimcrack Eden. When the boy at last decides to buy a present for the object of his transcendent love, he is discouraged by the indifference of the female attendant who, ironically, is engaged in amorous play as futile as his own:

Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen.

Significantly, the objects attracting his attention are not devoid of symbolic meaning. In traditional Christian iconography a vase holding a lily often designates the Annunciation. Empty, however, it indicates a separation of the soul from the body. From another point of view, the vase and the imitation flowers reflect the pervasive secularization of the culture, its preoccupation with external vanities. After all, what is the bazaar but a huge symbol of Vanity Fair, and what is the boy but a hypocritical pilgrim.

In the final scene of the story Joyce accentuates the theme of paradise lost, not only of the hero's Araby but of Heaven itself. With his illusions about an exotic bazaar shattered, the boy surrenders to a paralysis of volition:

Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall ...

The “eastern guards” in this context, it seems to me, are surrogates of the cherubim of Genesis, “placed at the east of the garden of Eden ... to keep the way of the tree of life.” For even as Adam and Eve heard the reprimanding “voice of the Lord God” just before their summary expulsion from Paradise, so the boy, in a mock parallel to this incident, is awakened to his fate:

I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

But unlike the darkness which fell after the crucifixion of Christ, there is no promise of a return of redemptive light. Instead of profiting by his folly, the hero relapses into self-pity and anger, a slave to his egoistic desires. Forgetting that hope, faith, and charity (love) are supernatural gifts of God that can fulfill man's infinite craving for happiness, he allows frustration to obscure his vision of the eternal light of salvation. And so paradise can be lost! And so the symbolic dialectic of “Araby” enunciates!

Criticism: John O. Lyons (essay date 1964)

SOURCE: “James Joyce and Chaucer's Prioress,” in *English Language Notes*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December, 1964, pp. 127–32.

[In the following essay, Lyons considers the influence of Chaucer's Prioress' Tale on Joyce's “Araby.”]

When Joyce's commentators mention the influence of Chaucer, the detail they cite most frequently is the character of Molly Bloom, which reminds them in its licentiousness and common sense of the Wife of Bath.¹ I think it can be shown, however, that Joyce's use of Chaucer is more than casual. There is no doubt of his knowledge of and respect for the writings of Chaucer. In 1912 he wrote, as part of an examination for a degree from the University of Padua, an essay on “The Good Parson of Chaucer.”² Six years earlier he had written to Grant Richards, who had requested that some allegedly obscene passages be deleted from *Dubliners* before he published it, “... I suspect that it [English literature] will follow the other countries of Europe as it did in Chaucer's time.”³ Joyce's reference to Chaucer in connection with *Dubliners* may have more significance than as a mere prop to his argument that the English are more prudish in literary matters than Continentals. Both *The Canterbury Tales* and *Dubliners* illustrate those alternating attitudes of irony and sympathy which have been seen by critics in the characterizations of Dame Alice and Molly Bloom. But beyond this, both of these works are collections of short stories in which real places and people are mixed with fiction, and in which the author (thinly disguised) is a participant.

The influence of Chaucer on Joyce appears to be more specific when a comparison is made of the *Prioress' Tale* with the often anthologized “Araby.” Chaucer's Prioress tells a story presumably based on the martyrdom of Hugh of Lincoln, to whom she refers at the end. The tale concerns a little boy who bolsters his courage to walk to and from school through the ghetto by singing *Alma redemptoris*. One day his throat is slit by the

Jews, but his widowed mother is able to find him in the pit where he is thrown because he continues to sing.⁴ Joyce's "Araby" is virtually the prototype of the modern short story about a youth's initiation. It concerns a romantic little boy who secretly worships the sister of a playmate. He wishes to please her by bringing her a souvenir from *Araby*, a bazaar. His uncle has promised him money for this treat, but on the night he is to go his uncle gets home late. When the boy finally arrives at the bazaar the stands are closing and his romantic imaginings dissolve before the tawdry props and people of the closing carnival.

On the surface these stories seem to have little similarity except that both are about obsessed schoolboys. Yet the details of Joyce's story often parallel those of Chaucer's tale. Chaucer's youth is a fatherless orphan; Joyce's lives with his aunt and uncle. Chaucer's youth attends "A litel schole of cristen folk," which is "Doun at the ferther ende" (494–495).⁵ Joyce's boy goes to "the Christian Brothers' School," and lives at the blind end of North Richmond Street (p. 33).⁶ Chaucer's boy sings his Latin prayers out of uncomprehending but complete devotion: "Nought wiste he what this Latin was to seye, / For he so young and tendre was of age" (523–524). In the back drawing room the boy in "Araby" reads books left there by a priest, the former tenant. These include "*The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow" (p. 33). He too loves more than he understands.

Both of these nameless innocents express a romantic and uncomprehending love for an idea of sweet beauty which sustains them in a hostile world. And both of them express their praise in song. To and from school Chaucer's little boy sings his song to the Virgin.

Twyes a day it passes thurgh his throte,
To scoleward and homward whan he wente;
On Cristes moder set was his entente.

(548–550)

The idea of this song and of the boy's singing recurs as a knell throughout the *Prioress' Tale*. She begins by calling her story a song (487), and then during the tale itself the words *song* and *singing* occur twenty-four times in the 202 verses. Chaucer also plays with the idea of the song issuing from the boy's heart and passing through his throat which, even when slit, is an opening for his song.

The swetnes hath his herte perced so
Of cristes moder, that to hir to preye,
He can nat stinte of singing by the weye.

(555–557)

In "Araby" the idea of *singing* and *heart* are also dominant in the early part of the story. Music is introduced obliquely when the coachman "... smoothed or combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness" (p. 34). When the boy spies upon Mangan's sister he feels a song rise from his heart. "When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped," and "her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood" (p. 35). As Chaucer's young martyr braves his way through the Jewish ghetto by singing the praises of the Virgin, Joyce's boy protects himself from a crude, adult, and urban world by harboring the image of his innocent love. "Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance" (p. 35). Only in this way can he stand

... the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stand on guard by the barrels
of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-you-all* about
O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land.

(p. 35)

Here the songs are attributed to the hard world, so it is coarse music—and the modern initiate keeps his own song of romantic praise to himself.

These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom.

(p. 35)

When he is alone his praise and prayer are open. “I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: ‘O love! O love!’ many times” (p. 36). When he waits for his uncle to come home so that he can go to the bazaar he goes “from room to room singing” (p. 38). And when he arrives at *Araby* there is the bitter irony that his disillusionment comes as he stands before a stall called the “Café Chantant” (p. 40).

The little boy in the *Prioress' Tale* is a Christian martyr, which Joyce's youth is not. Yet the religious images in “Araby” have often been noted. Cleanth Brooks emphasizes them in his analysis of the story.⁷ The house at the blind end of North Richmond Street was occupied by a priest; the boy treats Mangan's sister as an object of his vocation and offers prayers to her; his priestly role is performed when he imagines himself bearing a chalice through the throng; the aunt is visited by a “pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose” (p. 38); when he arrives at the closing bazaar it seems to him that he “recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service”; and the concessioners are “counting money on a salver” (p. 40). The boy's romanticism is partly doomed because he translates his normal pubescent longings into a religious context. This absurdity is extended in the boy's mind to the world about him, so that in the church-like atmosphere of the bazaar Joyce comments once again on the stultifying effect of Irish Catholicism.

At the end of the *Prioress' Tale* the images of *singing*, *heart*, and *blood* which signify the boy's mortality give way to images of precious stones which signify his immortality. When his weeping mother finds him singing in the pit he is called “This gemme of chastitee, this emeraude, / And eek of martirdom the ruby bright” (609–610). The boy confesses that the Virgin “leyde a greyn up-on my tonge” (662), and when it is removed by the priest he stops singing. They bury the youthful martyr “in a tombe of marbul-stones clere” (681).

Chaucer's story of martyrdom is about a little Christian boy in “Asie” who is killed by vindictive Jews. Joyce's story is of a young and innocent romantic who is disillusioned at *Araby* by crass Englishmen. The imagery of “Araby” also moves from blood and song to hard precious objects. Here it is not the beauty and immortality of gems, but those coins which should be rendered unto Caesar. He goes to the bazaar with the florin his uncle gives him tightly gripped in his hand. When he arrives he cannot find a sixpenny entrance, and so squanders a shilling to a “weary-looking man” (p. 40). Then he sees the two men “counting money on a salver,” and listens “to the fall of the coins” (p. 40). His imaginings of Eastern enchantment fade when he hears the young lady at the booth in a frivolous and flirtatious conversation and feels her coldness toward him. Instead of the “greyn” upon his tongue which allows him to sing in death, he has in his pocket two pennies and a sixpence which he allows to fall against each other as he lingers before the booth. The image of his virgin, Mangan's sister, deserts him in this last hour. In his own mind he had canonized the way in which “her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side” (p. 34). She cannot go to the bazaar because there is a retreat that week in her convent; he does go to *Araby*, and is there deserted by her image. Marvin Magalaner wonders why Joyce does not give the Christian name of the girl.⁸ Even her few words are given indirectly. If it were not so, and even if her name were given, the romantically deified image which the boy has of her would be diluted. In his disillusionment he is isolated from the doings of this world in a way which is analogous to the murder of Chaucer's little martyr.

The end of “Araby” might seem to be excessively hysterical for the small dimensions of the story.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

(p. 41)

Yet when the story is seen as a complement to an earlier type of Christian martyrdom by its depiction of a martyrdom for romantic childhood idealism, this death of youth justifies such excess. When the abbot removes the “greyn” from the tongue of the Prioress' martyr his actions are much more extravagant.

His salte teres trikkled doun as reyn,
And gruf he fil al plat up-on the grounde,
And stille he lay as he had been y-bounde.

(674–676)

Compared to this, Joyce's youth is restrained when he sees the impious death in life which the adult world about him leads. And yet, as with Chaucer's overstatement of his innocent martyr's infant piety, there is an irony in the theological wording of the boy's self-condemnation. He is still as ignorant of his own motives as is the Prioress of some of the grotesqueness of her tale.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Joyce shows Stephen Dedalus grow from precocious piety to worship for a young girl. “Araby” condenses this experience. In both, a youthful idealism is destroyed by a callous world. To enforce the sense that a romantic and pious youth is martyred by reality in “Araby” Joyce may well have gone to Chaucer's tale of a martyred youth. Where the stories differ those differences are complementary. The Christian world of the Prioress, like the ghetto in her tale, is “open at either end” (494). The world of Joyce's little boy, like North Richmond Street at the end of which he lives, is blind.

Notes

1. Harry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (Norfolk, Conn., (1941), p. 126. Richard M. Kain, *Fabulous Voyager: James Joyce's Ulysses* (Chicago, 1947), p. 100; William Y. Tindall, *James Joyce: His Way of Interpreting the Modern World* (New York and London, 1950), p. 38.
2. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York, 1959), p. 332.
3. Quoted by Herbert Gorman, *James Joyce* (New York and Toronto, 1939), p. 150.
4. Bloom makes reference to the story during his meditations on death in Glasnavin Cemetery. “It's the blood sinking in the earth gives new life. Same idea those jews they said killed the christian boy.” James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, 1961), p. 108.
5. *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston, 1933)—line numbers are indicated in the text.
6. James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York, n.d.)—page numbers are indicated in the text.
7. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York, 1948), pp. 420–423.
8. Marvin Magalaner and Richard M. Kain, *Joyce: The Man, the Work, the Reputation* (New York, 1956), p. 78.

Criticism: Harry Stone (essay date 1965)

SOURCE: “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” in *Antioch Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Fall, 1965, pp. 375–410.

[In the following essay, Stone explores the literary allusions and symbolism found in “Araby,” contending that Joyce “was careful to lacquer his images and actions with layer after layer of translucent, incremental

meaning.”]

Love came to us in time gone by	When one at twilight shyly played
And one in fear was standing nigh—	For Love at first is all afraid.
We were grave lovers. Love is past	That had his sweet hours many a one;
Welcome to us now at the last	The ways that we shall go upon.

—*Chamber Music*, XXX (written in 1904 or earlier).

And still you hold our longing gaze
With languorous look and lavish limb!
Are you not weary of ardent ways?
Tell no more of enchanted days.

—*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1904–14).

Lust, thou shalt not commix idolatry.

—*Finnegans Wake* (1922–39).

“We walk through ourselves,” says Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*. Stephen is trying to show how Shakespeare, or for that matter how any artist (creator of “Dane or Dubliner”), forever turns to the themes which agitate him, endlessly bodying forth the few crucial events of his life. “Every life is many days, day after day,” says Stephen. “We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves.” Stephen’s theory may be an ingenious *jeu d’esprit*—though Joyce himself was heavily committed to such views. But whether or not Stephen’s words are appropriate to Shakespeare, they are exactly appropriate to Joyce. In his writings, Joyce was always meeting himself—in ways which must at times have been beyond his conscious ordinance—and the pages of “Araby” are witness to that fact.

For “Araby” preserves a central episode in Joyce’s life, an episode he will endlessly recapitulate. The boy in “Araby,” like the youthful Joyce himself, must begin to free himself from the nets and trammels of society. That beginning involves painful farewells and disturbing dislocations. The boy must dream “no more of enchanted days.” He must forego the shimmering mirage of childhood, begin to see things as they really are. But to see things as they really are is only a prelude. Far in the distance lies his appointed (but as yet unimagined) task: to encounter the reality of experience and forge the uncreated conscience of his race. The whole of that struggle, of course, is set forth in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. “Araby” is the identical struggle at an earlier stage; “Araby” is a portrait of the artist as a young boy.

II

The autobiographical nexus of “Araby” is not confined to the struggle raging in the boy’s mind, though that conflict—an epitome of Joyce’s first painful effort to see—is central and controls all else. Many of the details of the story are also rooted in Joyce’s life. The narrator of “Araby”—the narrator is the boy of the story now grown up—lived, like Joyce, on North Richmond Street. North Richmond Street is blind, with a detached two-story house at the blind end, and down the street, as the opening paragraph informs us, the Christian Brothers’ school. Like Joyce, the boy attended this school, and again like Joyce he found it dull and stultifying. Furthermore, the boy’s surrogate parents, his aunt and uncle, are a version of Joyce’s parents: the aunt, with her forbearance and her unexamined piety, is like his mother; the uncle, with his irregular hours, his

irresponsibility, his love of recitation, and his drunkenness, is like his father.

The title and the central action of the story are also autobiographical. From May fourteenth to nineteenth, 1894, while the Joyce family was living on North Richmond Street and Joyce was twelve, Araby came to Dublin. Araby was a bazaar, and the program of the bazaar, advertising the fair as a “Grand Oriental Fête,” featured the name “Araby” in huge exotic letters, while the design as well as the detail of the program conveyed an ill-assorted blend of pseudo-Eastern romanticism and blatant commercialism. For one shilling, as the program put it, one could visit “Araby in Dublin” and at the same time aid the Jervis Street Hospital.

But the art of “Araby” goes beyond its autobiographical matrix. The autobiographical strands soon entwine themselves about more literary patterns and enter the fiction in dozens of unsuspected ways. For instance, embedded in “Araby” is a story, “Our Lady of the Hills,” from a book that Joyce knew well, *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) by William Butler Yeats. “Our Lady of the Hills” tells how a pretty young Protestant girl walking through the mountains near Lough Gill was taken for the Virgin Mary by a group of Irish Catholic children. The children refused to accept her denials of divinity; to them she was “the great Queen of Heaven come to walk upon the mountain and be kind to them.” After they had parted and she had walked on for half a mile, one of the children, a boy, jumped down into her path and said that he would believe she were mortal if she had a petticoat under her dress like other ladies. The girl showed the boy her two skirts, and the boy's dream of a saintly epiphany vanished into the mountain air. In his anguish, he cried out angrily, “Dad's a divil, mum's a divil, and I'm a divil, and you are only an ordinary lady.” Then he “ran away sobbing.”

Probably reverberating in “Araby” also are chords from one of Thomas De Quincey's most famous works, “Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow.” In “Levana,” Our Lady of Tears (she bears the additional title, “Madonna”) speaks about the child who is destined to suffer and to see, a type of the inchoate artist:

“Lo! here is he whom in childhood I dedicated to my altars. This is he that once I made my darling. Him I led astray, him I beguiled, and from heaven I stole away his young heart to mine. Through me did he become idolatrous; and through me it was, by languishing desires, that he worshipped the worm, and prayed to the wormy grave. Holy was the grave to him; lovely was its darkness; saintly its corruption. Him, this young idolater, I have seasoned for thee, dear gentle Sister of Sighs!”

He who is chosen by the Ladies of Sorrow will suffer and be cursed; he will “see the things that ought *not* to be seen, sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable,” but he will also be able to read the great truths of the universe, and he will “rise again *before* he dies.” In this manner, says Our Lady of Tears, we accomplish the commission we had from God: “to plague [the chosen one's] heart until we had unfolded the capacities of his spirit.”

The ideas and images of “Levana” (witness the parody in *Ulysses*) had sunk deep into Joyce's imagination. His imagination had always sought out, always vibrated to, the Levanaesque constellation—a constellation that fuses religion, sexuality, idolatry, darkness, ascension, and art. “Araby,” both in its central idea and its characteristic imagery—in the image of Mangan's sister, in the boy's blind idolatry, and in the boy's ultimate insight and dawning ascension—is cognate with “Levana.”

Other literary prototypes also contribute to “Araby.” In “Araby” as in Joyce's life, Mangan is an important name. In life Mangan was one of Joyce's favorite Romantic poets, a little-known Irish poet who pretended that many of his poems were translations from the Arabic although he was totally ignorant of that language. Joyce championed him in a paper delivered as a Pateresque twenty-year-old before the Literary and Historical Society of University College, Dublin, and championed him again five years later, in a lecture at the Università Popolare in Trieste, as “the most significant poet of the modern Celtic world, and one of the most inspired singers that ever used the lyric form in any country.” In “Araby” Mangan is the boy's friend, but,

what is more important, Mangan's sister is the adored girl. In each lecture Joyce discussed Mangan's poetry in words which could serve as an epigraph for the boy's mute, chivalric love for Mangan's sister and for his subsequent disillusionment and self-disdain. In the latter lecture, Joyce described the female persona that Mangan is constantly adoring:

This figure which he adores recalls the spiritual yearnings and the imaginary loves of the Middle Ages, and Mangan has placed his lady in a world full of melody, of lights and perfumes, a world that grows fatally to frame every face that the eyes of a poet have gazed on with love. There is only one chivalrous idea, only one male devotion, that lights up the faces of Vittoria Colonna, Laura, and Beatrice, just as the bitter disillusion and the self-disdain that end the chapter are one and the same.

And one of Joyce's favorite poems by Mangan—a poem whose influence recurs in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*—is “Dark Rosaleen,” a love paean to a girl who represents Ireland (Dark Rosaleen is a poetic name for Ireland), physical love, and romantic adoration. In “Araby” Joyce took Mangan's idealized girl as an embodiment of the artist's, especially the Irish artist's, relationship to his beloved, and then, combining the image of the girl with other resonating literary associations, wrote his own story of dawning, worshipful love.

III

It is easy to follow the external events of the story. A young boy becomes fascinated with his boyfriend's sister, begins to dwell on her soft presence, and eventually adores her with an ecstasy of secret love. One day the girl speaks to him—it is one of the few times they have ever exchanged a word—and asks him if he is going to Araby. She herself cannot go, she tells him, for she must participate in a retreat. The boy says if he goes he will bring her a gift. When he finally visits the bazaar he is disillusioned by its tawdriness and by a banal conversation he overhears, and he buys no gift. Instead he feels “driven and derided by vanity” and his eyes burn with “anguish and anger.”

“Driven and derided,” “anguish and anger”—these reactions seem far too strong. Indeed they seem pretentious when compared to the trivial disillusionment which caused them. And they are pretentious, certainly they are inappropriate, if related only to their immediate external causes. But the boy is reacting to much more than a banal fair and a broken promise. He is reacting to sudden and deeply disturbing insights. These insights are shared by the attentive reader, for by the end of “Araby” the reader has been presented with all that he needs in order to resolve the story's intricate harmony into its component motifs.

Most of those motifs, both personal and public, are sounded at once. The former tenant of the boy's house, a house stale with the smell of mustiness and decay, had been a priest who had died in the back drawing room. In a litter of old papers in a waste room behind the kitchen the boy has found a few damp-stained volumes: “*The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*.” The only additional information Joyce gives us about these books is that the boy liked the last volume best because “its leaves were yellow.” The musty books and the boy's response to them are doubly and trebly meaningful. Joyce chose works that would objectify the themes of “Araby,” works that would exemplify in the most blatant (yet unexpressed) manner the very confusions, veilings, and failures he was depicting in the priest and the boy. The books and their lurking incongruities help us arraign the priest and understand the boy. That the priest should leave a romance by Scott with a religious title that obscures the fact that it is the secular celebration of a worldly queen, Mary Queen of Scots, a queen enshrined in history as saint and harlot; a book of rules, meditations, anthems, and prayers for Holy Week by a Protestant clergyman named Abednego Seller, a clergyman who had written tracts against “Popish Priests,” engaged in published controversy with a Jesuit divine, and was eventually relieved of his office; and a volume of lurid and often sexually suggestive memoirs by a notorious imposter, master of disguise, archcriminal, and police official—all this is a commentary on the

priest and the religion he is supposed to represent. At the same time this literary debris objectifies the boy's confusions.

That Scott's unblemished romantic heroine, an idolized Catholic queen by the name of Mary, should also be (though not to Scott) a "harlot queen," a passionate thrice-married woman who was regarded by many of her contemporaries as the "Whore of Babylon," as a murderess who murdered to satisfy her lust—this strange dissonance, muted and obscured by Scott's presentation, is a version of the boy's strikingly similar and equally muted dissonances. That the dead priest's book of devotions is a Protestant manual by a man bearing the significant name, Abednego Seller—a name which combines in equal parts ancient religious associations (in particular associations of refusing to worship a golden image and of a faith strong enough to withstand a fiery furnace) with an ironically incongruous modern surname that has to do with selling and commercialism—this juxtaposition, also, is appropriate to the boy: it typifies one of his fundamental confusions.

That Vidocq should escape from a prison hospital disguised in the stolen habit of a nun, a veil over his face; that he should then assist a good-natured curé in celebrating mass, pretending to make the signs and genuflections prescribed for a nun—this is a version of what the boy will do. That *The Memoirs* should also contain the history of a beauty "who seemed to have been created as a model for the divine Madonnas which sprang from the imagination of Raphael," whose eyes "gave expression to all the gentleness of her soul," and who had a "heavenly forehead" and an "ethereal elegance"—but who, from the age of fourteen, had been a debauched prostitute who was ultimately caught by the police because, in the midst of committing a robbery, she and her accomplice became utterly engrossed in fornicating with one another—this, also, is a version, a grotesque extension, of the boy's confusions. The boy does not know, can not face, what he is. He gazes upon the things that attract or repel him, but they are blurred and veiled by clouds of romantic obfuscation: he likes *The Memoirs of Vidocq* best not because of what it is, a volume of exciting quasi-blasphemous criminal and sexual adventures, but because he finds its outward appearance, its yellowing leaves, romantically appealing. The boy, like the priest, or Vidocq's characters, or disguise-mad Vidocq himself, is, in effect, an imposter—only the boy is unaware of why he feels and acts as he does; the boy is an imposter through self-deception.

Joyce, in accordance with his practice throughout *Dubliners* (and for that matter, in accordance with his method throughout his writings) included these books so that we would make such generalizations about the priest and the boy. This is clear, not merely from his habitual usage in such matters or from the ironic significance of the books themselves, but from the highly directive import of the sentences which immediately follow these details. These sentences tell us that behind the boy's house was a "wild garden" containing a "central apple-tree"—images which strongly suggest a ruined Eden and Eden's forbidden central apple tree, a tree which has to do with man's downfall and his knowledge of good and evil: fundamental themes in "Araby." The last of the sentences is artfully inconclusive. "He had," concludes the narrator, "been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister." Joyce's ambiguity suggests that the priest's charity may have been as double-edged as other details in the opening paragraphs. Yet the possibility of an incongruity here never occurs to the boy. As usual he fails to examine beneath the veneer of outward appearances; he fails to allow for the possibility of a less public, more cynical interpretation of the priest's charity. If this worldly priest had been so "very charitable" why, at his death, was he able to donate "all his money" to institutions? His charity, so far as we know about it, began at his death.

These and other ambiguously worded ironies had already been sounded by the three opening sentences of "Araby." Joyce begins by telling us that North Richmond Street is blind. That North Richmond Street is a dead end is a simple statement of fact; but that the street is blind, especially since this feature is given significant emphasis in the opening phrases of the story, suggests that blindness plays a role thematically. It suggests, as we later come to understand, that the boy also is blind, that he has reached a dead end in his life. Finally, we are told that the houses of North Richmond Street "conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at

one another with brown imperturbable faces.” These words, too, are ironic. For the boy will shortly discover that his own consciousness of a decent life within has been a mirage; the imperturbable surface of North Richmond Street (and of the boy's life) will soon be perturbed.

In these opening paragraphs Joyce touches all the themes he will later develop: self-deluding blindness, self-inflating romanticism, decayed religion, mammonism, the coming into man's inheritance, and the gulf between appearance and reality. But these paragraphs do more: they link what could have been the idiosyncratic story of the boy, his problems and distortions, to the problems and distortions of Catholicism and of Ireland as a whole. In other words, the opening paragraphs (and one or two other sections) prevent us from believing that the fault is solely in the boy and not, to some extent at least, in the world that surrounds him, and still more fundamentally, in the nature of man himself.

IV

The boy, of course, contributes intricately to his own deception. His growing fascination for Mangan's sister is made to convey his blindness and his warring consciousness. Joyce suggests these confusions by the most artful images, symbolisms, and parallelisms. The picture of Mangan's sister which first sinks unforgettably into the boy's receptive mind is of the girl calling and waiting at her doorstep in the dusk, “her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door,” while he plays in the twilight and then stands “by the railings looking at her.” “Her dress,” he remembered, “swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.”

This highly evocative, carefully staged, and carefully lit scene—it will recur throughout the story with slight but significant variations—gathers meaning as its many details take on definition and thematic importance. That importance was central to Joyce, and versions of the scene occur often in his writings. As his Mangan essay (1902) indicates, he had early chosen the adored female as an emblem of man's vanity, an emblem of false vision and self-delusion followed by insight and self-disdain. The female who appears in “Araby” (she appears again and again in his other writings) is such an emblem. The prototypical situation in all these appearances is of a male gazing at a female in a dim, veiled light. There are other features: the male usually looks up at the female; he often finds her standing half obscured near the top of some stairs and by a railing; he frequently notices her hair, her skirts, and her underclothes. But though the scene varies from appearance to appearance, the consequences are always the same. The male superimposes his own idealized vision upon this shadowy figure, only to have disillusioning reality (which has been there unregarded all the time) assert itself and devastate him. Joyce found this scene—with its shifting aureola of religious adoration, sexual beckoning, and blurred vision—infinately suggestive, and he utilized it for major effects.

The prototypical scene occurs in Joyce's writings before “Araby” (1905). Around 1904, in *Chamber Music*, XXX, he depicted first-love as a “time gone by when one at twilight shyly played and one in fear was standing nigh,” and then added punningly that “we were grave lovers” and “love is past.” Later (around 1907), in “The Dead,” he drew another ambiguous lover. Gabriel Conroy stands in a dark hall at the foot of a dark staircase and gazes up through the gloom at a listening woman. His eyes linger on her shadowy skirt and shadowy form. The woman (who proves to be his wife, Gretta) is leaning on the stair railings. He is entranced by the grace and mystery of her attitude, “as if she were a symbol of something.” But what, he asks, is a listening woman, standing on the stairs in the shadow, a symbol of? Then, with a blindness that will later be filled with terrible irony, he thinks how he would paint her if he were a painter: he would capture her in that attitude—leaning on the railings on the dark staircase—and he would feature her hair and her skirt. He would call the picture *Distant Music*. Gabriel's title is as deceptive as Gretta's pose. But insight and disillusionment are not far off. Gabriel will soon find out what distant music really means to his wife and to himself, and his life will never again be the same.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1904–14) the prototypical scene is conveyed through two girls. Stephen sees Emma, his beloved, standing under a grey “veiled sky” on the stairs of the library. He already doubts her constancy, and he takes “his place silently on the step below ... turning his eyes towards her from time to time.” While he gazes at her, she and her friends stand posing their umbrellas seductively and “holding their skirts demurely.” Some days later Stephen is again standing on the steps of the library. The light has waned and he can hardly see. Suddenly his beloved is before him. He watches as she descends the steps of the library and bows to his supplanter, Cranly. “She had passed through the dusk. And therefore the air was silent save for one soft hiss that fell. ... Darkness was falling.” But though Stephen feels Emma betrays him, he uses her shadowy image to create the “Villanelle of the Temptress”—the only work of art he produces in *A Portrait*, and a poem which dwells on lures, fallen seraphim, chalices, longing gazes, lavish limbs, and the end of enchanted days.

These moments or vignettes from a fall, a fall which leads to insight and creation, are juxtaposed to an earlier episode in *A Portrait*. In the earlier scene, as Stephen strolls on the seashore, he hears the symbolic call to his destiny, the summons to become an artist. At this moment, in the “veiled grey sunlight,” he sees a fair-haired birdlike girl wading in the sea, her slateblue skirts raised about her thighs, her soft-hued flesh girded by the “white fringes of her drawers.” She feels the “worship of his eyes,” and suffers his gaze, bending her eyes towards the stream. “Heavenly God!” cries Stephen to himself. In the “holy silence of his ecstasy,” while “her image” passes “into his soul for ever,” he commits himself “to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!” But the ecstatic epiphany of the wading girl is soon deflated—not merely by the wasted sky and the grey sand which end the scene, but by the cold reality of its cognate, Emma’s betrayal, to which the epiphany is juxtaposed. Paradoxically, the annunciatory visit of the birdgirl heralds only a hope; it is deflation, the beginning of betrayal, which stimulates creation.

Joyce’s rejection of the romantic vision of the wading girl—and his continued interest in the voyeuristic scene of a male gazing at a shadowy female—is carried even further in the “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses* (1914–21) where he parodies this recurring scene with merciless brilliance. As the “Nausicaa” episode opens, dusk is falling. Bloom is sitting on Sandymount strand while a Benediction service (celebrated before a men’s retreat) is going on in a nearby church. Bloom, too, is a celebrant; he is engaged in fervent devotions. He is gazing at Gerty MacDowell, “literally worshipping at her shrine.” Gerty is eighteen and a virgin. From the nearby church, hymns of veneration ascend for the Host, for the Body, canticles of praise for Our Lady, for the Virgin Mary. Bloom concentrates on Gerty, who is enpedestaled on a rock by the water’s edge. As he watches her settle her hair, swing her legs, and lift her skirts, his excitement grows. From the nearby Mirus bazaar (that is, “Wonderful” or “Perfumed” bazaar) which is raising funds for Mercer’s hospital, a display of fireworks begins. Gerty uses the excuse of the fireworks to tempt Bloom, leaning back farther and farther, lifting her skirts higher and higher, and allowing him to see her thighs and her drawers. At almost the same moment, a hymn of adoration swells from the church; the priest kneels and looks up at the Blessed Sacrament, glorified now in the round ray-begirt opening of the monstrance, and displayed on high for all the venerating men to see. At this point Bloom’s private service of veneration (like the one in the church) is coming to its conclusion. While Gerty lifts her skirts and displays herself, he masturbates to a climax. But having induced one deflation, he is about to undergo another. He realizes that Gerty is not what she seemed to be; she is a cripple, a lame, limping version of his self-inflated dream. And there are further abasements. Bloom’s mind constantly circles back to the humiliating (yet strangely exciting) event of that afternoon: how Molly, his wife, displayed her lavish body before Blazes Boylan and brought that ardent lover to a more intimate climax. “Think you’re escaping,” muses Bloom, “and run into yourself.” But now the distant music, the sacred incense, and the rapturous words “holy Mary holy virgin of virgins” have faded on the darkening air. The clock on the mantel of the priest’s house concludes the deflation by uttering Shakespeare’s absurd “word of fear.”

Cuckoo.
Cuckoo.

Cuckoo.

After the publication of *Ulysses*, Joyce explained that his method of writing in the “Nausicaa” episode was tumescence and detumescence; that the colors associated with the scene were blue (the color of the Virgin Mary—Gerty, a virgin who favors blue, is a parodic form of the Virgin Mary) and grey (the color of dusk); that the symbol of the chapter was the Virgin; that the organs involved in the episode were the nose (perfume and incense abound in the scene) and the eye (voyeurism); and that the art included in the section was painting.

V

“Araby” is a version—perhaps the most primordial version in Joyce—of this obsessively repeated scene. For in “Araby” the image of the worshipped girl is coterminous with, is a metaphor of, the entire story. The boy in “Araby,” like Gabriel, will soon see that the portrait he has created—a romantic portrait that one might call *Young Adoration*—is a mockery, and his life will never again be the same. In “Araby” that portrait is of a girl in the dusk at her doorstep calling and waiting at her half-opened door, her figure defined by the light behind her. The picture is also of a boy standing by the railings looking up at her worshipfully. The suggestions evoked by the scene are of two utterly opposed sorts. On the one hand the image calls up associations of religious worship and spiritual adoration—the boy at the altar railing venerating a softly lit statue of the Virgin Mary—associations which will soon be powerfully underlined and elaborated. On the other hand, the image also suggests a seductive girl, even a harlot, calling and waiting at her half-opened door—the boy stares at her outlined figure, her swaying dress, her moving body, and her softly swinging hair—and these suggestions, too, will soon be underlined and elaborated. Lastly the image suggests Ireland, a country traditionally personified in Irish literature as a beautiful girl who is worshipped with mystical fervor. The two most famous literary embodiments of this personification are Cathleen ni Houlihan and Dark Rosaleen, the latter given its definitive popular form in “Dark Rosaleen,” the poem by Mangan that Joyce knew so well. In “Araby” Mangan’s sister is adored and worshipped as Dark Rosaleen is in Mangan’s poem, a parallel which many Irish readers would note at once, and a parallel which helps suggest that Mangan’s sister is an embodiment of Ireland, is a new and more equivocal Dark Rosaleen. In “Araby” the girl is known only as Mangan’s sister, an awkward and unaccountable substitute for a name (Mangan, the boy, is of no importance in the story) until one realizes that the circumlocution is designed to catch the reader’s attention and direct his associations. Once the Mangan-“Dark Rosaleen” associations are called up, the parallels become charged with meaning. For Mangan’s poem contains the same blend of physical love and religious adoration that Joyce makes the boy show for Mangan’s sister. Dark Rosaleen has “holy, delicate white hands,” is “my virgin flower, my flower of flowers,” and can make the lover “kneel all night in prayer.” Dark Rosaleen’s name is like “lightning in my blood”; Mangan’s sister’s name is “like a summons to all my foolish blood.” The poem exactly depicts the boy’s unrest, his obsessive focus on the girl, his fusion of queen and saint, and his strange holy ardor:

All day long, in unrest,	To and fro, do I move.
The very soul within my breast	Is wasted for you, love!
The heart in my bosom faints	To think of you, my Queen,
My life of life, my saint of saints,	My Dark Rosaleen!
	My own Rosaleen!
To hear your sweet and sad complaints,	
My life, my love, my saint of saints,	My Dark Rosaleen!

Joyce begins, then, with a subtly evocative blend of spirituality, sexuality, and nationality; he immediately goes on to develop each motif in concert with the others. The boy remembers Mangan's sister as a "brown figure," and every morning, in an unvarying ritual, he actually prostrates himself before her image, lying on the floor in the front parlor and waiting for her to emerge so that he can follow her. This ritualistic abasement and prostration is appropriate to the boy's rapidly developing obsession. Like De Quincey's young boy, he has had his heart stolen away; he, too, has become idolatrous; through this girl, "by languishing desires," he has, all unknown to himself, "worshipped the worm, and prayed to the wormy grave."

For the boy has begun to worship Mangan's dark sister as all that is spiritual and holy and romantic; he has begun to utilize her idolatrously as an interceding saint, as a charm against the commercialism and materialism of the market place. When on Saturday evenings the boy accompanies his aunt in her marketing, the "image" of Mangan's sister is always with him. The language of the passage suggests that unconsciously, from the boy's point of view, two warring services are being conducted in the market place: the world's materialistic service in worship of mammon, and the boy's holy service in worship of his mild madonna. The "flaring streets" are filled with their proper votaries: drunken men, bargaining women, and cursing laborers; they are also filled with an appropriate liturgical music: the "shrill litanies" of shopboys, the "nasal chanting" of street singers. In this materialistic world, so hostile to all that the boy imagines he believes in, he keeps himself inviolate by invoking his own secret service of worship. That service transmutes the stubborn commonplaces of everyday life into holy artifacts, holy strivings, and holy deeds of chivalry. The image of Mangan's sister becomes his sacred chalice; he guards it as he makes his way through the alien market place. "I imagined," he says, as he walks one Saturday evening through the market place, his mind fixed on the holy "image" of Mangan's sister, "that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes." This religious imagery continues to clothe and veil his impulses. He soon finds himself venerating his lady in "strange prayers and praises." His eyes often fill with tears, emotion floods from his heart; he wonders how he could ever tell her of his "confused adoration."

One evening, while in this excited state of sensual religiosity, the boy enters the back drawing room in which the priest had died. Thus begins the first of two vigils the boy will keep for Mangan's sister. The boy is about to lose himself in an ecstasy of devotion, and Joyce wants us to see that the boy is tenantry the same rooms and worshipping at the same shrines as the dead priest; that is, that the boy, like the priest, has begun to mix devotion with profanation, spirituality with materialism. The evening is dark and rainy. Through a broken pane the boy hears "the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds." The collocation of images is part of a cluster that Joyce used throughout his writings to suggest earthiness and bodily appetites (just before Mangan's sister's first appearance Joyce associated the boy with "dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, [and] the dark odorous stables") and now, watching the rain and the earth and the sodden beds through his broken window, the boy again begins his confused adorations. Below him gleams "some distant lamp or lighted window"—Joyce continues to light his special scenes in ways equally suggestive of a sanctuary or a brothel—and then the blind boy, living on his blind street, looking through his broken window, says with deepest irony: "I was thankful that I could see so little."

In a moment the boy will be invoking love incarnate; senses veiled, swooning in self-delusion, palms pressed together in devotion, he will murmur his fervent prayers. Joyce conveys this tremulous sublimation—how the boy veils his sensual responses in the garment of religious ritual—by the most artfully directive language. "All my senses," says the boy, "seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: '*O love! O love!*' many times." Every phrase is loaded with ironic meaning. The boy does not realize how truly his senses are veiling themselves (or for that matter, in what manner they are being veiled), nor does he understand, in the context, the religious connotations of the word "veil," or the physical connotations of the word "desire"; and slipping from his senses is what he emphatically is not doing as he tremblingly invokes Love.

The next sentence in the story, one which begins a new paragraph, is short and disconcerting: “At last she spoke to me.” The abrupt transitionless juxtaposition of the boy's swooning invocation of Love, palms pressed prayerfully together, and the girl's sudden apparition is purposely ambiguous. Without saying so—without, that is, introducing the supernatural by having the girl materialize before him upon his prayerful invocation (for the remainder of the passage makes it clear that the girl did not speak to him that night), Joyce suggests, at least he gains the effect, that a visitation, an epiphany, has indeed occurred as a result of the boy's invocation. But whom has the boy invoked? Love? The Virgin? His Lady? Ireland? Levana? A harlot? He is too confused to know. The girl's first words to him—“Are you going to Araby?”—confound him. It will be a “splendid bazaar,” she tells him; she would “love” to go, but she must attend a retreat in her convent. The boy is “so confused” he does “not know what to answer.” His confusion is understandable. For here in epitome are correlatives of the very things that have confused and will continue to confuse him: materialism (the splendid bazaar), sensuality (love), and spirituality (the convent retreat).

As Mangan's sister speaks to him, she turns a “silver bracelet round and round her wrist.” The boy stands “alone at the railings,” gazing at this Madonna of the Silver Bracelet. “She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.”

This wonderfully evocative scene strikes the chords of commingled spirituality, sensuality, and materialism with increasing force. That commingling is central to “Araby”; it is also central to Joyce's life. As the story of his life makes clear, Joyce was a materialist, a man of almost paranoiac cupidity and selfishness. He was also a person strongly attracted to the spiritual and the sensual. He told his brother, Stanislaus, that his chief reason for not becoming a priest was that he could not remain chaste. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* we learn of the dark ways and dark ladies that so early summoned his “foolish blood.” When Stephen enters Nighttown for his first visit to a prostitute, he is seized by a trembling, his eyes grow dim, the yellow flares of gas burn “as if before an altar,” and the people near the doors and in the lighted halls seem “arrayed as for some rite.” That Joyce should render the loss of virginity as a religious rite is consonant with his outlook and his method. In his writings we are constantly privy to the perverse warfare of sacred and profane love, to the clamorous intermixings of doctrine and experience. In *Ulysses*, when Stephen sets off for Nighttown and the bawdyhouses, he thinks, “We ... will seek the kips where shady Mary is.” And in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce was fond of introducing such meldings as “Merryvirgin,” “marrimount,” “Hollymerry,” “fingringmaries,” and “hellmuirries.”

One of the memorable scenes in *A Portrait*—it is a scene which dwells on the blasphemous conjoining of sacred and profane love—is that in which Stephen, fresh from the stews and with the savor of a harlot's kisses on his lips, kneels reverently at the altar to lead his sodality in their Saturday morning devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Her eyes seemed to regard him with mild pity; her holiness, a strange light glowing faintly upon her frail flesh ... The impulse that moved him was the wish to be her knight. If ever his soul, re-entering her dwelling shyly after the frenzy of his body's lust had spent itself, was turned towards her whose emblem is the morning star, “bright and musical, telling of heaven and infusing peace,” it was when her names were murmured softly by lips whereon there still lingered foul and shameful words, the savour itself of a lewd kiss.

This deceptive fusion of knightly chivalry, spiritual devotion, and desecrating lust (all carefully lit)—it is Joyce's recurrent fusion, the fusion which reaches its culmination in the “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses*—had occurred even earlier in yet another evocation (in this case a striking premonition rather than a later extrapolation) of Mangan's shadowy sister. Between 1900 and 1903, that is, a few years before writing “Araby,” Joyce added to his slender collection of *Epiphanies* a scene in which the pose, the lighting, the

physical features, the language, the connotations (the madonna allusion, and the conjoining of ape and martyrs' legends, for example)—all prefigure “Araby.” Here is the epiphany in its entirety:

She stands, her book held lightly at her breast, reading the lesson. Against the dark stuff of her dress her face, mild-featured with downcast eyes, rises softly outlined in light; and from a folded cap, set carelessly forward, a tassel falls along her brown ringletted hair ...

What is the lesson that she reads—of apes, of strange inventions, or the legends of martyrs?
Who knows how deeply meditative, how reminiscent is this comeliness of Raffaello?

These recurrent comminglings help us establish the meaning of “Araby”; they show us that these fusions are intentional, that the aura of worship and desire, romanticism and corruption that Joyce casts over Mangan's sister is at the heart of “Araby.”

VI

All women, for Joyce, are Eves: they tempt and they betray. He constantly fashions his women, fictional and real—Mangan's sister, Gretta, Mary Sheehy, Emma, Nora, Molly—into exemplars of this idea. By the same token, men, in their yearning to worship, contrive (perhaps even desire) their own betrayal and insure their own disillusionment. This paradox, which embodies Joyce's personal needs and experiences, is at the center of *Exiles*. It also helps shape *A Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. In the latter work the notion is universalized and multiplied. One of the primal forms of woman in *Finnegans Wake* is woman as temptress. She is portrayed most clearly as Isabel, the daughter of HCE and Anna Livia, and as the Maggies or Magdalenes (who appear in dozens of permutations: maudelenian, Margareena, Marie Maudlin, etc.), the two girls who tempted HCE to his fall in Phoenix Park, and who are often merged with Isabel. This archetypal temptress and goddess, blending and changing in a flux of protean metamorphoses (she is also Issy, Issis, Ishtar, Isolde—as Isolde of Ireland, an embodiment of Ireland) is frequently referred to as “Ysold,” “I sold,” “Issabil,” “eyesault,” and “eyesalt.” As her godlike role and legendary names imply, she combines worshipful love and sexual appeal (Isolde), with inevitable commercialism and betrayal (I sold), with bitter grief and disillusionment (eyesalt)—the combination and progression we also find in “Araby.”

What Joyce is saying in “Araby” becomes more precise as the details accumulate and fall into patterns. This second evocation of the carefully lit figure of Mangan's sister, now in the guise of the Madonna of the Silver Bracelet, is worth examining once more, this time in the context of what we have just been tracing:

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. ... I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

This second evocation of Mangan's sister is again filled with strange harmonies. On the one hand the passage calls up Mary Magdalene and the Blessed Virgin Mary (both were present at the crucifixion) and soft overtones of a tender and dolorous *pietà*; one easily extracts and then extrapolates the appropriate images—the patient hand on the cruel spike, the gentle head bowed submissively, the mild neck arched in grief. But a coequal and co-ordinate pattern in the scene is the harlotry associations of Mary Magdalene, who, in Catholic liturgy, is specifically associated with exotic Near Eastern imagery, bracelets, and crossing the city in search of her love—all strong elements in “Araby”; while on the more personal level the name “Mary” is also the name of the girl Joyce regarded as his original “temptress” and “betrayal”—Mary Sheehy; and perhaps, at the same time, this “shady Mary” pattern is connected with the harlotry associations of still another Mary, the “harlot queen,” Mary Queen of Scots, the heroine of the dead priest's book, *The Abbot*, who

was executed in her petticoat. In any case, the negative pattern incorporated in the shadowy image of Mangan's sister combines hints of commercialism and sensuality with connotations of sexuality and betrayal—the turning and turning of the silver bracelet, the head bowing toward the boy, the white curve of the bare neck, the soft hair glowing in the light, the side of the dress accentuated by the dim glow, the white border of the petticoat just visible beneath the dress (one recalls the dream-shattering petticoat of the false Protestant madonna in “Our Lady of the Hills”), and the whole figure standing at ease in the dusk.

The boy now makes his pledge. “If I go,” he says, “I will bring you something.” The consequences of his pledge are immediately apparent. “What innumerable follies,” writes the narrator in the very next sentence, “laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening!” The shadowy “image” of Mangan's sister constantly comes between him and everything he undertakes; his schoolmaster, puzzled and then exasperated, hopes that he is “not beginning to idle”—a phrase which again, now punningly, underlines that the boy, like De Quincey's young boy, has indeed begun to worship false idols, that he is well on his way to Araby.

Araby—the very word connotes the nature of the boy's confusion. It is a word redolent of the lush East, of distant lands, Levantine riches, romantic entertainments, mysterious magic, “Grand Oriental Fêtes.” The boy immerses himself in this incense-filled dream world. He tells us that “the syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me.” That enchantment, or to put it another way, Near Eastern imagery (usually in conjunction with female opulence or romantic wish fulfillment), always excited Joyce. It reappears strongly in *Ulysses* in a highly intricate counterpoint, which is sometimes serious (Molly's Moorish attributes) and sometimes mocking (Bloom's dream of a Messianic Near Eastern oasis). But the boy in “Araby” always interprets these associations, no matter how disparate or how ambiguous they are, in one way: as correlatives of a baroquely beatific way of living. Yet the real, brick-and-mortar Araby in the boy's life is a bazaar, a market, a place where money and goods are exchanged. The boy is blind to this reality lurking beneath his enchanted dream. To the boy, his lady's silver bracelet is only part of her Eastern finery; his journey to a bazaar to buy her an offering is part of a romantic quest. But from this point on in the story the masquerading pretenses of the boy—and of his church, his land, his rulers, and his love—are rapidly underlined and brought into a conjunction which will pierce his perfervid dream world and put an end to “enchanted days.”

The boy has arranged with his aunt and uncle that he will go to the bazaar on Saturday evening, that is, on the evening of the day specially set aside for veneration of the Virgin Mary. Saturday evening arrives but the boy's uncle is late from work and the boy wanders at loose ends through the empty upper reaches of his house. In the “high cold empty gloomy rooms” he begins his second vigil. Off by himself he feels liberated. He goes from room to room singing. Hidden, he watches his companions play and listens to their weakened, indistinct cries. Then he leans his forehead against a cool window pane and looks over at the “dark house” where Mangan's sister lives. “I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.”

When he goes downstairs again he is brought back from the isolated world of his imagination to the ordinary world of his everyday life. He finds Mrs. Mercer sitting at the fire. “She was an old garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose.” The sentence is packed with ironic meaning. The old lady's name—Mercer, that is, merchandise, wares, a small-ware dealer—links her to the commercial focus of the story. That her husband was a pawnbroker sharpens this focus, introducing as it does commercialism in its most abhorrent form from the church's point of view—commercialism as usury. But that the church accepts, even lives on, this same commercialism is also made clear: for garrulous old Mrs. Mercer (another embodiment of Ireland) is a pious woman with pious purposes; ironically, she expresses her piety in good works that depend upon empty mechanical acquisitiveness: she collects used stamps. (One recalls, in this connection, the “pious purpose” of the actual Araby bazaar—to collect money for a hospital; and one also recalls that the “Wonderful” or “Perfumed” bazaar in *Ulysses*—the bazaar that allowed Bloom to gaze

worshipfully under Gerty's skirts while a choir celebrated the Host and hymned the Virgin Mary—was an attempt to collect money for another “pious purpose,” for a hospital named “Mercer's.”) Joyce is saying, in effect, that everyday religion and piety in Ireland are based upon self-deluding and mindless materialism. When Mrs. Mercer's unexamined commercial religion is remembered in conjunction with the boy's and then the dead priest's (one recalls that the priest's book of heretical devotions was by a man named “Seller”)—we get some idea of how insidiously mammonistic is Ireland's religious bankruptcy.

The boy will soon have some insight into this and other bankruptcies, but at the moment he is taut with frustrated anticipation. “I am afraid,” says his aunt, when his uncle still fails to appear, “you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord”—counterpointing “bazaar” and “Our Lord,” money and religion. Then, at nine O'clock, the uncle finally returns, tipsy and talking to himself. He has forgotten the bazaar, and he tries to put the boy off, but the aunt insists that he give the boy money for the bazaar, and he finally agrees, after the boy tells him twice that he is going to Araby. The word “Araby” sets the uncle's mind working. He asks the boy if he knows *The Arab's Farewell to His Steed*, and as the boy leaves the room, the uncle is about to recite the opening lines of the poem to his wife. Those lines never appear in the story, but they are fraught with thematic significance:

My beautiful, my beautiful! that standeth meekly by,

With thy proudly-arched and glossy neck, and dark and fiery eye!

Fret not to roam the desert now with all thy wingèd speed;

I may not mount on thee again!—thou'rt sold, my Arab steed!

The notion of betrayal, of something loved and beautiful being sold for money, of something cherished and depended upon being lost forever, is central to what has already happened in “Araby” and what is about to take place. But the poem goes on with even greater cogency:

The stranger hath thy bridle-rein, thy master hath his gold;—

Fleet-limbed and beautiful, farewell!—thou'rt sold, my steed, thou'rt sold!

This cogency—turning the bridle reins over to a foreign master for money, saying farewell to a beautiful part of the past—has another and even more startling appropriateness. For the poem is by Caroline Norton, a great beauty and a member of a famous Irish family (her grandfather was Richard Brinsley Sheridan), who was sued for divorce by her husband, the Hon. George Chapple Norton, on the grounds that she had committed adultery with Lord Melbourne, then Home Secretary but at the time of the suit in 1836 prime minister of Great Britain. As Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne had been the minister responsible for Ireland, and in 1833, while still Home Secretary, he had supported the Coercion Bill, a bill of great severity aimed at Irish nationalists. The trial which ensued—one of the most notorious in the nineteenth century—was used by Dickens in the breach-of-promise suit in *Pickwick*, by Thackeray in the Lord Steyne-Becky Sharp relationship in *Vanity Fair*, and by Meredith in some of the climactic scenes of *Diana of the Crossways*. The jury found for the defendants, but chiefly on grounds other than Caroline Norton's constancy. The defendants won after conclusive testimony was introduced showing that Norton had been the chief advocate of his wife's liaison with Lord Melbourne, that he had initiated and perpetuated the liaison as a means of advancing himself, and that he had brought suit only after he had suffered reverses in that advancement.

That an Irish woman as beautiful as Caroline Norton should have been sold by her husband for English preferments; that she should have been sold to the man who, in effect, was the English ruler of Ireland; that she, in turn, should have been party to such a sale; that this very woman, writing desperately for money,

should compose a sentimental poem celebrating the traitorous sale of a beautiful and supposedly loved creature; and that this poem should later be cherished by the Irish (the uncle's recitation is in character, the poem was a popular recitation piece, it appears in almost every anthology of Irish poetry)—all this is patently and ironically appropriate to what Joyce is saying.

So also is the next scene in “Araby.” The boy leaves his house on the way to Araby with a florin, a piece of silver money, clutched tightly in his hand. That Joyce, out of all the coins and combinations of coins available to him, chose to have the boy clutch a florin is doubly meaningful. The original florin, the prototype of all future coins bearing that name, was a gold coin, famed for its purity, minted in Florence in 1252. It received its name, “florin,” that is, “flower,” because, like many of its progeny, it bore a lily, the flower of Florence and of the Virgin Mary, on one side. On the other side it bore the figure of Saint John the Baptist in religious regalia, a man who gave his life rather than betray his religion. The florin the boy clutches, however, is a silver coin minted by the English with a head of Queen Victoria on one side and the Queen's coat of arms (including the conquered harp of Ireland) on the other. Owing to the fact that the customary “Dei Gratia, F. D.” (“by the grace of God, defender of the faith”) was omitted from the coin when originally issued in 1847, it became infamous as the “Godless and Graceless Florin” and aroused such a popular outcry that it had to be called in before the year was out. As a result, the Master of the Mint, a Roman Catholic, was dismissed, and a few years later a new but almost identical florin was issued with the usual motto. The malodorous genesis of the English coin, its association with a Catholic scapegoat, and the restitution of a motto which, from an Irish Catholic point of view, made the coin as idolatrous and offensive as the Godless version—all this is ideally suited to Joyce's purpose.

For the duped boy is now acting out his betrayal in the most emblematic way. We recall the intricate liturgy of his self-delusion. Despising the market place, he had summoned and protected the image of Mangan's sister as a holy chalice antithetical to all such worldly commerce; mistaking his impulses, he had transformed his sexual desires into prayers and praises for the Virgin, into worshipful Catholic devotions. That the boy who immersed himself in such ceremonious self-deception should be hastening to buy at a bazaar (where, incidentally, he will meet his English masters) and that he should be clutching an English florin, an alien and notorious silver coin sans Virgin's lily and sans Catholic saint but bearing instead symbols of his and Ireland's servitude and betrayal, is, of course, supremely ironic.

That irony continues and expands in what follows. It is Saturday night. The boy tells us that “the sight of streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey.” The flaring streets “thronged with buyers” and the clutched silver coin call to the reader's mind a purpose far different from that which the boy thinks he is pursuing. The sights, the words, the Saturday evening, the silver florin, also recall that the last time the boy went into the flaring streets shopping through throngs of buyers on a Saturday night, he had said, speaking particularly of those buyers, “I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes.” They recall also that Saturday is the day most particularly devoted to veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We now see clearly what the boy bears through a throng of foes, what his chalice is: it is not the image of a mild spiritual madonna, it is money, the alien florin of betrayal—betrayal of his religion, his nation, his dream of supernal love; he, like his country, has betrayed himself for the symbolic piece of alien silver he clutches in his hand as he hurries on to Araby. We also begin to get a better notion of who the shadowy madonna is that he worships with such febrile spirituality. We recall that he is rushing headlong to a bazaar to buy his lady a token (he, too, is one of the throng of buyers), and then we recall how his madonna—could she be a false, sensual, materialistic madonna, a projection of his own complicated self-betrayal?—“turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist.”

The boy at last arrives at the large building which displays “the magical name” of *Araby*. In his haste to get into the closing bazaar, he passes through a shilling rather than a sixpenny entrance, handing the gatekeeper his silver coin as he goes through the turnstile. The interior of the building is like a church. The great central hall, circled at half its height by a gallery, contains dark stalls, dim lights, and curtained, jar-flanked

sanctuaries. Joyce wants us to regard this temple of commerce as a place of worship. “I recognised a silence,” says the boy as he stands in the middle of the hall, “like that which pervades a church after a service.” The service is, of course, the worship of mammon, and Joyce, by his use of religious imagery here and throughout the story, lets us see both that the money-changers are in the temple (if one looks at the bazaar as a correlative of the church), and that the really devout worship which goes on in Ireland now, goes on in the market place: the streets thronged with buyers, the shrill litanies of shopboys, the silver-braceleted madonnas, the churchlike bazaars. Even he who imagined that he bore his chalice safely through a throng of foes finds himself in the temple of the money-changers ready to buy. Shocked, and with growing awareness, the boy begins to realize where he is and what he is doing. In the half-dark hall, as the bazaar closes and the remaining lights begin to go out, he watches as two men work before a curtain lit overhead by a series of colored lamps upon which a commercial inscription is emblazoned. The two men “were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.” The boy also has fallen. We recall the “wild garden” with its “central apple-tree,” that the words “falling” and “fell” are crucial to the description of Mangan's sister during her epiphany before the boy, and that the word “fall” again recurs—again in connection with money—when the boy, in his penultimate action, an action reminiscent of how Judas let the silver of betrayal fall upon the ground after his contrition, allows “two pennies to fall against the sixpence” in his pocket as he finally turns to leave the bazaar. But right now the fallen boy is witnessing the counting of the collection before the sanctuary of this church of mammon (the curtain, the salver, the lamps, the inscription all suggest simultaneously the sanctuary of a Catholic church); he is listening to the music of this service of mammon, the clink of falling coins. The boy is so stupefied that he can remember only “with difficulty why [he] had come.”

His shock and his disillusionment are not yet over. He sees a young saleslady standing at the door of one of the dark stalls. The reader, like the boy, instantly feels that he has viewed this scene before: the girl standing in the doorway, the dim lighting, the churchlike atmosphere. Then, suddenly, the reader realizes that the scene enforces a crucial juxtaposition; the waiting salesgirl is a parody of the boy's obsessive image of female felicity, she is a counterpart (an everyday, commercial counterpart) of Mangan's tenebrous sister. The boy looks steadily at this vulgar avatar of his longings; and then his other vision—his vision of a comely waiting presence, of a heavenly dolorous lady—dissolves and finally evaporates. The boy, at last, glimpses reality unadorned; he no longer deceives himself with his usual romanticizing. For the moment, at least, he truly sees. There before him stands a dull, drab, vacuous salesgirl; she is no mild Irish madonna, no pensive *pietà*, no mutely beckoning angel. He listens as she talks and laughs with two young gentlemen; the three of them have English accents:

“O, I never said such a thing!”

“O, but you did!”

“O, but I didn't!”

“Didn't she say that?”

“Yes, I heard her.”

“O, there's a ... fib!”

This snippet of banal conversation is Joyce's, the boy's, and now the reader's epiphany—the word “epiphany” used here in Joyce's special literary sense of “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself”—and the conversation the boy overhears bears an unmistakable resemblance to a well-defined type of epiphany which Joyce recorded (bald exchanges of fatuous, almost incoherent conversation), several examples of which have survived. But what we have here is the epiphany surrounded by all that is needed to give it significance; the private *quidditas* has been

transformed into a public showing forth; the artist, the priest of the eternal imagination, has transmuted (to paraphrase another of Joyce's religious metaphors) the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving art.

For what the boy now sees, and what we now know he sees, is that his worshipped madonna is only a girl, like the ordinary girl who stands before him, that his interest in his madonna is akin to the gentlemen's interest in the young lady before them, and that their pedestrian conversation about fibbing—the very word is a euphemism for “lying”—is only a banal version of his own intricate euphemisms, his own gorgeous lying to himself. Like the Catholic boy in Yeats' “Our Lady of the Hills,” who sobs in anguish because his vision of a palpable madonna must give way to the reality of an ordinary Protestant girl, the boy in “Araby” can now also cry out angrily, “I'm a devil, and you are only an ordinary lady.”

That this ordinary lady is an English lady is another shattering part of the boy's painful epiphany. The English accents are the accents of the ruling race, the foreign conquerors—Joyce makes much of this notion in *A Portrait* and more in *Ulysses*—and now the boy begins to understand that England, this nation which rules over him, is quintessentially vulgar, the servant par excellence of mammon. England is one with Ireland and Ireland's church, and the boy is one with all of these. He has felt the first stirrings of desire and converted them into masquerading religiosity; he has wanted to go shopping at a bazaar and has told himself that he is making an enchanted journey to fetch a chivalric token; he has been exposed to the debased vulgarities of *The Memoirs of Vidocq* and has admitted only that he liked its yellow pages. Yet he is no worse than the rest of Ireland—its dead priests (part of a dying church), its Mrs. Mercers, its faithless drunken surrogate fathers—and for that matter, no worse than Ireland's rulers. Ireland and Ireland's church, once appropriately imaged as a romantic lady or a sorrowful madonna, has now become cuckquean and harlot—she is sold and sells for silver.

Joyce returned to this theme again and again, often with startling repetitions of details and symbols. In *Ulysses*, for example, Ireland appears personified not as a young girl, but as an old milkwoman. She enters and leaves *Ulysses* in a page or two, yet within that cramped space, and despite the vast difference, on the realistic level, between the role she must play in *Ulysses* and the roles of those who appear in “Araby,” Joyce manages to associate her with many of the idiosyncratic features that characterize Ireland and Ireland's betrayal in “Araby.” In *Ulysses* the old milkwoman is depicted as “an immortal serving her conqueror [Haines, the Englishman] and her gay betrayer [Mulligan, the Irishman], their common cuckquean.” Mulligan sings a song about her “hising up her petticoats”; she tells him she is ashamed she must speak in foreign accents; she is depicted “slipping the ring of the milkcan on her forearm” (the silver bracelet again); and she is paid by Mulligan with a silver florin.

VII

Other elements in “Araby” are also connected to patterns that transcend the immediate action. The two most crucial events in the story, the two vigils, harmonize with specific occasions in the Roman Catholic liturgy. The first vigil—the one in which Mangan's sister appears after the boy's invocation, “*O love! O love!*”—suggests the Vigil of the Epiphany. The most striking passage in that Vigil tells how “in those childish days of ours we toiled away at the schoolroom tasks which the world gave us, till the appointed time came”—a passage which is exactly appropriate to how the boy, after his first visitation or epiphany (that is, after Mangan's sister has appeared to him and directed him to Araby—just as in the original Epiphany an angel appeared to Joseph directing him to go from Egypt to Israel) feels about the schoolroom tasks (“child's play, ugly monotonous child's play”) while he waits for the time of his journey to Araby. But the “appointed time” spoken of in the Vigil is the time of the journey to Israel and of the coming of the spirit of Jesus, not of a trip to Araby; it is the time when the spirit of Jesus cries out to a child, “Abba, Father,” and he becomes no longer a child, a slave, but a son of God, entitled to “the son's right of inheritance.” For the boy in “Araby” that cry and that inheritance turn out to be far different from what he believed them to be—he comes into a

majority, but it is the disillusioning majority of the flesh, of all the sons of Adam, not of the spirit; he makes his journey, but it is a journey to Egypt, to Araby, to the market place, not back to the Holy Land.

These reverberating liturgical harmonies are continued in the boy's second vigil—the one he keeps during his long evening wait, and then during his journey to and sojourn in Araby. The connections here are with Holy Week (especially the Passion) and with Holy Saturday (the night before Easter Sunday). In “Araby” the trip to the bazaar takes place on a Saturday night; the boy's aunt refers to the Saturday night in question as “this night of Our Lord,” an expression which can be applied to any Saturday (or Sabbath) night, but which calls up most particularly the pre-eminent Saturday “night of Our Lord,” that is, Holy Saturday. The service appointed for this occasion is the Mass of Holy Saturday. This Mass, owing to its great beauty, and especially to the rich symbolism of the Tenebrae, haunted Joyce. (The whole of Book IV of *Finnegans Wake*, for example, takes place in the instant between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.) The Mass of Holy Saturday was the only Mass Joyce regularly tried to witness later in life, always leaving, however, before communion. Central to this Mass is the imagery of light and darkness, the extinguishing of the old lights and then the rekindling of new lights from new fire. On the other hand, prominent in the Passion is the notion of betrayal: Peter's lying threefold denial of Jesus, and Judas' selling of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The idea of profound betrayal, then the adumbration of awakening and rising, all combined with imagery of light and dark, and the whole counterpointed with liturgical overtones, informs the conclusion of “Araby.”

The boy, for instance, comes to Araby with silver in his hand (with the idolatrous successor to the Godless Florin, it will be remembered); and he watches as the money of betrayal (his and his nation's) falls clinking on the salver. Like Peter's lying threefold denial of Jesus, the banal conversation about lying that the boy overhears also involves a threefold denial (the girl denies three times that she said what she is accused of saying). The foreign English accents continue the parallel, for Peter, like the English, is a foreigner, and his denials involve his accent. “Even thy speech betrays thee,” he is told. When Peter recognized his betrayal (at the crowing of the cock) he “wept bitterly”; when the boy recognized his (at the call that the light was out) his “eyes burned with anguish and anger.” In the service for Holy Saturday the lights are extinguished and then relit; in the service the boy witnesses there is no rekindling, the boy merely gazes “up into the darkness.” And yet, of course, here too a new light is lit; for though an old faith is extinguished, we witness a dawning.

These liturgical and religious parallels and disparities (one could list other much more subterranean ones: the story of Abednego is told *in extenso* in the Holy Saturday Mass, and Abednego Seller's heretical *Devout Communicant* is a manual for Holy Week), these parallels lie unobtrusively in the background. They are not meant to be strictly or allegorically interpreted; they are meant to suggest, to hint, perhaps to condition. Unconsciously they tinge our associations and responses; they also harmonize with the more explicit motifs of the story.

The boy standing in front of the young lady's shadowy booth, listening to her bantering inanities, perceives all these significances only dimly. He is shocked, hurt, angered; but he intuitively feels, and will later understand, what the reader already comprehends. Yet even in his dim awareness he is ready to make one decision. While still at the “dark entrance” of the young lady's stall, he tells her he is no longer interested in “her wares.” He lets the two pennies fall against the sixpence in his pocket; he has come to buy, but he has not bought. Someone calls that the light is out. The light is indeed out. Like De Quincey's young boy, the boy in “Araby” has been excluded from light, has worshipped the “lovely darkness” of the grave; he has (in the words of *Chamber Music*, XXX) been a “grave lover.” But again like De Quincey's young boy, at last he has seen. He has risen again *before* he has died; he has begun to unfold “the capacities of his spirit.” As *Chamber Music*, XXX, has it, he welcomes now “the ways that [he] shall go upon.” For the boy has caught a glimpse of himself as he really is—a huddled, warring, confused paradox of romantic dreams, mistaken adorations, and mute fleshly cravings—and one portion of his life, his innocent, self-deluding childhood, is now behind him. In his pride and arrogance, and, yes, in his purity and innocence too, he had imagined that he bore his chalice safely through a throng of foes; instead, he had rushed headlong toward that which he thought he most

despised. In a land of betrayers, he had betrayed himself. But now he understands some of this; and now, raising his eyes up into the blackness, but totally blind no more—the Christlike fusion here of ascent, of sight, and of agony is all-important—he can say, “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.”

VIII

Joyce has succeeded, here, in taking the raw, rather humdrum, unpromising facts of his own life and transforming them into abiding patterns of beauty and illumination. He has taken a universal experience—a more or less ordinary experience of insight, disillusionment, and growth—and given it an extraordinary application and import. The experience becomes a criticism of a nation, a religion, a civilization, a way of existing; it becomes a grappling hook with which we can scale our own well-guarded citadels of self-delusion. Joyce does all this in six or seven pages. He manages this feat by endowing the simple phrases and actions of “Araby” with multiple meanings that deepen and enlarge what he is saying.

The image of Mangan's sister is a case in point. Joyce takes this shadowy image, this dark scene which fascinated and obsessed him and which he returned to again and again, and shapes it to his purposes. He projects this image so carefully, touches it so delicately and skillfully with directive associations and connotations, that it conveys simultaneously, in one simple seamless whole, all the warring meanings he wishes it to hold—all the warring meanings it held for him. The pose of the harlot is also the pose of the Virgin; the revered Lady of Romance (kin to Vittoria Colonna, Laura, Beatrice, Levana, Dark Rosaleen, and the beloved of any artist) is also Ireland and at the same time a vulgar English shopgirl. One need not belabor the point. These meanings are conveyed not merely by the juxtapositions and evocations of the chief images—of Mangan's dark sister and the English shopgirl, for example—but by the reiterated patterns, allusions, and actions which bind the whole work together: the dead priest's charitableness, Mrs. Mercer's used stamps, the fall of money on the salver; Araby, Eastern enchantment, the knightly quest for a chivalric token; the swaying dress, the veiled senses, the prayerful murmur, “*O love! O love!*” Scarcely a line, an evocation, an object—the central apple tree, the heretical book of devotions by Abednego Seller, “The Arab's Farewell to His Steed,” the blind street—but adds its harmony to the whole and extends and clarifies the story's meaning.

The test of an explanation is its utility—how many facts can it order and make meaningful? The conception of “Araby” embodied in this essay accounts for thorny details as well as larger motifs. The conception also sheds light on recurrent scenes, ideas, and patterns in Joyce's writings; for example, it makes intelligible a heretofore impenetrable passage in *Finnegans Wake*. That passage, in turn, is part of a longer section which is amenable to similar exegesis, a section which contains lines such as “Never play lady's game for the Lord's stake”; “Lust, thou shalt not commix idolatry”; and “Collide with man, collude with money.” But here is the passage itself:

Remember the biter's bitters I shed the vigil I buried our Harlotte Quai from poor Mrs Mangain's of Britain Court on the feast of Marie Maudlin. Ah, who would wipe her weeper dry and lead her to the halter? Sold in her heyday, laid in the straw, bought for one puny petunia. Moral: if you can't point a lily get to henna out of here!

In the light of what we know about “Araby,” and paying attention only to those meanings which are pertinent to “Araby,” the passage might be freely construed as follows: Remember the bitter tears I shed, I the biter who was bitten, in that secret and buried vigil I kept—all was later shed and buried—for the Harlot Queen, for Mary Queen of Scots, for Mangan's sister, who lived, as all Ireland does, under the rule of Britain's Court. These and others, blended together, I venerated in my maudlin, sentimental way, as I also venerated Mary Magdalene, saint and prostitute (a weeper who wiped her weeping dry). To what end?—sacramental? (altar), noose or enslavement? (halter), or merely a dead end? (halt her)? Ireland and Ireland's religion was sold in its

heyday, laid low and prostituted in the straw, sold for one puny penny, for a petunia. Moral: if you can't accept Ireland's religion (lily), if you can't paint the lily (that is, gild the lily, romanticize Ireland, cover all with a veneer of gold—with a pun on "pointillism," and with sexual overtones), at least you can get the false dye (henna) out of her, and get the hell (Gehenna) out of here!

Obviously this is a bald transcription of something much richer and much more subtle. Obviously, too, the passage is wed to the patterns of *Finnegans Wake*, so that from the point of view of "Araby," the passage is overlaid by considerations extraneous to the story. (For example, "Harlotte Quai"—that is, "Charlotte Quay"—and "Britain Court" are also actual places in Dublin.) But though "Araby" is not the *raison d'être* of the passage, it provides a key to the passage. For most of the meanings in the passage are so condensed and private, they can be satisfactorily read only in the light of their much plainer and more detailed conjunction in "Araby." How then does the passage come to be in *Finnegans Wake* at all? It is there because it is tied to a series of events which shaped some of Joyce's fundamental insights and concerns. Eventually that cluster of events and associations, given early literary coherence in "Araby," became both matrix and correlative for such concerns. We see the cluster in *Finnegans Wake* as we see it in all his writings. Joyce, in truth, was always walking through and meeting himself.

We have already noticed that some portions of those original events and associations can be identified; other portions we can detect only as they filter again and again through Joyce's successive fictions. In *Finnegans Wake* these fragments of events and associations, truncated now and fantastically jumbled, have suffered a strange sea change, but they are still discernible, sometimes all the more so, and sometimes all the plainer in import, because of their laborious encrustations of meaning.

For one thing, as in "Araby," the name "Mangan" (this is the only time it occurs in *Finnegans Wake*) again appears in female guise, now as "Mrs. Mangain." The changed spelling of the name is significant because it underlines the mercenary and sexual elements (Man-gain) which had played so large but so implicit a role in the boy's confused adoration of Mangan's dark sister. At the same time a whole group of associations sounded in "Araby" are also sounded here. "Harlotte Quai" and "Marie Maudlin" are a recrudescence of the virgin-harlot fusion embodied by Mangan's sister, the fusion of the "harlot queen" (Mary Queen of Scots) with Mary Queen of Heaven and Mary Magdalene. "Britain Court" again suggests courting Britain as well as submitting to British rule. "Vigil I buried" refers once more to the secret vigils the boy devoted to his false madonna, and to the ultimate deflation and burial of that self-deluding idolatry. While "biter's bitters" is another version of the boy's "anguish and anger"; as Joyce put it in his essay on Mangan, it is "the bitter disillusion and self-disdain" which must end all such romantic projections; or, once again, as he put it in *Ulysses*, it is the "agenbite of inwit." (Note the striking repetition of words, meanings, and sounds, here—"anger," "anguish," "agenbite," "biter's," "bitters," "bitter," "inwit"—as though a constellation of sounds had become wedded to the archetypal event.) In a similar manner, the commingling of sex, selling one's self for money, and being brought low which is so central to "Araby" is epitomized in, "Sold in her heyday, laid in the straw, bought for one puny petunia." The sexual element is conveyed by "sold in her heyday" (punning on "hayday"), and "laid in the straw" (that is, made love to in the straw—"hayday" again), while engrafted upon the same words is the idea of selling one's self for money: "sold in her heyday," and "bought for one puny [that is, "one penny"] petunia" (with a pun on *pecunia*). And all this is conjoined with the ultimate deflation, the idea of being brought low: "laid in the straw"—a remark which, in the context, applies to Ireland and the Catholic religion as well as the narrator.

The last sentence in the passage is also packed with additional meanings analogous to those in "Araby." The lily is the predominant flower of Catholicism, but more particularly, in Catholic symbolism, it is the flower of the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, the plant, henna, in addition to producing a dye, that is, a masking substance, also produces a white flower connected with Mohammedan religious symbolism and used, like the dye, in Mohammedan religious and erotic rites—the word "henna" itself is of Arabic origin. Hence, in a manner analogous to the end of "Araby," the line implies that Irish Catholicism, and in particular the worship

of the Virgin Mary, is dyed or adulterated by money, sex, and “Arabian” exoticism; or to put it another way, if one can’t have a religion devoid of henna, if one isn’t allowed to paint the lily unless one gilds it, one must leave the religion and the country. But this statement, though its implications and even its images are redolent of “Araby,” goes beyond “Araby.” For in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce is looking back; he can convey his moral from the distant pinnacle of exile and achievement. In “Araby” the boy has just discovered that he is confusing lilies and henna; in his moment of anguish he can not yet see that he must gild the lily or get out.

IX

Joyce's art in “Araby,” and in many of his other writings, may be likened to a palimpsest. Perhaps more than any artist of his era he was willing, for the sake of his over-all design, to obscure, even to wipe out rich nuances and powerful ironies. But at the same time, and again perhaps more than any contemporary artist, he was careful to lacquer his images and actions with layer after layer of translucent, incremental meaning. The finished palimpsest is rich with shimmering depths, strange blendings, and tantalizing hints: here something has been rubbed out, there a few faint lines coalesce meaningfully and then dwindle away, while in the center a figure, distinct, yet merging with myriads of dim underforms, swims slowly into focus and then turns and dissolves and re-forms before our gaze. Abednego Seller drops out of view, only the misleading, enigmatic *Devout Communicant* remains; England's silver florin gleams brightly in the boy's tight grasp, the ancient golden lily and golden saint glimmer darkly in the shaded depths; Saturday evening shopping trips and “this night of Our Lord” stand boldly in the foreground, the liturgical engrams of which they are a part loom faintly in the distance. Mangan's shadowy sister—a version of the darkling siren Joyce drew so often—is limned and limned again. Harlot and virgin, temptress and saint, queen and shopgirl, Ireland and England—she is a miracle of blendings, mergings, and montages. While a multitude of harmonizing designs, some clear, some dim, some just faintly discernible—Mary Queen of Scots, “Our Lady of the Hills,” Dark Rosaleen, a criminal dressed as a nun, Levana, Eastern bazaars, Caroline Norton, and idolatrous vigils—complete the deceptive palimpsest.

In *Dubliners* we sometimes become fascinated by the more legible figures in the palimpsest. But the more obscure figures are there too, and Joyce, by his reticences, encourages us to seek them. We know at the end of “Araby” that something devastating has occurred, and we would like to know exactly what it is. Ultimately, the full radiance of sight, of meaning, is ours, not the boy's. He has caught a glimpse of reality, of himself as he really is; he can reject the old encumbering vision, he can decide to dream “no more of enchanted days,” but he can not yet fashion a new life. As the story has it, the light is out; the boy must grapple in the dark. But like blind Oedipus, in the dark the boy finally sees: his moment of illumination is given to him as he gazes “up into the darkness.” That moment of blinding sight is also the moment of artistic vision, of the unfolding of “the capacities of [the] spirit”; not merely because the moment is later seen and reseen with the clarity, the penetration, the rich ramification of the artist's eye, but because the moment itself is a *sine qua non* for the artist's eye. The boy's end is his beginning; he has walked through and met himself.

“Araby” is the rendering of a quintessential moment (and for Joyce, *the* quintessential moment) in a portrait of the artist as a young boy. It is as though the boy of the story has come to the end of a well-lighted dead-end road. He now confronts a tangle of dark paths. Perhaps one of those paths will eventually lead him to a brighter road and to a wider, steadier vision of the surrounding countryside. The boy has not yet chosen the path he will follow; he may very well choose the wrong path. But at least he has seen that his own comfortable well-worn road, well-lighted and thronged with travelers though it is, is a dead end. That insight makes further travel possible; he can “welcome . . . now at the last the ways that [he] shall go upon.” North Richmond Street is blind, but Dublin perhaps has thoroughfares, and if not Dublin, then, as the conclusion of *A Portrait* tells us, the beckoning roads of all the world beyond Ireland: “white arms of roads” leading “beyond the sleeping fields to what journey's end?”

Criticism: Robert P. ApRoberts (essay date 1967)

SOURCE: "'Araby' and the Palimpsest of Criticism or, Through a Glass Eye Darkly," in *Antioch Review*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Winter, 1967, pp. 469–89.

[In the following essay, ApRoberts refutes Professor Stone's thesis in the essay reprinted above, asserting that "Araby" is a self-contained story and should be read at face value.]

"You see how easy it is to deceive one who is an artist in phrases. Avoid them, Miss Dale; they dazzle the penetration of the composer. That is why people like Mrs. Mountstuart see so little; they are bent on describing so brilliantly."

—George Meredith, *The Egoist*

Vanity flee and verity fear.

—James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

Everywhere in modern criticism the tide of symbolic interpretation runs full. Exegetes search the literature of the Middle Ages for the four-fold levels of Dante's allegory and return from below the surface dives into the Miller's and the Reeve's tales bearing interpretations by which these stories undergo a sea-change into some thing which, if not rich, is at least strange. For several years now some critics have lived in the murky depths of symbolic interpretation of Shakespeare without ever emerging to breathe the fresh air or glimpse the light of common day. Many Dickensians scorn the judgment of the ordinary reader that Dickens is above all a comic writer (a judgment reflected in current musicals which transform villainous Fagins into Pickwickian grotesques) and find through the alchemy of symbolism, with the most solemn and unsmiling countenances, that his works are more Dostoyevskian and Kafkaesque than those of his two continental followers.

Of late there are signs that the tide may be ebbing. Protests are made that the *Troilus* which Professor D. W. Robertson, Jr., reads is not Chaucer's but the Parson's. Despite outraged cries of misunderstanding from G. Wilson Knight, Professor R. M. Frye's examination of the claims of the school of Knight is a telling *caveat* to the Christian symbolists of Shakespeare; and the symbolic interpreters of Dickens are being marked off, even by Dickensians, as a rather special breed. Professor Frank Kermode, examining one of Northrop Frye's archetypal flights, urges us to press our feet more firmly to the ground the farther Frye's balloons strain toward the stratosphere. The time is, then, certainly opportune for an examination of the claims of some of the symbolic critics, and fortunately there is at hand a rather pure and rather prettily limited instance of symbolic interpretation which we may use as a test case. This is an article by Professor Harry Stone entitled "'Araby' and the Writings of James Joyce" which makes an elaborate disclosure of the symbolism Mr. Stone finds in Joyce's short story.

Such an interpretation is not something new for Professor Stone, for he has written a number of studies offering symbolic interpretations of Dickens, though none of these has been on such a detailed scale as his interpretation of the Joyce story. Furthermore, his article bears the imprimatur of a distinguished review—an imprimatur made even more impressive through the fanfare accorded the article by the managing editor as breaking the twenty-five year tradition of the *Antioch Review* of not printing explications. The managing editor at once illustrated and justified the completeness of this momentous surrender by a lengthy quotation from the report of an Editor X who, without ever having read "Araby," was convinced that the article not only told "the story in considerably more detail than Joyce gave" but was also "a demonstration of a method and a key to understanding not only Joyce as a whole, but the entire canon of twentieth-century allusive writers." Certainly a most alarming prospect is raised when this reaction is joined to the bemused wonder of the

managing editor at the decision to publish Professor Stone's article: "Does it represent a major policy shift or a passing editorial aberration? Or is it, perhaps, capitulation in the face of the sheer number of explicatory articles submitted to us despite our protestations of non-interest?" Who can fail to feel alarm at the future that may face the editors if the decision is not rescinded? Will they be doomed to read such articles without necessarily reading the works they explicate? Will such a policy inaugurate a new dialogue at editorial meetings:

Q. (despairingly) "Have you read the 'Lake Isle of Innisfree'?"

A. (triumphantly) "No, but I've read the explication."

Is the "Editor's Shop Talk" a palimpsest beneath whose surface there is a cry for help from frightened people?

Whatever the real nature of the *Antioch* editors' reactions, they are at least a tribute to the effectiveness of Professor Stone's rhetoric. I myself would add to this tribute. Polished, finished, flowing, assured—rich and rolling on the tongue—almost it persuades. My conviction that there is not the slightest substance to the article only increases my admiration—no! my astonishment—at the audacity of the performance. Out of nothing Mr. Stone has created the illusion of something. But reason does have the power to resist the potent spell and to show that the fabric of the vision is baseless, that its cloud-capp'd towers and gorgeous palaces are an insubstantial pageant which, examined critically, dissolve and leave not an idea behind.

II

Let me declare at the outset that I do not understand what Mr. Stone's thesis is. Nowhere can I find an exact statement of it. But, clearly, whatever that thesis may be, one of its elements is the concept that in "Araby" are to be found, for the first time, ideas and themes which recur in Joyce's later work. Despite Professor Stone's curious claim that "in his writings Joyce was always meeting himself—in ways which must at times have been beyond his conscious ordinance," surely the appearance of an idea in a later work of Joyce's is not proof of its existence in "Araby." The Joyce that wrote *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* is the Joyce that had written "Araby," but the Joyce that wrote "Araby" is not the Joyce who had written the later works. Just as clearly, before we can accept the claim that an idea in "Araby" recurs in a later work or is related somehow to its appearance in the work of another author, we must be convinced of its existence in "Araby."

We may, then, dismiss from consideration Mr. Stone's contention that Yeats's story "Our Lady of the Hills" is "embedded in 'Araby'" (whatever that means) or his suggestion that chords from "Levanna and Our Ladies of Sorrow" reverberate in it. In the absence of evidence external to "Araby"—evidence of the kind that would be provided by a statement of Joyce's that such linkages exist—both connections are dependent on the validity of Mr. Stone's reading of "Araby." We can also ignore Professor Stone's interpretation of "a heretofore impenetrable passage" from *Finnegans Wake* in the light of his reading of "Araby"—though we may admire the expertise that can distinguish the impenetrable passages of *Finnegans Wake* from the penetrable—for this interpretation also depends on the validity of that reading.

Just as the precise thesis of Mr. Stone's article is not clear, neither is his precise interpretation of "Araby." But it is clear that Mr. Stone believes that we are to see beneath the surface of the story certain themes, and that without such penetration we cannot understand the story. To an ordinary glance the final sentence of the story might seem the perfectly straightforward informing idea: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger." But Professor Stone counters any such idea at the very beginning of his discussion of the story:

"Driven and derided," "anguish and anger"—these reactions seem far too strong. Indeed they seem pretentious when compared to the trivial disillusionment which caused them. And they

are pretentious, certainly they are inappropriate, if related only to their immediate external causes. But the boy is reacting to much more than a banal fair and a broken promise. He is reacting to sudden and deeply disturbing insights. These insights are shared by the attentive reader, for by the end of "Araby" the reader has been presented with all that he needs in order to resolve the story's intricate harmony into its component motifs.

Professor Stone does not claim that the meanings he finds in the story are merely ancillary to, or concomitant with, the surface narrative. They are for him necessary to an understanding of the story. And, indeed, it must be so, for were these meanings merely underlying, then the attentive reader of Professor Stone's article might see no need to plunge into such murky depths when all seemed clear without arcane explanation. Professor Stone must and does claim that "Araby" can be fully understood only through the symbolic meanings he finds in it.

But though Professor Stone does not make his view of "Araby" clear, he does make clear his belief that a chief revelation of the story is that Irish Catholicism is decayed and corrupted, principally by mammonism. This indictment is first made by the details given about the dead priest, details which, according to Mr. Stone, were intended by Joyce to arraign the priest.

The case against the priest rests on two points. The first is the books he left behind. *The Abbot* has for its heroine that notoriously evil woman, Mary Queen of Scots. *The Memoirs of Vidocq* is "a volume of exciting quasi-blasphemous criminal and sexual adventures." *The Devout Communicant* is a devotional manual written, according to Mr. Stone, by a heretic and anti-Catholic, Abednego Seller, whose first name is that of one who would not worship the golden image and whose last suggests commercialism. The second point is the "highly directive import" Professor Stone finds in the "artfully inconclusive" final sentence about the priest.

"He had," concludes the narrator, "been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister." Joyce's ambiguity suggests that the priest's charity may have been ... double edged. ... If this worldly priest had been so "very charitable" why, at his death, was he able to donate "all his money" to institutions? His charity, so far as we know about it, began at his death.

From these two pieces of evidence Professor Stone deduces that the priest is an imposter, a finding of the greatest importance, for on it Professor Stone rears the superstructure of his article. He speaks of the first two paragraphs of the story in which the evidence appears as involving the themes of "decayed religion" and "mammonism" and as linking the story "to the problems and distortions of Catholicism and of Ireland as a whole," and he returns to these themes over and over, often referring to their relation to the priest and his defection from true religion. But their primary importance, of course, lies in their relation to the boy, for, as Mr. Stone tells us later, in worshipping the girl "the boy, like the priest, has begun to mix devotion with profanation, spirituality with materialism." And a principal revelation to the boy at the end of the story is that this worship is corrupt.

How well does the case against the priest stand examination? The attentive reader that Mr. Stone posits for "Araby" might naturally, in reading his article, wonder why, if it is so important for us to know that the author of *The Devout Communicant* was Abednego Seller, Joyce does not tell us. He does tell us that *The Abbott*—surely a somewhat more famous book—was by Walter Scott. Certainly Professor Stone attaches great importance not only to the paradox of the author's name but also to his having been a heretic and an anti-Catholic:

When Mrs. Mercer's unexamined commercial religion is remembered in connection with the boy's and then the dead priest's (one recalls that the priest's book of heretical devotions was

by a man named “Seller”)—we get some idea of how insidiously mammonistic is Ireland's religious bankruptcy.

... the story of Abednego is told *in extenso* in the Holy Saturday Mass, and Abednego Seller's heretical *Devout Communicant* is a manual for Holy Week. ...

Scarcely a line, an evocation, an object—the central apple tree, the heretical book of devotions by Abednego Seller ...—but adds its harmony to the whole and extends and clarifies the story's meaning.

Abednego Seller is the first piece of evidence Professor Stone adduces for the mammonism of the priest and hence of Ireland, and, if the arraignment of the priest is the foundation of Mr. Stone's article, Abednego Seller is its cornerstone.

Such emphasis might well lead the attentive reader to be curious about this author whose concealed name is of such paramount importance, a curiosity that would be further whetted by the discovery that no word-index or concordance to any work of Joyce's lists “Abednego Seller.” If he were to satisfy this curiosity, he would find that Seller lived from about 1646 to 1705, that *The Devout Communicant* was first published in 1686, and that, after the sixth edition in 1695, there is no record of its having been reprinted under that title.

This information would raise for the attentive reader the question, “Could there be another religious manual with the same title of Roman Catholic provenance and published in Ireland?” Such an enquiry pursued would lead to the discovery that Pacificus Baker, a prominent English Franciscan, wrote such a manual in the eighteenth century. This *Devout Communicant* was first published in London and underwent a number of editions and reprintings—second edition (apparently the earliest extant) 1765, sixth edition 1798; reprintings in 1813, 1823 (Manchester), 1826, 1827, and 1828 (Liverpool). An edition without the author's name, revised and enlarged by William Gahan, an Augustinian, was printed in Cork in 1794 and a copy of this edition is the only copy of any work with the title *The Devout Communicant* in the National Library of Ireland. (There are also indications that the work was reprinted in Dublin at least twice during the nineteenth century.)

At this point the attentive reader would ask what proof Professor Stone can offer that Joyce knew of the existence of Abednego Seller's work? (The enquiries I have made have failed to locate a copy in Ireland, though these enquiries have been by no means exhaustive.) Even if Professor Stone can prove that Joyce knew of the seventeenth-century manual, how would he persuade the reader of the likelihood that the reference in “Araby” is to this work and not to the popular and often reprinted Roman Catholic work? In view of the realism of the Dublin setting with North Richmond Street and the Christian Brothers School, why should the attentive reader, supposing he knew of the two *Devout Communicants*, feel that Joyce refers to Abednego Seller's heretical manual rather than to Pacificus Baker's orthodox one? If the title *The Abbot* were given alone without the name of the author, the reader might well assume that, because the book had belonged to a priest, it was a religious book. Any reader exerting the proper scholarly and critical attention that the attentive reader should exert would feel that he could not accept Mr. Stone's ascription of *The Devout Communicant* unless Mr. Stone could prove, first, that Joyce knew of Seller's work and, second, that Joyce was referring to this work and not to the Roman Catholic one. (We may note, in passing, that Professor Marvin Magalaner in his study *Time of Apprenticeship: The Fiction of Young James Joyce* (New York, 1959) ascribes the work to Pacificus Baker.)

The Devout Communicant is, then, not a piece of evidence which can be used to arraign the priest. What of the other books? The very most that can be said against a priest who reads works of the sort of *The Abbot* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq* is that he is guilty of venial sin, for they are vanities that stand in marked contrast to works entirely suitable for a priest to read, works such as *The Devout Communicant*.

Mr. Stone's other piece of evidence, which concerns the priest's charity, is easily disposed of. "If this worldly priest had been so 'very charitable' why, at his death, was he able to donate 'all his money' to institutions? His charity, so far as we know about it, began at his death." If Mr. Stone had only realized that his question is not a rhetorical one, he might have answered it himself. First, a secular priest is permitted to own property. Second, the priest may have given away vast sums during his life and still have left "all his money" to institutions. Finally, Mr. Stone's statement that the priest's charity, as far as we know, began at his death is an argument *ex silentio*. We might just as well say that the priest was unchaste on the grounds that we are told nothing at all about his chastity.

Once we think of this last point, we can see that Professor Stone missed a good opportunity to indict the priest for lust. Spiritually a priest might be regarded as both male and female, and for this the abandoned bicycle pump is a magnificent symbol. Its rustiness points to the waste of the priest's fertility. But underneath this obvious symbolism there is the more important idea of masturbation for which a pump is an unmistakable correlative, a symbolism reinforced when we recall Bloom's masturbation at the moment of the elevation of the Host—to which Mr. Stone refers in his article—a false priest elevating himself at the altar of lust. So too in "Araby" the priest is a false priest guilty of mammonism and fruitless lust just as we are to find the boy guilty of mammonism and fruitless lust. But there is still another layer of the palimpsest to be revealed. Such an article as a bicycle pump is clearly of British manufacture, for the Irish were not allowed to develop industry. It is then a symbol of the British commercial materialism which has corrupted Irish Catholicism—a symbol of Mammon, the strange god after whom the priest has gone a-whoring. This exegesis is not merely facetious; it illustrates a serious issue. A critic of Professor Stone's persuasion should find every detail in a story symbolic, for, if he admits that any detail is present for verisimilitude alone, he raises the question of how to distinguish such a detail from one which is symbolic.

But it is time to deliver a final verdict on the priest. And that verdict is not even "Not proven"; it is "Not guilty." And the other contentions dependent on the case topple with it like a file of upright dominoes falling with the first—the corruption of Irish religion, the other subliminal hints of this in the opening paragraphs, its parallel in the boy's worship of the girl, and the revelation to the boy at the end of the story that his worship is corrupt. The case has not provided a sound foundation for the interpretation of "Araby" let alone an Archimedean base from which to shift the understanding of the entire canon of twentieth-century allusive writers.

III

It would be simply tedious to expose the complete lack of substance of other and far less important readings by Professor Stone of the palimpsest of "Araby." Two of these baseless interpretations, however, are worth examining, for they illustrate beautifully the pitfalls that await the thesis-monger who grinds the axe of symbolic interpretation: false association and the creation of nonexistent facts.

Among those symbols of betrayal Mr. Stone finds everywhere in the story is the florin, the coin which the uncle gives the boy for the bazaar. "That Joyce, out of all the coins and combinations of coins available to him, chose to have the boy clutch a florin is doubly meaningful." The original florin of 1252, a gold coin noted for its purity, bore emblems of the Virgin and of John the Baptist. The boy's coin is silver and bears the emblems of Ireland's foreign masters. The first issue in England, coined in 1847, was known as the "Godless and Graceless Florin" because the title "Dei Gratia, F. D.," customary on coins, had been omitted by the Roman Catholic Master of the Mint, who was subsequently discharged for the offense. As Mr. Stone believes that the boy in his visit to the fair is "acting out his betrayal in the most emblematic way," he finds it "supremely ironic" that the boy "should be clutching an English florin, an alien and notorious silver coin sans Virgin's lily and sans Catholic saint but bearing instead symbols of his and Ireland's servitude and betrayal."

The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason, and the reason why Joyce chose to have the boy clutch the florin is that he did not choose to have him clutch something else. What reader, no matter how attentive, would call to mind the history of the florin, even if he knew it, on the strength of its single mention in this sentence: "I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station"? How many readers, well-read, cultivated, or attentive, know that history? Did Mr. Stone know it when he first read "Araby"? A florin is almost as common a coin for an Irishman or an Englishman as a fifty-cent piece is for an American (I say "almost" simply because the florin shares its equivalence to the fifty-cent piece with the half-crown), and no Irish or English reader would give a second thought to the single and simple mention of a florin any more than an American would to such a mention in a story of a fifty-cent piece, a coin which has associations as rich as those of the florin.

The colloquial designation "four-bits" arises from its relation to the Spanish "piece-of-eight"; its more formal designation of "half-dollar" relates it to the coins which first appeared in 1518 made of silver mined in Joachimsthal ("dollar" is a modified shortened form of *Joachimsthaler*) and bearing the effigy of the saint whose name appears in apocryphal writings as that of the father of the Virgin Mary. What an *embarras de richesses* for an explicator of Mr. Stone's kidney, if we add to these associations a fascinating history! When the Bank of England suspended payments in 1797, and the scarcity of coins was very great, a large number of Spanish pieces-of-eight, which were held by the Bank, were put into circulation after having been countermarked at the mint with a small oval bust of George III, such as used by the Goldsmith's company for marking. Others were simply over-stamped with the initials G. R. enclosed in a shield. In 1804 the Mandy penny head set in an octagonal compartment was employed. These coins were called "pieces-of-eight" because each was worth eight *reals* and were commonly referred to as "dollars." Several millions were distributed and were very largely used in the British North American colonies. By such a history our terms "four-bits" and "dollar" came into use. Let me disabuse the reader of any illusion that all this information is a display of erudition. It is readily at hand in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—from which I have taken the history practically verbatim—as is all the information Professor Stone provides about the florin.

Since Mr. Stone gives the history of the florin because he is searching the palimpsest of "Araby" for symbols of betrayal, we may remark here on his curious failure to note a word in the sentence containing "florin" much richer as such a symbol, a failure which illustrates how endless are the associations anyone can establish once he gives his fancy up unrestrainedly to symbol hunting. For the name of the street down which the boy hastens is Buckingham, a name rich in overtones of betrayal. I have no intention of exhausting these associations. Consider only those involved in the Buckingham who figures in *Richard III*—Richard's "second-self" in the practice of treachery and a traitor to Richard. How much more would this one association—an association within the knowledge of any cultivated reader—add to the irony Mr. Stone finds in the boy going to the bazaar bearing a coin symbolic of "his and Ireland's servitude and betrayal" by providing the further irony that to reach the bazaar the boy passes down a street with a name redolent of betrayal!

But our main point is that the significance Professor Stone sees in the word "florin" is an example of what I have called "false association." It is true that the florin has a history of association with the Virgin Mary and with the idea of godlessness and gracelessness, but it is false to assume that these associations would be aroused in the reader by the bare mention of the name of an everyday coin.

The second misinterpretation involves the creation of a nonexistent fact to establish a false association. Mr. Stone says that when the boy "allows 'two pennies to fall against the sixpence' in his pocket," his action is "reminiscent of how Judas let the silver of betrayal fall upon the ground after his contrition." The context of this statement makes it quite clear that what establishes for Mr. Stone the association between Judas' act and the boy's is the action of "letting fall":

The two men “were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.” The boy also has fallen. We recall the “wild garden” with its “central apple-tree,” that the words “falling” and “fell” are crucial to the description of Mangan's sister during her epiphany before the boy, and that the word “fall” again recurs—again in connection with money—when the boy, in his penultimate action, an action reminiscent of how Judas let the silver of betrayal fall upon the ground after his contrition, allows “two pennies to fall against the sixpence” in his pocket as he finally turns to leave the bazaar.

Judas did not let the silver of betrayal fall—he threw it down, he cast it down, he hurled it, he flung it, but he did not let it fall. In Matthew XXVII, 5, we are told that, after the betrayal of Jesus, Judas repented and attempted to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders in the temple. When they refused to take them back, Judas threw them away and went off and hanged himself. The words used to describe the action of throwing the money away are in the Greek original “rhipsas ta argyria en to nao,” in the Vulgate “projectis argenteis in templo,” in the Challoner-Rheims revised “he flung the pieces of silver into the temple,” in the King James “he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple,” and in the Revised Standard “throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple.” Nowhere in the original or in any standard translation is it said that Judas let the silver fall in the temple. Professor Stone finds an association which does not exist between the boy's act of letting his money fall and Judas' act of throwing away the money of betrayal.

IV

“Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.” Professor Stone, as we have seen, finds this final state of the narrator unconvincing in terms of what we might call the surface meaning of the story. It is with this judgment, from which Mr. Stone begins his examination of “Araby,” that the attentive reader of the article must take issue. For the final sentence records the reaction which the reader has been awaiting since the boy's entrance to the bazaar and which has been prepared for by all the details given after his entrance. Mr. Stone finds the reaction inappropriate to the triviality of the disillusionment, but what is important is not the triviality of the disillusionment but the strength of the illusion which led up to it. The occasion of the disillusionment is unimportant just as is the cause of the illusion. The important thing is the revelation to the boy of the triviality of what he had attached so much significance to. That revelation is universal and its truth is none the less keen for all its reputation over the centuries:

Now I have seen the face of death and am sore afraid. One day too I shall be like Enkidu.

Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

her bifeoh læne,
her bimon læne,
eal pis eoran gesteal

her bifreond læne,
her bimaeg læne;
idel weorpe!

And thinketh al this world nis but a faire
That passeth soone as floures faire.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,

Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.

Man is in love and loves what vanishes
What more is there to say?

The “anguish and anger” are the reactions of a young boy feeling this truth for the first time, and the self-centeredness and self-dramatization are quite in keeping with his age and with the earlier creation by the boy of an inner world of love and hope at odds with reality. Our awareness that the story is told by a narrator who sees the boy's reaction in this way cuts against any tendency to find the reactions too strong, pretentious, or inappropriate—they are the reactions of a boy, and they are none the less important nor is the insight less true because in later life he will react differently.

Viewing the story in the light of its final revelation, we can see how beautifully every stroke prepares us for this revelation with the delicacy and simplicity of high art. The setting of a lower-middle-class district, though not of great importance, has a double appropriateness: it is a drab, respectable neighborhood whose inhabitants might well dream of a more beautiful environment; second, such a neighborhood does not crush the spirit out of its inhabitants as a working-class neighborhood might nor satisfy their longing for beauty as an upper-class neighborhood might. The more immediate and more important setting is not, however, the respectable bourgeois world of North Richmond Street but the world of boys which is described in much greater detail. The narrator has known a world occupied in school-time and play-time entirely by boys. In such a world women, old or young, have being only as they relate to the members of this world—“John's mother wants him! Bill's aunt is calling him!” “Mangan's sister” is the girl's natural appellation here and not “an awkward and unaccountable substitute for a name ... designed to catch the reader's attention and direct his associations” to James Mangan and Dark Rosaleen. (Granted the fame of James Clarence Mangan, why should the phrase direct an Irish reader to him when Mangan is such a common Irish name? Even if it did, why should “sister,” which certainly has no connotations of romantic love, bring to mind Dark Rosaleen? The use of the last name rather than the first is the common practice in an English or Irish boy's school.)

The boy is at an age where his emotional fancies are strong and where he is experiencing a first awakening of a generalized impulse toward sexual love. Twelve years of age would fit very nicely and would accord with the biographical experience which the story no doubt reflects—Joyce was twelve in 1894 when his family lived in North Richmond Street. At this point in the boy's life a girl captures his attention. He has no idea of the mechanics of sex or that what he feels is the beginning of a period of strong sexual drive. What he notices are the precise details that such a boy would notice: the things that mark a girl as different externally from a boy—the dress with a petticoat showing at times below the hem, the long braid, the way she bends her head to one side, the way she holds the top of one of the iron uprights of the railing (no doubt swinging back and forth) and the common simple first piece of jewelry for a girl, a silver bracelet. Nothing could be more suggestive of girlhood and less suggestive of the “desecrating lust” and the “hints of commercialism and sensuality with connotations of sexuality and betrayal” which Mr. Stone finds in these details. And no one could be a less likely prototype of Gerty MacDowell or Molly Bloom or less suggestive of the harlot.

So too, nothing could be less suggestive of a response to sensuality and lust than the response the boy makes. His reaction is that of one who has been stirred by chivalric love in the tradition of the Arthurian romances. His love kept secret from the world becomes a treasure which he sees himself guarding safely from all harm, as a knight errant would guard the precious object of a quest (the most precious object in the Arthurian story is, of course, a chalice, the Holy Grail). His confused and generalized emotion is engendered as much by the exciting idea of being in love as it is by the object which calls forth such romantic intensity, a diffuseness which is shown when, in an ecstasy of feeling, he prays to the lord of terrible aspect with the intensity of a young Dante.

While he is in this feverish state, the girl speaks to him of Araby, and immediately her desire to go transfers to him with an intensity made greater because she cannot go and because he promises to bring her something from the fair—the knight now has a quest to undertake for his lady.

From this moment on suspense builds. The intervening days drag interminably until at last the appointed Saturday arrives. Knowing his uncle's habit of lingering late in a snug on a Saturday night, he reminds his uncle that he is going to the fair that night. The curt reply shows the irritation of a man acknowledging a request he does not want to carry out and it gives the boy a sense of foreboding. Arrived home, he waits feverishly for dinner and his uncle's return, cooling his forehead against the window which faces the house where the girl lives. When he comes downstairs he finds a Mrs. Mercer there for supper. To Professor Stone, Mrs. Mercer's name, her dead husband's occupation of pawnbroking, her collecting of stamps for a pious purpose all mean that "Joyce is saying, in effect, that everyday religion and piety in Ireland are based upon self-deluding and mindless materialism." But the function of every detail about Mrs. Mercer can be accounted for much more simply. What can be more infuriating when one is in a fever of doubt and expectation than to have to go through the formality of being polite to an outsider? How much more so when the outsider is a tedious person? How beautifully Joyce makes us feel this for the boy! The more trivial Mrs. Mercer, the greater our sense of the boy's anguish. She is the garrulous widow of a pawnbroker (pawnbroking is not the most glamorous of occupations) with nothing better to do than collect stamps for some "pious purpose" (the alliteration almost makes us hear the boy spitting out the words contemptuously). We feel the boy's relief when, after she takes her garrulous leave, he is able to walk up and down the room physically venting his anxiety.

Hope when the uncle at last appears is offset by the precautionary wait enforced by a drunkenness that may turn to nastiness before it is partially tempered by food. But at last, late though it is, the boy is off with money in his hand. At the same time that the complete emptiness of the train, the slowness of its journey, and the late hour of the arrival make us anticipate the disappointment to come, they heighten our sense of the boy's desperate anxiety not to miss the bazaar. Joyce could not have got him to Araby in a more feverishly anxious state.

And Joyce could not have got him there at a time when the contrast between his expectations of something wonderful and the reality of the bazaar would be greater—no bright lights but a half darkened fair, no gay noisy crowds but a nearly empty building about to close up, no busy booths with shouting hucksters but nearly all closed stalls and attendants counting their receipts before those still open. The one stall the boy stops before is hopelessly expensive for someone with eightpence in his pocket (four of which he would need for the train home). What price a present for his lady now? At this stall he overhears the most banal flirtatious talk, talk that bears as much relationship to a romantic love as his own exchange with the girl.

I do not see how Joyce could have achieved a greater build-up or a greater let-down. Not all boys would dream of romantic love in such bookish terms as the narrator, though surely the young Joyce would, but what boy has not experienced dreams of romantic love focussed on some girl, dreams which grow and flourish in a secrecy guarded by shyness? What person has not felt the disillusionment that comes when an expected delight proves disappointing? What more than a fair or a circus promises a glamor it does not have—a fair is the very symbol of vanity; witness Bunyan's representation of the world as Vanity Fair. Then too, the boy's love for the girl is made to run parallel to his anticipation of the bazaar. Exciting enough in itself, the visit to the fair is made doubly exciting because it is a quest undertaken for his lady who longs to go and cannot, a quest from which he will bring back for her some wondrous object. Suspense mounts with the agonizing wait for the uncle and the intolerable slowness of the eleventh hour journey. The bazaar could never have lived up to the boy's expectations—no bazaar could have—but at no time could it have come less up to them than at the time of the boy's arrival.

At the end of the story we can see the true conflict and how details in the story reinforce our sense of its universality. The main conflict is between the desire of mankind for a perfection of beauty in life and the impossibility of realizing this desire. At first the boy feels a conflict between his “love” for the girl and his environment; he keeps his “love” to himself and protects it from the unworthy, hostile world—“I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes.” This same conflict is involved in the case of the boy and the uncle—the uncle is indifferent to the intensity of the boy’s desire to go to the bazaar. But at the end the boy realizes that the true conflict is not between himself and his environment, or at least not so much so, as it is between the enormous power of his fancy and the impossibility of reality ever corresponding to his fancy. “Vanity of Vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity”—what the story is concerned with is the moment of first realization, the moment when its truth is most deeply felt.

V

Obviously, if we consider the symbol-making power of the mind, anything may become symbolic for a reader. The important questions for the critic are, “When is a particular symbolic perception acceptable? How does one check, restrain, discipline the symbol-making activity of the mind?” The whole of “Araby” is finally symbolic of the way in which men are driven and mocked by illusions. Some details in the story take on a symbolic cast and some do not, though this dichotomy is overly simple. It is more accurate to say that the details give verisimilitude and that, at the same time, some may take on symbolic significance in the light of the central idea of the story. Joyce suggests to us, at several points, that though men universally realize the truth the boy comes to experience, they never lose their vain desires. Of all men, a priest should be most keenly aware of the vanity of things, and yet the books the priest leaves behind are a mixture of a devout treatise and two highly romantic works. Even those whose lives are informed by an awareness of the contrast between the corruptible and the incorruptible are subject to the vanity of human wishes. The garden of the house is, as all gardens are, an attempt to achieve beauty, but its decayed condition shows a failure to achieve it or to maintain it even if it is momentarily achieved. This wild garden with its central apple tree may symbolize the vain aspiration of man to create beauty here where it cannot keep its lustrous eyes and may even, if some reader wishes, be taken as a symbolic allusion to the Garden of Eden, which man dreams of but can never achieve in his fallen condition. Again, the uncle, unresponsive though he is to the wild longing of the boy, is stirred by the name “Araby” to recite what, from the title alone, the reader recognizes would be a highly romantic poem. The ordered neighborhood with its “decent lives,” the world of business and routine where adult men and women are preoccupied with making a living, checks and subdues the fancy but it never completely conquers it. Man still remains discontent with his condition—like the uncle, many men seek the public house “to see the world as the world’s not” or they may become puritanical, as many Irish are, and seek to repress their vain desires, a reaction suggested when the boy feels anger at being driven and derided by vanity. Finally, there is the implication that one of the bases of religion, at least of Christianity, is the vanity of human wishes for which religion offers a consolation—the girl cannot go to the bazaar because her school is going to have a “retreat,” a period devoted to a consideration of the difference between things eternal and things *sub species aeternitatis*.

Symbolic significances which supplement the central idea of a story, expand it, provide overtones for it, reinforce it, or in any way arise naturally from it are not to be objected to even if such significances might not occur to all readers. But symbolisms which run counter to the central idea, are discordant with it, are unrelated to it, or are claimed to be concurrent with it but to be perceived only by an understanding of an arcane network of unstated details obliquely connected with it are to be rejected unless evidence is adduced from outside the story to show that the author saw such symbolisms in the story. On this basis we must reject Mr. Stone’s view that the girl with her silver bracelet holding one of the spikes of the area railing, head bowed and petticoat showing, is at once a symbol of the Virgin Mary as she appears in *pietás* (in what *pietá* does she appear standing and holding one of the nails?) and of Mary Magdalene and hence, by the name “Mary” called up through this symbolism, to be associated with Mary Sheehy and Mary Queen of Scots. We reject the harlot symbolism, not merely because the associations reek of the lamp and would never occur to any reader

however attentive, but rather because the idea of the girl as a harlot and of the boy's love for her as lust jars with the idea of a young boy's first romantic illusion of love. Our rejection of the Virgin symbolism would be based on Ockham's principle—the details beautifully bespeak young girlhood and need no further explanation. Or, again, we can reject the idea that the opening lines of “The Arab's Farewell to His Steed” “are fraught with thematic significance” and that the story of Caroline Norton, the author of the poem, “is patently and ironically appropriate to what Joyce is saying.” The story is self-contained and does not depend for its effect upon whether the reader knows these matters or not—the details that Joyce gives are the details the reader needs.

The flaw which stands at the very heart of Professor Stone's article is his basic assumption that “Araby” is not self-contained. He seeks to give substance to his belief by the idea that in this early story Joyce employs the allusive method of his later works. For Mr. Stone “Araby” cannot be understood by itself, and he proceeds to rewrite the story as Editor X unconsciously realized when he felt that, in reading Mr. Stone's article, he “was being told the story in considerably more detail than Joyce gave.” Apparently neither Editor X or Mr. Stone conceived that, if Joyce had wanted to tell the story in more detail, he would have told it in more detail and that, if he had not done so, he would have written an imperfect story. If Joyce wanted the reader to arraign the priest, he would have made it clear that the priest was to be arraigned—if the arraignment were to depend upon the anomaly of Abednego Seller's name then Joyce would have made it clear that *The Devout Communicant* referred to was the one by Seller and not by any other.

The palimpsest Professor Stone sees in “Araby” is not in the story but in Professor Stone's mind, and what he takes for depths shimmering with rich, half-obsured images is a mirror wherein the figures of his own perfervid fancy glimmer and shift. Mr. Stone uses “Araby” as a sort of Rorschach test, a starting point for a long free association fantasy that might be of general human interest insofar as *humani nihil a me alienum*. However, it is quite alien to any academic discipline. For it is free association; there is no control whatsoever except the limit of what happens to be Mr. Stone's awareness.

Intellectually, Mr. Stone's approach to “Araby” is not different from Baconianism. It is only a jump—no, not even that—to move from the idea that the “Araby” Joyce wrote is not the “Araby” of the common reader but the “Araby” Mr. Stone reads beneath the surface, to the idea that it was written not by Joyce at all but by someone else as part of the Great Cryptogram. And the effect of such neo-Alexandrianism upon students, not to mention editors of reputable journals, may be a double disaster. It may either turn them into little apostles who see all works of art as double-acrostics and who are led to those displays of vanity against which Helen Gardner so sensibly warns us:

The critic's task is to assist his readers to read for themselves, not to read for them. ... He is not writing to display his own ingenuity, subtlety, learning or sensitiveness; but to display the work in a manner which will enable it to exert its own power.

Or it may drive them away from literature as something whose esoteric incomprehensibility repels the reason and destroys the humanistic illumination of art.

What some symbolic critics ask their readers to accept is that all fancies engendered by a work of art have validity. They want complete exemption for such ideas from the requirements of evidence, common sense, and logic which ideas in other areas of human activity must meet before they are accepted. True, criticism is an art, though no one has ever claimed that it stands on the same footing as the original works it elucidates, but it is much more a science in that it must test its claims with the scrupulosity of science, and it must be as rigorous in the logic with which it advances them. Criticism is the product of reason enlightened by imagination and not of the free play of fancy released from the inhibitions imposed by logic and common sense. It is not the critic but the lunatic, the lover, and the poet who are allowed to give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. Likewise, the true scholar checks out every fact to the end, never ignores any argument

which stands against his thesis, even one which has never been advanced by another, and is tentative about every theory with a tentativeness that varies with its degree of probability. The true critic supports his interpretations by facts. Both are united in the pursuit of truth as something which they cannot alter to their own desires and which they pursue unwearingly no matter how illusory the idea that they can ever say a final word.

Quid est scholaris? Est homo discens virtutes cum solitudine. ... Qualis substantia est scholaris? Est substantia animata sensitiva scientiae et virtutem susceptibilis.

Criticism: Bernard Benstock (essay date 1967)

SOURCE: "Arabesques: Third Position of Concord," in *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Fall, 1967, pp. 30–9.

[In the following essay, Benstock supports Professor Stone's thesis in the essay reprinted above, and agrees that "Araby" serves "as a vital introduction of many of the motifs of the later works of James Joyce."]

"You must say 'paragon': a paramour is,
God bless us, a thing of naught."

—A Midsummer-Night's Dream

"I'm the Sheik of Araby,
Your love belongs to me;
At night when you're asleep,
Into your tent I'll creep."

—"The Sheik of Araby"

"... (if you can spot fifty I spy
four more) ..."

—Finnegans Wake

In the Fall '65 issue of the *Antioch Review* Harry Stone marched through James Joyce's "Araby" in hobnailed boots, kicking up many muddy chunks. In retaliation Robert P. ApRoberts in the Winter '66-'67 issue wafted over the same terrain, leaving hardly a trace. They collided but never met. If it is necessary to choose between their two approaches to the story (and I think it is), my preference is for the over-reacher rather than the under-achiever. In doing so I reject the Helen Gardner critical dictum quoted by Professor ApRoberts ("The critic's task is to assist his readers to read for themselves."); I see no reason for the critic to allow himself to be used as a crutch for those who cannot read for themselves in the first place. Instead I view the critic as an independent reader with a point of view of his own, with insights and outlooks shaped and sharpened by his overall view, who offers the reader the uniqueness of his reading. "Araby" will survive all of our critical comments, but the Joycean dialogue that is current today has been enriched by Professor Stone's speculations, rather than by Professor ApRoberts' insistence that we take the story at face value.

Self-contained as Joyce's story is, it is also a part of something else: both of a trio of tales of childhood, for which it serves as the culminating piece, and for the full *Dubliners* collection, for which it is germinal. Harry Stone is precise in citing those last phrases of the story ("Driven and derided, 'anguish and anger'—these reactions seem far too strong," he comments); his critic is flailing the wrong horse when he cites this passage against him. The final sentence of "Araby" serves as a recording of the boy's moment of self-awareness because of his experiences with Mangan's sister and the Araby bazaar that proves to be a vital link with her.

But even larger is this revelatory instance for all the childhood experiences from “The Sisters” through “An Encounter” and “Araby.” In each of the previous cases the boy is too young to comprehend fully the meaning to himself of the particular occurrence that disturbs him. The death of Father Flynn and the consequent gossip that floods in at its wake inundates the stunned child: his suspicions are aroused and he reserves judgment, having failed to make a pattern of the pieces. In the second story the boy is somewhat older but still pre-pubescent: he knows enough to be frightened by the encounter with the pederast, but not enough to understand the exact nature of the danger to him embodied in the “queer old jossler.” Instead he records a partial awareness of himself in relation to his friend Mahony: “He ran as if to bring me aid. And I was penitent; for in my heart I had always despised him a little.” Compare this conclusion first to that of “The Sisters” (where the story is given over at the end completely to a literal reproduction of the words of the adults, without the boy venturing any real comment), and then to “Araby” (where the boy’s reactions are squarely on target, although exaggerated). “Araby” is as self-contained an artistic entity as “The Mookse and The Gripes,” but it is also as much a part of *Dubliners* as the latter is of *Finnegans Wake*.

To preserve that entity Joyce recapitulated in the third childhood vignette those important elements of the first two, hence the dead priest that Professor ApRoberts takes such pains to exonerate from sin. That nameless cleric is a remanifestation of the dead Father Flynn, with a sister to inherit after him—lest we miss the connection between the two stories. (Professor ApRoberts will probably demand *two* sisters for a perfect analogy, but James Joyce rarely honors such demands for slavish literalness; in fact, Joyce’s subtleties may often go unnoticed for decades—and perhaps forever—but the primary levels are clear enough here, the secondary allusions perceptible to more careful readings, and tertiary ones dependent upon unusual insights or accidental discoveries.) It should be apparent from the “background material” that organized religion in the shape of the Roman Catholic Church of Ireland is already a dead end for the young tenant of North Richmond Street: all of “The Sisters” and the first two paragraphs of “Araby” independently serve to make that point. The same is equally true for the freedom of open adventure: the Pigeon House was never reached; on the road inexplicable danger presented itself. This romantic young heart may continue to dream of Persia or the Wild West, or of Araby, but his physical confines will remain the streets of Dublin, “places the most hostile to romance.” Other important sources for his direct participation in active life are just as arid: like the boy in “The Sisters” he is the ward of an aunt and uncle (no parents of any kind are mentioned in the middle story). He comes to realize himself superior to and divorced from his casual playmates (as the boy in “An Encounter” felt toward Mahony), and with the awakening of puppy love, even his aptitude in school begins to dim as any actual achievement worth his attention: “I watched my master’s face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle.” The full composite of his hopes and interests now centers about Mangan’s sister and the Araby bazaar that was to him her temple. When this house of cards collapses, it represents a kind of total destruction from which he may never spiritually recover. If he fails to go on to absorb a sophisticated education, he faces a future like that of Thomas Chandler (“A Little Cloud”); if he diligently returns to his school-work but remains unable to re-establish ties with other people, he runs the risk of a dead life similar to that of James Duffy (“A Painful Case”). At best he can hope to survive his disillusionment on the surface at least, remaining somewhat cautious when it comes to “real” commitments—in which case he may well share the painful awakening of Gabriel Conroy (“The Dead”). *Dubliners* in toto is a self-contained artistic entity.

With the final sentence of “Araby,” then, we are given the boy’s assessment of the totality of his experiences: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.” Despite the succinct quality of his self-evaluation, there are important connectives still missing. We have seen the protagonist as the victim of delusion, having assumed that there was something in this world pure and perfect, and worthy of his adoration. All of the dammed-up streams of parental love, religious involvement, adventurous spirit, and individuality had made a madonna of Mangan’s sister and a chalice-bearing Knight Templar of her worshipper. When the glorious temple proves to be a dreary commercial enterprise, and its priestess (a surrogate for the Adored One) a drably flirtatious salesgirl, painful disillusion sets in. The extreme reaction that he has is concomitant with the total commitment that he

had made to the ideal of a personal religion based on Mangan's sister as his goddess. Yet his self-accusation of vanity is something of an enigma, since obviously it is the world around him that has failed him, that has proven tawdry and cheap throughout, and that at most he is guilty of childish naivete rather than vanity. Unless there is actually something else that the boy learns (something about himself, which he feels at that moment but does not openly explain), other than that he is confined like all others within the limitations of his environment. Is there some personal guilt that he has become aware of? The technique of first-person narration precludes our receiving all the information directly, yet that careful reading provides all the necessary information.

The locus of the boy's sudden awareness is in the snatch of conversation overheard, a technique familiar to readers of Joyce aware of the epiphanies he recorded from just this sort of eavesdropping. That the accents of the two young men indicate that they are English is significant, the clue throughout *Dubliners* of the external domination of the Irish by their British masters: Mr. Alleyne's "piercing North of Ireland accent" ("Counterparts"), Gallaher returned from London sporting an orange tie ("A Little Cloud"), Routh's triumph at cards when the Irish Jimmy Doyle is the heavy loser ("After the Race"), and so forth. The local shopgirl is in the process of selling herself to the Englishmen, who obviously possess a good deal more money than the meager eight pence that the boy has with which to buy a present that will win the love of Mangan's sister (this situation is comparable to that of Farrington in "Counterparts," who loses at Indian wrestling to the English Weathers and then watches the London actress walk out, aware that his "want of money" prevents him from approaching her). The contrast to the boy is apparent: his was an exalted love, while the flirtation in the bazaar is unspeakably vulgar. Yet how different actually were these two instances? To what extent had he kept hidden from himself the common denominator that underscores the two? He had assumed that his beloved was radically different from the run-on-the-mill female—but was she? He had also assumed that he was vastly superior to the young men on the make—but is he? He had directly associated a gift that he would purchase with the successful wooing of the girl he loved. We have seen him during his moments of ecstasy, pressing his trembling hands together and "murmuring, 'O love! O love!' many times"—and the combined religious fervor and sexual excitement should have been apparent throughout to the adult reader, however disguised it may have been to the early adolescent undergoing the experience. "Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door"; "her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood"; "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand"; "my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires"; "All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves": these are the verbalized sensations and attitudes of the young protagonist (although the language in which they are couched is already somewhat removed from his own vocabulary at the time). It requires no Freudian come from Vienna to read these phrases to us with the obvious emphases. The boy himself makes the analogy with religious devotion, yet it is clear to the reader that he has transferred the familiar responses from the Virgin to Mangan's sister. Until the epiphanic moment engendered by the small talk of the shopgirl and her admirers, the boy has remained unaware of the degree to which it is his awakening sexuality that is responding to the girl he adores. Having shrouded his pubescent desires in mystic mantles, he has watched them suddenly pierced during the encounter in the bazaar: his love was sensual and secular, and now openly reflected in the harsh English accents and the insipid female coyness.

That "Araby" is a story of the grossness of common sexuality does not alter the fact that it is a delicate narrative of a sensitive boy's disillusionment (a crucial stage in the development of the kind of paralysis that Joyce sought to dissect in his native city), any more than the fragile lyrics of *Chamber Music* lose either their fragility or lyricism from Joyce's often-stated explanation that his title included the tinkle of the chamber pot. It requires a prurient sensibility quite different from Joyce's to insist that one aspect cancels out the other. I will even go so far as to add my acceptance of the contention that Maria in "Clay" is polarized as both the Blessed Virgin and the Halloween Witch, so that at the center of the polarity she is merely a pitifully human Maria. The young James Joyce who wrote *Dubliners* may not yet have had the equipment to artifice a *Finnegans Wake*, but he already saw himself as a candidate for literary greatness, a potential genius waiting in the wings to be called onto the stage, and a rival of the God of the Creation. "Araby" is already well-encrusted

with complexities and calculated contradictions. It is surprising, therefore, that Professor Stone, who plays this delicate harpsichord as if it were a Cathedral organ, should avoid the Freudian interpretations that have already appeared on “Araby”: “her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door” (yonic); “The rain impinges upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds” (phallic); “she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist” (yonic); “She held one of the spikes” (phallic); “I passed in quickly through a turnstile. . . . I found myself in a big hall” (yonic). One can only imagine the howls of anguish from Professor ApRoberts at such transgressions against “logic and common sense”; yet to the Freudian these elements obviously exist in the story and accurately supplement the surface concepts. The same Marvin Magalaner that Professor ApRoberts credits with the accurate identification of *The Devout Communicant* as that of Pacificus Baker has been responsible for a reading of “Araby” that would certainly be considered “illogical” by Professor ApRoberts.

The contest featuring Pacificus Baker against Abednego Seller is a main event destined to delight the hearts of Joycean enthusiasts for many years. In one corner, wearing the orange trunks of a heretical Protestant is Seller, championed by Harry Stone; in the other corner, sporting the ecclesiastically purple trunks of a devout Catholic, stands Baker, brought out of retirement by Robert P. ApRoberts for a comeback. Two *Devout Communicants* in an embarrassment of riches, comparable only to having two Saint Patricks. How careless of James Joyce to have failed to provide us with the author's name in this instance! He left no doubt that *The Abbot* was written by Sir Walter Scott, and of course Vidocq's name is embedded in his title and cannot be avoided; but here is a mysterious volume titled *The Devout Communicant* and no author's name attached to avoid confusion. The “true scholar” that Professor ApRoberts postulates (who “checks out every fact to the end”) would now have to find a yellow-paged candidate to solve the enigma—if the enigma were actually intended by Joyce to be solved. Joyce was a rummager through secondhand bookstalls and has left us quite a list of those existing in the Dublin of his day (in “The Dead” we hear about “Hickey's on Bachelor's Walk,” “Webb's or Massey's on Ashton's Quay,” and “O'Clohissey's in the by-street”; in *Ulysses* we find the “hawker's cart” under “Merchant's arch,” “an old one in Liffey street,” “Clohissey's,” and the “slanted bookcart”)—could Joyce have noticed the disparate volumes at any of these? Professor ApRoberts checked the current catalogue of the National Library of Ireland; did he also canvass Marsh's Library in Dublin, or the Bibliothèque Nationale and Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris? Joyce frequented those as well prior to 1904. Can we credit the bibliophilic Joyce with purposely keeping the identity of the boy's yellow-paged find a mystery to invite just the sort of speculation that the Stone-ApRoberts controversy has produced? It would certainly be in keeping with Joyce's bizarre sense of humor. Obviously the author of the particular volume is of no concern to the boy in the story, anymore than its subject matter. He is preoccupied with the charisma of the yellow pages, which serves as a clue to his romantic disposition.

This in itself should indicate to the reader something about James Joyce's artistic attitudes: he engenders mysteries with great delight and sits back to watch the scholars scurry about for elucidation. At times he ventures forward to lend a hand; at other times he keeps himself refined out of existence: at first he refused to disclose the schema to *Ulysses*; later he relented. That entire second paragraph of “Araby” is veiled with such enigmas, as Professor Stone indicates as he plunges beneath the veil. It is devoted to the dead clergyman and his legacy, and should we dismiss it as mere exposition (it would be a rare luxury in the tales styled in “scrupulous meanness”), Joyce brings the priest back later in the story: “One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died.” In exonerating the priest Professor ApRoberts runs the risk of eradicating him altogether, although he understandably objects to the heavy-handed treatment that had been afforded this paragraph. What do those three books actually signify about the priest? Nothing that would stand up in a court of law. We know nothing about how he came to have them, what use he put them to, what he thought of them, or who abandoned them—the priest himself or his sister? Assuming that these were deleted from the rest of his books by the legatee, would Pacificus Baker's properly Catholic *Devout Communicant* be junked along with Scott and Vidocq? We are treated to fragments of evidence that do not tell their entire tale, and we are told only what the finder, the central intelligence of “Araby,” knows or cares about. He passes no judgment on the priest, sees no mock-Eden in the “wild garden” or its “apple-tree,” and comes to no

conclusion about the “rusty bicycle-pump” (even Freudian analysts have avoided concrete conjecturing on that suspicious object). The boy merely transmits without comment of his own the hearsay of adults: “He was a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.” The protagonist shows no awareness of irony here, although Professor Stone is correct in his suspicion of intended irony. It seems inconceivable that James Joyce would have perpetrated such a sentence without ironic intention, but Joyce's irony is often a delicate sort of understructure. The heavy array of bricks that Professor Stone piles upon this one may cause it to buckle dangerously.

We might allow this particular priest, despite his strange reading habits and his suspect generosity, to get off lightly were he not one in a succession of priests who are suspicious personages in *Dubliners*. They range from the unfortunately demented Father Flynn (“The Sisters”) to the black sheep Father Keon (“Ivy Day in the Committee Room”) and that proponent of the celestial double-entry ledger, Father Purdon (“Grace”). In fact, there is not a single Catholic cleric in all of *Dubliners* whose role is not in some way actually sinister, even in their negative existences: the Father Butler who is not likely to be at the Pigeon House (“An Encounter”), the nameless priest—his photograph is already “yellowing”—who has long since left for Australia (“Eveline”), and the Father Conroy whose absence from his aunts' annual fête causes no comment at all (“The Dead”). Professor ApRoberts' naivete about Joyce's priest would be understandable if “Araby” were so self-contained that not a single other piece of Joycean writing existed.

The Stone case for the “Godless and Graceless Florin,” however, does not quite ring true, and the ApRoberts rebuttal carries weight. When so arbitrary a choice for a worthless piece of abandoned junk as a rusty bicycle-pump proves to be only a naturalistic element in the story, the common two-shilling coin seems intended for service only within the realm of verisimilitude. Of the possible single coins (I assume that the single coin here parallels the tribute exacted in “Two Gallants” and the bribe offered in “The Dead”), only the half-crown might have been a logical alternative, since a shilling alone would be insufficient for fare and entrance fee, and anything more than half-a-crown exorbitant. Yet the coin and the change derived therefrom do function tangentially as symbolic of commercialism and betrayal within the framework of “Araby,” although Professor Stone gratuitously attributes a Judas role to the boy who is actually the betrayed. Since Professor ApRoberts discovered the origin of the florin in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and suspects that his predecessor might have done the same, it is only by logical extension to presume that Joyce preceded both of them to that source—he was an avid user of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (particularly the eleventh edition). Is it not a typically scholastic attitude to assume that creative writers are not equipped to do the kind of minute research that the scholar does? In the case of James Joyce, I would conjecture that he left his thumbprint on more books than even the best of his commentators, and might well have been smiling to himself as he handed the boy his florin. But if he was, he made very little effort to share the irony with his readers, leaving Professor Stone almost no tangible evidence to support his assertions. But the commercial coin is a weighty symbol in *Dubliners*. The remaining eight pence in the boy's pocket (pitifully insufficient even in the original two-shilling state to buy a fitting tribute to the madonna of his dreams) are mocked at the bazaar by the larger amounts of money being counted on the salver, in the same sense that the boy is dwarfed by the “great jars that stood like eastern guards.” The florin not only has its counterpart in the coin exacted by Corley from the slavey and the gratuity foisted on Lily by the embarrassed Gabriel Conroy, but the hard facts of economic existence and some of its concomitant sordidness dominate all the adult stories in the book (Mrs. Mercer and her pawnbroker-husband heralding an entire parade of the mercantile and the mercenary): Eveline's poverty; Jimmy Doyle's losses at cards; Bob Doran's “bit of stuff put by”; Chandler's envy of Gallaher's success; Farrington's pawned watch; Maria pauperized in the laundry; Mr. Duffy's speculations about embezzlement; the unpaid election canvassers; Mrs. Kearney's insistence that her daughter be paid in advance; Father Purdon's sermon to the business community; Freddy Malins' Christmas card shop. No matter how Godly and Graceful the florin in “Araby” may be, it serves as a symbol of buying and selling.

It is because Professor Stone makes such conclusive pronouncements on such tenuous evidence that he provides his adversary with so accessible a target. Yet the case for Mangan's sister being larger than life

remains a strong one (I am dubious, however, about the “Dark Rosaleen” as the necessary evocation). As a designation for the loved one, “Mangan's sister” has a significant sound despite Professor ApRoberts' scoffing. It is true that the boy would refer to his schoolmate by last name as is traditional in school, but the sister is not a classmate of his, nor one of the boys. She must have a first name and the boy must know it, yet the awe with which he regards her is detrimental to actual familiarity. “Mangan's sister” is a title rather than a name: its corollary may well be “Christ's mother” in an Irish Catholic milieu. That the boy never sees her as the Mary or Rosie or Flossie that she actually is serves to underscore the romantically warped view that he has imposed upon the ordinary girl. “Mangan is such a common Irish name,” Professor ApRoberts insists, but were it as common as Murphy (which it is not), it would still signify James Clarence Mangan to Joyce and should to any careful reader of Joyce. The romantic despondency associated with that unfortunate poet is the common Irish malady that Joyce sees in the Dublin world of “Araby.”

In contrast to the bold assertions of Harry Stone, Professor ApRoberts avoids committing himself to any significant reading of the story. He maintains that there is no thesis to the Stone case, yet there is a very precise and excellent one: that “Araby” serves as a vital introduction of many of the motifs of the later works of James Joyce. It is unfortunate that in being so right Professor Stone manages to sound so wrong. The *Finnegans Wake* quotation is awkwardly pushed forward for explication, and it turns out to be an explication on only the most literal level and divorced from the context which enriches it many times over. That the “whole of Book IV of *Finnegans Wake* ... takes place in an instant between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday” is inaccurate: even if one assumes that the dream is taking place on Saturday night (and many *Wake* analysts now contend that it is Friday), the instant that divides one day from another is necessarily at midnight, while Book IV takes place unmistakably at dawn. I also question Professor Stone's assumption that the girl working in the bazaar is English. It is hardly likely that English sales help would be coming to work in economically deprived Dublin—the actual emigration went in the other direction (and still does). It is Joyce's vague antecedent that is actually responsible for the critic's misreading: “At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents. ...” The men are English (“their” refers back to them alone); the girl most likely is local. The Joycean motif is of the Irish selling themselves to the English—like the slavey in “Two Gallants” giving both body and coin to Corley, “the son of an inspector of police.” The same sort of casualness with antecedents might have resulted in Professor Stone's contention that the Gerty MacDowell of *Ulysses* is eighteen years old: we know that “Gerty would never see seventeen again,” but that is hardly proof that she is only eighteen. The troublesome sentence is the one that reads: “Then they could talk about her till they went blue in the face, Bertha Supple too, and Edy, the spitfire, because she would be twenty-two in November.” The next sentence begins, “She would care for him with creature comforts ...”—an indication that the “she” who will be 22 is the she who will “care for him,” that is, the Gerty who is “womanly wise.” That she is past the first bloom of youth is important to our awareness of the repressed sensuality of the beautiful but lame Gerty, making her desire to marry the much younger Reggy Wylie that much more pathetic.

In the final analysis there may not really be much to choose between the extreme approaches to “Araby” offered by the two contenders. On one hand we have Robert P. ApRoberts asserting that “nothing could be less suggestive of a response to sensuality than the response the boy makes,” while on the other Harry Stone contends that “Joyce was a materialist, a man of almost paranoiac cupidity and selfishness.” In Joycean terminology the Stone case “has the true scholastic stink” (we might remember that in *Exiles* Robert Hand claims to be able to swim “like a stone”), while the ApRoberts correctives are full of sound and fury, signifying very little. Between the muddy torrents and the shallow pool a third stream approach seems necessary. In *Finnegans Wake* the Four Old Men present their individual commentaries on the events of Chapter 16: Matt's is the “First position of harmony”; Mark offers “a second position of discordance”; Luke follows with his “Third position of concord,” still leaving room for John's “Fourth position of solution.” In the Great “Araby” Controversy we may still look forward to a non-synoptic gosseller.

Criticism: Frank Turaj (essay date 1970)

SOURCE: "'Araby' and *Portrait*: Stages of Pagan Conversion, in *English Language Notes*, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 3, 1970, pp. 209–13.

[In the following essay, Turaj finds a parallel between "Araby" and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, maintaining that the two works represent two different stages in Joyce's personal development.]

"Araby" is regarded as the story of a boy for whom young love becomes mystical and religious. It is partly a story of his initiation into love, and it is partly a story of his conversion *from* orthodox religion. Besides being a principal theme in Joyce's writing, this dialogue of the world and the spirit is, of course, a main fact in his life. A striking resemblance between the devices and themes of "Araby" and Chapter IV of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* suggests the process of the resolution of this dialogue, this conflict, both in Joyce's fiction and in his personal conversion to esthetic worldliness in his own life, as he recollects this artistically. That is, the resemblance really shows two stages in the conversion from Catholicism to "Paganism" of Dedalus-Joyce.

Chapter IV of the novel, the pivotal chapter, focuses on Stephen Dedalus' visit to the director priest, who attempts to recruit him for the Catholic priesthood. It then changes focus to reveal the opposite drive in Stephen's life as he watches the bathers. The scene with the director is famous:

The director stood in the embrasure of the window, his back to the light, leaning an elbow on the brown crossblind, and as he spoke and smiled, slowly dangling and looping the cord of the other blind. ... The priest's face was in total shadow, but the waning daylight from behind him touched the deeply grooved temples ... of the skull.

The significance of the scene is revealed in the language and the imagery. The priest's back was to the light. He leans on a "crossblind." He dangles a cord (noose?). His "face was in total shadow." There was "waning daylight." The reference to "deeply grooved temples" possibly involves a pun on the word "temples." The priest's head is referred to as a skull.

Directly after leaving the rectory, Stephen sees some boys swimming. Now the living sensuous world attracts him: "This was the call of life to his soul, not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar." He sees a girl standing in the water (*italics* have been added):

She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as *a sign upon the flesh*. Her thighs, fuller and softthued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and *dovetailed* behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some *darkplumaged dove*. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder *mortal beauty*, her face.

She was alone and still, gazing out to sea; and when she felt his presence and the *worship* of his eyes her eyes turned to him. ...—*Heavenly God!* cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of *profane joy*.

The italicized words indicate the religious-like response to a thing of simple mortal existence. The phrasing suggests the conventions from which Stephen derives responses, generally religious words and images, and also (these not italicized) pagan overtones deriving from some general symbols, e.g., “strange and beautiful seabird,” “emerald trail of seaweed,” “ivory,” “featherings of soft white down,” “long fair hair.” Stephen’s fervor is transferring from things perceived by religious perception to things perceived by sense perception.

The boy in “Araby” is in the process of an analogous transformation. Like Stephen, he carries a way of thinking, an indoctrination, into a different—but psychologically related—plot context. The religious motif is woven into the story from the very first line (italics added): “North Richmond Street, *being blind*, was a quiet street except at the hour when the *Christian Brothers’ School set the boys free*. An uninhabited house of two stories [Old and New Testaments?] stood at the *blind end*, detached from its neighbors in a square of ground. ... The former tenant of our house, *a priest, had died* in the back drawing-room.” All this is purposeful. The suggestions are of things musty, dull, dim, dead. Compare the passage to the one quoted from *Portrait* where the priest is described in a context of blindness and death, “back to the light,” “crossblind,” “skull,” etc.

In the next few lines of “Araby” the author, or implied author, brings himself into the story. He mentions immediately the books he found in the room where the priest had died, “*The Abbot* by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*.” He likes the last best, a worldly memoir. He favors this over a romantic novel of religion and a religious manual. Immediately the reader is told, “The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree. ...” In the light of developments, the seduction of his emotions, the meaning of the “garden” is worth contemplating.

The boy becomes interested in the girl. So far in his life he has really only known one set of emotional responses, those taught him by the Christian Brothers. Since he doesn’t have even a father or mother—he has an aunt and an uncle instead—he is still further removed from the normal emotional process, and the significance of his Christian Brothers education looms larger. He transfers his religious responses, the kind he knows, to the girl.

A moment of illumination in this story comes when the boy returns to the “drawing room in which the priest had died.” He sees “some distant lamp or lighted window ...” like a votive light in a church. Then, like Stephen Dedalus, the boy experiences a conversion, a pagan conversion: “All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: ‘*O love! O love!*’ many times.” He is less mature and less intellectually aware than Stephen, so he does not yet realize that it is precisely a thing of the senses to which he is responding. He has retained the proper attitude for prayer, but his god has changed.

The girl speaks to him of “Araby,” or a place where material delights, gifts to the senses, abound. We get this image of her: “The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.” The light seems to trace something like a marble statue. One thinks of the convention with which the Virgin is represented. But the image informs us of the nature of this goddess. She is quite mortal: “the white border of a petticoat.” Recall the passage quoted from *Portrait* of the girl standing in the water. There are trace resemblances again, “the white fringes of her drawers,” and other soft and subtle similarities.

In both instances, *Portrait* and “Araby,” the subject is in a border world where worship and piety are confused with worship and passion. In each case feminine attraction carries religious suggestion.

The boy plans to go to the bazaar, “Araby.” His aunt hopes it will not be “some Freemason affair,” some non-orthodox activity. But his purpose for going is quite worldly, in fact a sort of pagan quest to obtain an object for tribute. His aunt, at one point, suggests, “I’m afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of

our lord.” It is ironically a “night of our lord,” considering the boy's new objective for his worshipful pilgrimage.

Joyce describes the bazaar in terms suggesting a church. The boy enters in awe. A reaction forms: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.” He gazes up, as one gazes up in prayer, but now finds “darkness.” He is gazing up into the “darkness” of “vanity.” He has not escaped the training of the Christian Brothers. It dogs him.

The boy is not old enough to interpret his experience, or realize it, or articulate it as Stephen does, but this is essentially what has happened: Indoctrinated and imbued with the true spirit of Irish Catholicism, he reacts toward romanticism. He could have gone in three more-or-less romantic directions, monastic as exemplified by Walter Scott, devout pietism as illustrated in the handbook, or worldly romance. His favorite of the three books indicates his particular bent.

One may change ideas, but it is difficult to alter a way of thinking. He approaches love religiously. It replaces or palliates the character of the street, Christian, dead, and blind. Since the change is gradual—we read the story only when the boy is already familiar with the books and has already known the girl through the window for awhile—we witness it at a critical time.

If we take into consideration the different contexts and stages of maturity, this experience anticipates what happens to Stephen Dedalus. The change in the adolescent predicts the more conscious, deliberate, intellectual change in Dedalus-Joyce. In effect, “Araby” shows Joyce's recollection of the time when his vision began to change, and *Portrait* shows him when he finally grasped the change and accepted it. Shows it, that is, within the license of art.

Criticism: Edward Brandabur (essay date 1971)

SOURCE: “The Green Stem of Fortune,” in *A Scrupulous Meanness: A Study of Joyce's Early Work*, University of Illinois Press, 1971, pp. 49–56.

[In the following essay, Brandabur provides a thematic overview of “Araby.”]

From the harsher portrayals of Dublin's youth encountering perversity in the first two stories, Joyce turns to romance. For “Araby” displays characteristics of “Romance” described by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* most clearly as it concerns the hero's power of action: “If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended.”¹ Although like all the stories in *Dubliners*, “Araby” falls most obviously into the ironic mode, for the reader finds himself “looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity,”² the protagonist attempts to transcend his limitations by “romantic” means. He earnestly imagines a “eucharistic” suspension of the laws of nature. Of course, Joyce works most effectively by mingling the ironic and romantic modes, as he will mix the tragic and ironic in “A Painful Case,” the comic and ironic in “The Dead.” In all three stories the “heroism” cannot be purely romantic, tragic, or comic because of the sadomasochistic motivations at work. These motivations undermine the archetypal “purity” of romantic, tragic, comic quests. For example, the romantic quest of the boy in “Araby” proves a delusion because the boy realizes his contempt for the romantic gratification he appears to want. He prefers frustration, though he wears the trappings of desire. In “A Painful Case,” Mr. Duffy cannot evoke an unequivocal pity because compulsively he engineers his own tragic isolation. In “The Dead,” Gabriel cannot be a “pure” comic hero because his desire for the comic bride, Gretta, is undercut by an inhibiting hatred for her. The “irony” of *Dubliners* is not in showing up how foolish these characters are for thinking they can pretend heroism in Dublin. Rather, it is

in showing the reader's archetypal expectations as delusions. They will not bear up under the sharp gaze of Joyce, whose eyes are ours for the duration of our reading. A close look at "Araby" will reveal this special Joycean irony.

In "Araby" an adolescent boy is romantically attracted to a neighbor girl, although he does not communicate with her until in a casual meeting she asks him if he is going to a bazaar called "Araby"; he attends the bazaar to buy a gift for the girl but, delayed by his uncle, he arrives as it is closing and buys nothing.

The protagonist's goal appears to be the indirect manifestation of his feelings to the girl; he goes to "Araby" like a troubadour-knight in the service of his lady.³ He is inhibited from expressing himself directly to her; like Chaucer's courtly Troilus he watches her from afar: "Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen" (p. 30). But his quest is more elaborate than a juvenile attempt to give a shy valentine. One must look at the sacramental element in the story to delineate this intricate quest.

The protagonist actually seeks union not with the girl directly but with her image, a surrogate both for the religious belief which he has virtually given up as dead and hopeless and for an actual relationship with a girl which is also so hopeless for him that he cannot bring himself even to consider it openly. The defining circumstances of his quest suggest both what it replaces and what its character as surrogate must be. The story begins with the description of North Richmond Street which, by synecdoche for all the ways of Dublin, is a dead-end street at the "blind end" of which stands an uninhabited house where a priest had died leaving behind the "old useless papers" of his career. Among these are Scott's *The Abbot*, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*, which in their uselessness evoke both the ineffectuality of religion and the futility of romance in Dublin. The futility of religion has been explored especially in "The Sisters," as in this story the death of romance, but it is romance in a "sacramental" sense, even though the chivalric trappings are present. The youthful crusader's first encounter with his "lady" suggests the ritual of a courtly *donnoi*:

She asked me was I going to *Araby*. ... While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of her petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

(pp. 31–32)

The erotic implication of the bracelet and the spike is unmistakable, as is the suggestion of her acquiescence in his desire for her. But his quest is not simply erotic, nor even simply at the level of romantic transcendence. His quest for her is combined with his quest for a priestly role. Here, as in the courtly love tradition, religion and romance combine with the difference of course that the medieval system employed religious elements as a convention largely because they were readily available. But in this story and throughout Joyce's writing, religious elements, particularly the liturgical and sacramental, unite with romance in an order not primarily romantic or religious, but a new combination: the transubstantiation of experience which "Araby" describes.

This "sacramental" process can be shown in "Araby" by assuming from the start the boy's identification with the dead priest, in terms of which he carries out his peculiar and isolated adventure. If the story chiefly depicted shy adolescent love, overwrought and disappointed, one could not account for the attention given to these squalid relics of a dead priest. But the first two paragraphs focus on his abandoned house which is a parody of the ruined monastery essential to gothic tales, haunted by sacred ghosts. Joyce's Dublin is one of the first cities to be haunted by modern ghosts—wasteland figures from a past which was neither vital or

romantic, living in houses with pretentious histories, like “the house on Usher’s Island” in “The Dead”; or Mr. Duffy’s parody of a hermitage in “A Painful Case.” In Dublin, imagination must have its reliquaries, even at the cost of parody. The shy and curious protagonist had poked about in this house enough to describe with affection the objects left behind. He reveres especially the old “useless” books: “I liked the last [*The Memoirs of Vidocq*] best because its leaves were yellow” (p. 29). After these introductory descriptions, the story recounts the boy’s infatuation with Mangan’s sister, who, like the priest, affects him entirely from a distance: “I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires” (p. 31).

The tension built up by his “confused adoration” comes to a head when the boy goes into the room where the priest had died: “It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times” (p. 31). Just before this episode, the boy had described himself in a priestly role, listening to “the shrill litanies of shop-boys ... the nasal chanting of street-singers,” sounds which “converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand” (p. 31).

Priest-like, the boy carries his eucharist, the image of Mangan’s sister. The intense incident in the priest’s room implies the verging on a suprasensory transcendence of the conditions of reality. The climax of tension in his rubbing of his hands together is also an invocation, his murmuring “*O love! O love!* many times.” Probably also it is an autoerotic displacement. The boy does carry out his erotic desire for Mangan’s sister in fantasy which includes eros and eucharist, though the girl is not thought of primarily with affection but with veneration. The sexual element appears mainly through symbolic suggestion, as she turns a bracelet idly on her wrist and holds a fence spike while bowing in assent towards him, like Polly in “The Boarding House,” an obscene madonna.⁴ The masochistic aspect of this posture Joyce recognized in his own affairs. In a letter to Nora he desired flagellation along with the visual realization of her in the typical Joycean image of woman as an obscene madonna: “Tonight I have an idea madder than usual. I feel I would like to be flogged by you. I would like to see your eyes blazing with anger. I wonder is there some madness in me. Or is love madness? One moment I see you like a virgin or madonna the next moment I see you shameless, insolent, half-naked and obscene.”⁵

In “Araby,” the moment of invocation leads at once to a description of the first actual encounter between the protagonist and Mangan’s sister, with his promise to bring her something from “Araby.” After this, “the syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me” (p. 32). An “Eastern enchantment” urges the boy once again into a posture of transcendence. On the night he goes to “Araby” the ticking clock annoyingly reminds him of the conditions of reality, from which he wishes to flee into his interior state of sacramental transcendence:

I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

(p. 33)

Adequately to achieve his quest, the boy must escape the vivacious sounds and warmth of life, where the clock speaks of human limitation into a state where passion freezes through the operation of the intellect and imagination: “leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived.”⁶ As with Stephen Dedalus, in his relation with Emma at the end of *A Portrait*, here at work is “the spiritual—heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri” (*Portrait*, p. 252).

The story ends with his coming to “Araby,” a rapidly darkening hall where it appears that he is not so much disillusioned about the sham nature of his quest as about his desire for what the surrogate replaced. Both encounters with women in the story occur across symbolic barriers and the last, with the salesgirl, conduces to the epiphany. She is the terminus of the protagonist's quest from whom he will presumably buy a trinket to manifest his romantic feelings. But when he arrives at “Araby” she is talking with two young Englishmen. The protagonist finds himself at once in a traditionally inferior position with respect to the salesgirl, who is surrounded by objects symbolically erotic: “Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:—No, thank you” (p. 35). His turning away implies the rejection of an erotic commitment felt to be futile at least partially because of that feeling of sexual inadequacy typical of the Joycean male. The dominating English command her attention, and the protagonist achieves an epiphany constituted partially of his feeling of ultimate rejection by the woman and partially of awareness of his own crushed masculinity. “I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark” (p. 35). Once again, the principle of defeat in his quest resides in a pleasant and vicious area of the soul. The itch of masochism urges him finally to look into the sad darkness of self-awareness: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (p. 35).

Like most of the Dubliners, the protagonist in “Araby” turns back on the threshold of what he has apparently sought. Like Eveline, who refuses erotic possibilities at the barrier of “the black mass of the ship”; like Mr. Duffy, who flees from the woman with whom he had been cultivating an intimate relationship at the instant when her touch prepared for a consummation of intimacy; like Gabriel, in “The Dead,” whose desire for Gretta subsides when he is alone with her, the urge for self-defeat brings the protagonist in “Araby” to a final repudiation of what he had seemed to want.

Notes

1. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p. 33.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
3. Cleanth Brooks observed the symbolic character of the boy's actions: “The present he hopes to bring her from Araby would somehow serve as a means of communicating his feelings to her, a symbol for their relationship in the midst of the inimical world.” Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York, 1959), p. 190.
4. Mr. Harry Stone presents a long list of archetypal and literary elements in this story, among them the liaison of harlot and “Lady of Romance,” as a “pose” on the part of Mangan's sister. “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” *The Antioch Review* 25 (Fall, 1965): 375–410.
5. Joyce to Nora, September 2, 1909, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 243.
6. Dennis Donoghue perceives a similar pattern in everything Joyce wrote: “Joyce's career is an instance ... of the gradual abandonment of the finite order, the virtual rejection of the human, the dissolution of time and history.” “Joyce and the Finite Order,” *Sewanee Review* 68 (Spring, 1960): 270. Though an unqualified generalization about Joyce's work, it suggests something which Joyce criticizes in his

compatriots, who invariably prefer to rise above the conditions of existence, the world of “fact,” into the ornate realm of Irish imagination.

Criticism: Epifanio San Juan, Jr. (essay date 1972)

SOURCE: “Araby,” in *James Joyce and the Craft of Fiction: An Interpretation of Dubliners*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972, pp. 54–67.

[In the following essay, San Juan offers a stylistic analysis of “Araby.”]

Among the various reasons why the existing interpretations of “Araby” have failed to grasp the principle of organization informing the narrative, I would point to the wrong emphasis placed upon stylistic details—the texture of description, the rhetorical appeals of imagery and ambiguous allusions, symbols, and so on—and the distortion of form created by this emphasis.¹ For if the formal whole of the story resides in the parts, the verbal devices which constitute the means of representation, then we may ask why the narrative has to present events in a sequence. And why should such an experience, consisting not only of images or of thoughts but also of decisions leading to acts that change the situation of the protagonist—why should the boy's experience be arranged in the precise order of revelation that we find in the story?

We can clearly account for the kind of formal wholeness realized by the story if, assuming that the whole is composed of a meaningful sequence of parts, we can formulate the principle enabling the story to exercise its power upon us through its own aesthetic integrity. My concern then would be with the formal structure of the story, the disposition of parts—plot, character, thought, and diction—in order to achieve certain effects.

The plot of “Araby” is a dynamic and complex one, consisting of a change in the fortune of the protagonist from a passionate “lover,” sensitive and obsessed with heroic possibilities, to a disappointed visitor of a bazaar. Put this way, one perceives the absence of any contradiction between the initial condition and the final state of the character. A reversal occurs on the level of expectation and its nonfulfillment: the boy promised Mangan's sister to bring her a gift if he should succeed in going to the bazaar. The conditional mode of expressing his intention clearly discounts any exaggerated vision of future accomplishment; but this effect is part of the marked contrast in tone between the dialogue and the emotional response surrounding this isolated exchange between the idolized girl and the idealizing sensibility of the boy:

—It's well for you, she said.

—If I go, I said, I will bring you something.

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening!

and so on. Note the similar discrepancy, the curve of deflation, in the preceding paragraphs, with the paragraph beginning “One evening I went into the back drawing-room. . . .” That isolation, the feeling of acute empathy, accelerates into sublime rapture, only to be undercut by the factual transcript of the first verbal exchange:

All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: “O love! O love!” many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*. I forgot whether I

answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar, she said she would love to go.

The nature of the boy's response provides a key to our understanding of why the experience in the bazaar should be an inevitable conclusion and the last statement a surprising but probable generalization of the boy's ordeal for himself.

We derive quite a different perception of the boy's predicament, a grasp of the limitations and possibilities of the epiphany uttered at the end, in our acquaintance with the movement of the plot. The action proper begins with the middle of the story, with the paragraph beginning "At last she spoke to me. ..." Prior to this, the exposition gives us all the relevant facts and information needed to make the boy's actions most probable and his response both unexpected and most likely. An inverted-pyramid pattern holds the details of setting (from panoramic scope to gradual localization into scenic background: North Richmond Street to garden and drawing-room, etc.), of space and time, until, the external circumstances established, the boy's inner world is systematically disclosed, from past routine—the collective sharing of childhood games in habitual times and places—to emotional concentration on his affection for Mangan's sister. Then, with the interiorization of this particular person in the boy's consciousness, the narrator describes what consequences arose from this focus on her image, how the world's appearance varied, how the boy's attitudes and feelings toward his habitual ways and associations subsequently changed, until his commitment to a promise moves him to action. The order of the exposition is controlled by a rhetorical purpose: to arouse our sympathetic identification with the boy by a vivid, concrete actualization of his world in sensuous details and their appeal to the boy's awareness of value at this stage. Thus the objective recording of surface phenomena—houses with "brown imperturbable faces," "musty" air of the drawing room, curled and damp pages of books, and the like—entails the corresponding effects on the boy's mind implied by the emphasis on sensory qualities: visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory sensations predominate.

As the exposition develops, the stages of temporal specification harmonize with the concurrent heightening of the boy's presence in such an environment. Environment becomes a world. The first two paragraphs consist of the general and the particular geography of the story; the next two paragraphs convey the general (season) and specific temporal duration of the boy's experience prior to the momentous Saturday, the journey/pilgrimage to *Araby*. Further narrowing or close-up in time is accomplished by the change from the customary "Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour" to the climactic "One evening I went into the back drawing-room," this transition bridged by a paragraph embodying the charismatic force of the girl's image on the boy's consciousness, the cathexis of energy somehow converting the series of events in the boy's Saturday evenings into a static configuration. The total impact reduces his existence to a poetic instrument: "... my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires."

The orientation of place and time functions chiefly to form our idea of character in revealing the boy's thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and feelings about the objects and persons around him. Description of place contains within itself the manner of perceiving and responding. The narrator renders the boy's solidarity with his peers, their sense of community and sportiveness, his awareness of affective qualities, without discrimination:

The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness.

Our inferences about the boy's character may be formulated in relation to what happens later, in terms of capacities to do certain things and to react in a certain way.

One major inference, quite apart from the boy's sensitive temperament and vigorous constitution, is his growing interest in the female sex as a class. Although the class is here represented by Mangan's sister, the designation itself seeks to preserve the generality to which the boy's image of the girl conforms. Her "brown figure," her "image," "her name," refuse to crystallize into any individualized person. In fact, the two occasions in which the boy apprehends her presence yield evidence for his tendency to introject, or internalize, what is observed. The first description—"Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side"—brings about a rapturous and intensely idealized response radically out of proportion to his slight acquaintance with the girl. Premised on this slight acquaintance, the boy naturally draws out of his inner resources (where religious, sexual, romantic imagery mix; the Tristan-Isolde romance and the cult of courtly love condense all these attributes) the force to endow her image with life. And the testimony of her life depends not on her actual existence, her reality as perceived, but on the quality of his response to her image, her reality as conceived. Obviously she, as intentional object of devotion, seems overdetermined: her image becomes a sacred "chalice" to the grail-hero.

Given this intense, passionate attraction to an idealized presence, we can understand his promise to bring a gift from *Araby* and his anxiety to perform the steps necessary to confirm his vow. But if the impetus to stylized worship gives strong, compelling direction to the boy's impulses and his irrational vitality in inventing fantasies, it also removes him farther and farther from ordinary life. Such indeed is the effect he records after the promise. But even before the promise is given, the boy has already exiled or cast himself out from the vulgar and business world: recall his chivalric withdrawal as he walked through the "flaring streets."

This withdrawal from the ordinary world and the removal from the level of material circumstance, a logical result of the boy's concentration on his self-generated object of worship, serves to motivate his estrangement from his aunt and uncle, his anger at their unconcern, and his agonized yearning to reach the temple-like bazaar where he will finally obtain the "chalice" and thus fulfill the sacramental object of his quest. The reality of the "chalice" depends on his promise to bring back something. Mangan's sister acquires all sorts of religious associations in the course of time; likewise, the bazaar attracts all the energy of idealization the boy can sustain, his spirit inflamed by opposing forces. The feeling of frustration, anger, and despairing revolt that we see in the boy at the end can be comprehended only on the basis of these expectations.

But the concluding statement is not wholly that of the boy as narrator-participant; it is also properly that of himself as the adult narrator who is reconstructing an experience from which he is now detached in space and time. Since then, the narrator obviously has gained some knowledge of the world and of the complexity of life to be able to clarify the predicament of the boy in this meaningful way. Because of this peculiarity, the narrative exists on two planes: the boy-participant (an imaginative projection) and the narrator. The narrator is the central intelligence whose judgment of the boy's experience as he undergoes it is subtly fused with the structure of the plot and is, at many points, exposed by telling overt comment. Joyce's problem in composing "Araby" lies, I suggest, in contriving a method to combine the authoritative first-person account and the balanced poise of the narrator who has organized the account in precisely the order we have it. It is the old problem of reconciling the confessional, witnessing virtues of the first-person viewpoint with the rational distance and sense of the totality usually ascribed to the omniscient storyteller. As I have noted above, the style and tone of description is the mature narrator's, especially in conceptual treatment: "The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces." The animistic charge invested in the "face" of the houses manifests its continuity in the hostile aspect of *Café Chantant's* front: "I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall."

Seen in the light of this ambiguous narrative voice, the conclusion may then be construed as a product of two lines of force, one dramatized in the progression of the plot and the other implicit in all the opposing elements that form the countermovement to the plot and thus constitute the agent of the reversal. The conclusion marks the triumphant harmony of the two narrative spheres of subjective (sensory) experience and objective (conceptual) understanding:

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

Ironically, this act of recognition is expressed as an act of “gazing into the darkness,” that is, a perception of actuality: “the lights of the upper part of the hall had been extinguished.” Cognizing the external world, the boy immediately becomes the mature narrator and recognizes his previous state. He executes this leap in the transitive mode of separating what he was and what he is now; and in producing a reflection of himself, one the seer and the other the image of himself seen, he defines his situation by that metaphor of “reflection.” The emotional implication of the concepts frees him from his mistake of sentimental exaggeration; he objectifies the cause of the mistake in the word “vanity.” “Vanity” is the active force that has led him to form undue expectations; “vanity” has driven and derided him to that extreme, to the “darkness” that is the end of his boyish indulgence. He is a “creature” whose eyes, both the cause of the delusion and the liberator from that delusion, “burned with anguish and anger”—anguish at the sense of being responsible for his plight and accepting it as such, anger at his “blindness” in not realizing the nature of his plight. If the principle for the shaping of the narrative is logically prior to the temporal unfolding of the plot, then it remains now to trace how the principle of organization implied in the concluding statement guides the sequence of incidents and the cause-effect relation among the different elements comprising such incidents.

“Vanity” is etymologically “empty,” hence futile or blind. Negativity pervades the sense of place in the beginning: “blind” street, uninhabited house, hollow middle-class residences, empty drawing room, dead priest, decaying books, wild garden, straggling bushes, rusty bicycle pump, winter dusk, “dark muddy lanes,” uncle, shadow, “back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits,” and “dark odorous stables.” One can isolate the analogical matrix of “darkness,” vanity, anger, and anguish of the last sentence in the imagery and the connotations of words that convey the relation of the boy to his world. With these realistic details, a few more reality-oriented judgments that one can ascribe to the mature narrator establish the counterforce to the idealizing tendency of the boy's passion and subsequently effect the reversal. (For even here one can see that the boy's connection with the world of squalor and vulgar indifference guarantees the firm, inescapable background for his existence in the world.) Consider these insinuated judgments:

her name was like a summons to all my *foolish* blood.

Her name sprang to my lips at moments in *strange* prayers and praises which *I myself did not understand*.

My eyes were often full of tears (*I could not tell why*) and at times a flood from my heart *seemed* to pour itself out into my bosom. ... *I did not know* whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my *confused* adoration (*emphasis supplied*.)

Apart from the negative references to surroundings, the priest's dubious life, and the lack of visualized clarity in the girl's figure as apprehended by the boy, one detects the uncertainty undermining his irresistible passion for the girl's image in his mind. Indeed, his adoration is “confused,” in both senses.

The boy's confusion, the chaotic and undefined response to the outside world at this stage of his experience, infects the first verbal contact between him and Mangan's sister. Note the failure of memory—the key to the

reversal:

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*. I forgot whether I answered yes or no.

The boy's confusion and the failure of his memory foreshadow his fate at the bazaar. Becoming aware of her presence—severely qualified, selectively filtered to produce what many have considered a madonna image—and directly though mildly encouraged by her, he utters his crucial vow: “If I go, I will bring you something.”

From this point, the movement gathers force in the direction of fulfilling the vow. But here the conflict between potent impulsive inwardness and the indifferent world grows sharp and almost dominates the foreground of the boy's consciousness. Owing to the strength of the distracting force exerted by the aunt, the master of the class, Mrs. Mercer, and the uncle, the boy's memory seriously suffers a fatal decline. At first he wanted to destroy outer reality: “What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening.” But even as he wishes “to annihilate the tedious intervening days,” he acknowledges his “follies.” Immediately after confessing *Araby*'s “Eastern enchantment,” he mentions his Aunt's reluctance, suspecting some “Freemason affair,” his master's strictness and suspicion of idleness. How shall we take these next two utterances except as 1) the actual state of the boy-participant at the moment of experience, and 2) the depreciating comment of the mature narrator:

I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

Finally, the momentous day arrives—a transitional stage from the end of the week, Saturday, to Sunday, the beginning of a new week, plus all other associations in Christian liturgy. Every detail concerning the uncle's behavior—fussing with hat-brush, his return at nine o'clock registered by the rocking of the hallstand as it receives the weight of his overcoat—climaxed with his forgetting of the boy's intention, works toward blocking the primary action of the plot. Framed within the departure of the uncle and his arrival, the boy's experience—his bad humor, his heart's misgiving, his irritation—shows how time becomes humanized, a lived duration, measured in the stream-of-consciousness. Not entirely, however, since the boy's almost complete engulfing by, and immersion in, clock-time is avoided when he easily affirms his imaginative freedom by going up to the “high cold empty gloomy rooms.” The epithets almost epitomize the whole course of the plot. He stresses his alienation from the world outside, and in the very process reveals to us (but unheeded by himself) the cause of his temporary imbalance: the dangerous prevalence of the imagination. It is his imagination that affords life and value to Mangan's sister, not her real existence. Consequently, everything depends on the imagination, whose muse is memory:

The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

That passage compresses the two occasions in the story where Mangan's sister is described.

When he goes downstairs, however, we realize that his imagination and its efficacy depend on the limitations of time and place, the specific locale of his existence. And this condition of his imagined passion he has not at

all accepted as an *a priori* ground of experience. While his idealism may be qualified by his sharp observation of the world, the world presents itself as colored and transformed by the pressure of his emotions. Thus we note a foreshortening in the gap between desire and the fulfillment of desire which he envisions, anxious and angry at his uncle's dereliction and the joke of the verses "The Arab's Farewell to his Steed." But finally the florin—a big sum for him—reinforces the movement to the glamorized goal, the *Araby* of his imagination.

So far, we anticipate the trip to *Araby* in a general way, knowing the driving force of his affection for the girl. But he finds later that it was not affection but vanity that drove him. Having overcome the obstacle of the indifferent adults—the boy's orphanhood justifies his courage to initiate himself into experience and to seek for symbols of authority—he now seems headed for the successful accomplishment of his quest. But the development of the narrative continues to interweave with the surface-movement, the journey to *Araby*, the resisting force. Unable to prevent his departure from the house, this resisting force—call it the corrupt Mammon-worshipping world of reality, the paralyzed philistine public, or what you will—now accompanies the boy's trip as an ominous part of the environment. At first, environment vivifies memory, whose failure threatens to ruin the project of the imagination: "The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey." But from then on, the details of awareness convey to us a meaning counter to the literal motion of events: third-class carriage of a deserted train, ruinous houses, and improvised wooden platform. The positive note, though present, is subdued: twinkling river, special train, lighted dial of a clock, magical name.

Before the boy overhears the conversation at the *Café Chantant*, we observe that the florin is split up and lowers in denomination. This dwindling of monetary value parallels the gradual destruction of any hope of buying a present. The boy feared that the bazaar would be closed; he sacrifices a shilling to enter his "magical" Castle Perilous. But the weary-looking man simply heralds more disillusioning aspects: closed stalls, dark hall. As a result of the boy's inability to summon up the girl's image, to clearly remember the reason for his trip, the world slowly encroaches upon his consciousness from the moment he enters *Araby*. Distracted by the fall of the coins, he sees two men counting money on a salver: "Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets." The frivolous rhythm of talk between men and lady about truth and falsehood, and the woman's unencouraging and dutiful tone, do not greatly differ from the recorded exchange between him and Mangan's sister. His reply to the lady, "No, thank you," simply punctuates his feeling of emptiness—the sense of vanity—registered by the material sound of his "two pennies falling against the sixpence" in his pocket. Victim of his bad memory (the Muse is memory herself), he is defeated by what he thought the world of *Araby* would be. Remembering the past clearly, the artist becomes the priest of his own sacrifice.

The pattern of emotional response outlined here by pursuing the plot as it moves in one direction, either speeded up or impeded by the acts and responses of the protagonist, illumines finally the meaning of the epiphanic vision at the end. It is a conclusion for the primary plot involving the boy's quest and his journey to *Araby* on a metaphorical dimension; it is a conclusion, too, for the countermovement of the plot that involves the conditions which make the boy's quest probable at first, and improbable and thus "wonderful" (in Aristotle's sense) in the end. For the boy's character, right from the first paragraph, contains its own problem and solution. And the dialectical movement from problem to solution, rendered in the plot, obeys the principle of telling a story to achieve a difficult effect that is both paradoxical and ironic: the boy's experience—virtually an ordeal in the interpretation of signs—rendered at the moment of happening from a perspective of knowledge and just comprehension. The boy is aware of things but not the meaning of things; the narrator obliquely delivers the meaning of things to us. Interpreted in this way, one perceives "*Araby*" as Joyce's finest accomplishment in holding justice and reality in a single luminous imitation of an action.

Note

1. This essay assumes the relevance and qualified validity of all the existing interpretations of “Araby.” Confining myself strictly to a description of the structure of the plot and its function in determining the whole narrative action, I thus inquire—if my description is correct—into the premise or condition whereby any other evaluation of details would be considered valid or consistent with the larger subsuming structure. I therefore assume here the Aristotelian position regarding the primacy of plot in mimetic art. For the elaboration of motifs and themes in the story, and their relation with Joyce's achievement, I refer the reader to the following works: Bernard Benstock, “Arabesques: Third Position of Concord,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 5 (Fall 1967): 30–39; Harry Stone, “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” *Antioch Review* 25 (Fall 1965): 375–410; Robert P. Roberts, “‘Araby’ and the Palimpsest of Criticism, or Through a Glass Eye Darkly,” *Antioch Review* 26 (Winter 1966–67): 469–89; William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), pp. 19–21; Marvin Magalaner, *Time of Apprenticeship: The Fiction of Young James Joyce* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), pp. 79, 87, 101; James A. Fuller, “A Note on Joyce's ‘Araby,’” *CEA Critic* 20 (February 1958): 8.

Criticism: Susan J. Rosowski (essay date 1976)

SOURCE: “Joyce's ‘Araby’ and Imaginative Freedom,” in *Research Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3, September, 1976, pp. 183–88.

[In the following essay, Rosowski views the primary conflict in “Araby” “not between the child's and the adult's visions, but between psychological and factual realities.”]

Readers have long recognized the importance of “Araby” in Joyce's canon. The third and final story of the childhood phase of the *Dubliners* (before adolescence, maturity, and public life), “Araby” portrays an early stage of the struggle that Joyce develops later in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses*. The story is viewed usually as portraying the initiation of a young boy: the boy moves from the child's world of romance to the adult world of reality and, in the final lines, to disillusionment as he realizes himself trapped in “the hell of the world of reality.”¹ Yet basic problems remain unresolved with this interpretation: the narrative voice is unnecessarily complicated; the relevance of the opening paragraphs to the whole is unclear; and, finally, the boy's reaction in the last line of the story far exceeds his recognition of “reality.” I believe that in the last paragraph of the story the boy does not move to an “adult” world but, instead, continues the human cycle of tension between imaginative flight and factual realities by assuming a new romantic role. More basically, I believe that the primary conflict of the story is not between the child's and the adult's visions, but between psychological and factual realities.

In “Araby” the concrete, factual world is filtered through the transforming mind of the narrator. The subject of the story is that transformation. The boy's games in Dublin, his infatuation with Mangan's sister, and his trip to the bazaar are all vehicles by which Joyce portrays the psychological truth of human struggle for imaginative freedom. The terms of this struggle are established early, for the opening setting reveals tension between appearance and reality: “North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free.”² Potential freedom is pitted against social form. The social facade of blindness and imperturbability covers the actuality of children yearning for flight.

Joyce makes this tension specific in the second paragraph by focusing upon the perspective of the boy. Here the basic technique of the story is established, as the reader sees the world through the imaginative lens of the child and vicariously participates in his imaginative transformation. Yet Joyce insures that the reader also remain separate from the child through the use of a double perspective. First, there is the narrator himself, a commentator removed in time from the child he once was; second, there is the child, through whom the narrator is telling the story. By drawing back periodically, the narrator reminds the reader that he is separated

in time from the boy of the story. For example, after recounting his childhood experience of first speaking to Mangan's sister, the narrator writes, "What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening!" The result is a dual perspective of childhood immediacy combined with adult distance.

Two effects are created by this technique. First, there is a delightful comic effect, maintained throughout the story. Finding some "paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp," the boy decides he "liked the last best because its leaves were yellow," and, in describing the "wild garden" behind his house with its "central apple-tree," he conveys overtones of Edenic myth. In these descriptions, Joyce is careful that we move beyond the child's vision of his world, both by the adult narrator discussed previously and by a careful selection of images. If the "wild garden" with its "central apple-tree" is, indeed, suggestive of Eden, then it would follow that the "late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump" which is found under one of the bushes in the garden is suggestive of the snake.³ The incongruity between the reality and the imaginative transformation is inescapably comic. The mythic images are there, certainly, "images which strongly suggest a ruined Eden and Eden's forbidden central apple tree, a tree which has to do with man's downfall and his knowledge of good and evil,"⁴ but we must recognize that they are themes in the boy's mind which lead to the larger theme that emerges from the story as a whole. This larger concern is with the imaginative transformation of such seemingly mundane subjects.

There is a second, equally important effect conveyed through the double perspective, for at the same time that we recognize the comedy of the boy's imaginative flights, we also recognize their value:

Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness.

The experience is, quite simply, beautiful, and the incongruity of this beauty with the physical reality of stables and Dublin streets is suppressed. Thus early in the story Joyce establishes the paradoxically complementary sides of man's imaginative existence—its comedy and its beauty—and posits these against the threat of imprisonment to physical reality.

The tension underlying this threat is developed in the next paragraphs, when the boy becomes a knight-errant-lover for Mangan's sister, a role for which the preliminary scenes have prepared the reader. In developing this role, Joyce increasingly emphasizes the separation between physical reality and imaginative perception; correspondingly, the narrator is increasingly comic. We encounter him lying on the floor, peeping through a crack in the window shade so he can see Mangan's sister, and, later, stalking her in the Dublin streets. Yet Joyce continues to convey the beauty of imaginative experience, for through his role the boy becomes a part of a transformed, unified setting: "These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me. . . ." By the end of this initial description by the narrator of himself in his childhood role as knight-lover, the comedy and the beauty of the romantic pose are interwoven:

My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

This use of the opening paragraphs to prepare the reader for the boy's romantic role is one of the great achievements of the story. Had Joyce opened with the boy's comically conventional pose, his eyes brimming with tears so that "at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom," certainly the

reader would have laughed immediately, or at least chuckled, and possibly stopped reading. Yet the story opens with the deceptively simple description of North Richmond Street, building gradually to the romantic pose through the more easily accepted transformation of the garden and physical setting: “When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed.” By the time that the narrator specifies the boy in the role of lover, we are prepared for his transforming even “places the most hostile to romance.” We accept and value the boy's melodramatic pose.

Like the initial paragraphs, the story as a whole is structured carefully to convey the tension between imaginative freedom and factual restraint. Two major empirical realities provide two psychological crises. First, the narrator's meeting with Mangan's sister provides the crisis to the first part of the story; it represents the physical reality that will forever threaten imaginative freedom. Mangan's sister is clearly not the ideal the boy is imagining: “the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease,” represents the reality of the girl. Throughout the story, however, the boy never perceives her in terms of this reality. She exists for him only as an imaginative projection of himself, as he indicates when he calls her “my desire,” the “brown-clad figure cast by my imagination.” Similarly, their actual meeting is not the spiritually purified event that the boy imagines. It is, after all, set against a background of childish play, in which “her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps. . . .” Yet this meeting also represents the potential strength of the imagination, for the boy totally transforms the physical details of the scene: “the light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing.” The boy emerges from this meeting on a new imaginative height, saying “the syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me.”

Second, the bazaar provides a crisis to the story as a whole. Once the boy has talked with Mangan's sister and committed himself to the journey and the quest, the basic conflict of the story becomes specific. With this commitment, the reader knows the form of factual reality that the boy must, ultimately, confront. Again, however, we must distinguish the boy's definition of that struggle from one that emerges from the story as a whole. The boy has committed himself to go to the bazaar and to bring back something worthy to Mangan's sister. Yet by this time the incongruity between his imaginative ideal and the reality of the actual world is so great that there is no possibility in the reader's mind for the success of the specific task. Instead, the more important struggle is defined by the reader—the struggle of the boy to translate a specific task involving physical reality into the beauty of imaginative experience.

Actually confronted with the bazaar itself, the boy moves rapidly toward crisis. Striving to maintain the vision of the religious supplicant, he “recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service,” which is broken by “the fall of the coins” as “two men were counting money on a salver.” Critics have seen the fall of the coins as the point at which the boy descends from his vision; but here the boy has not yet fallen when viewed in terms of overall struggle described in the story—that to maintain imaginative freedom. He is still able to transform the concrete reality around him, as revealed in his use of the richly connotative word *salver* and in his suggestion of the money lenders in the temple with the description of the noise of the coins. After this scene, he continues to translate the wares of the bazaar into his imaginative vision: “I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall. . . .”

It is only with the next paragraph that the boy's fall occurs: “I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real.” Finally, the boy is unable to sustain his imaginative role against the physical reality of the bazaar: “Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the six-pence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.” For the only time in the story, the boy subjects himself to physical reality. There is no transforming quality in these lines, and no tension behind them. Their content is completely factual, and their style is completely flat. In this paragraph, the reader's expectations are fulfilled—expectations that the boy's romantic pose will be

deflated and that he will be entrapped by physical reality. Were the story to end here, the boy would, indeed, be caught in the web of the actual world.

However, the story does not end here. The last line of “Araby” carries us beyond the boy's perception to the reader's epiphany, for here Joyce unifies the story by demonstrating truth to human reality and, by doing so, develops a contrast with the inhuman subjection to empirical reality of the preceding sentences. Far from representing the human spirit entrapped in a hellish world of reality, the final line represents man's unconquerable striving for imaginative freedom. In this line, the boy transcends the flat details of the two pennies and the sixpence and returns to imaginative existence as he assumes a new role. He is no longer the archetypal lover. He has become the archetypal sinner: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.”

Joyce has prepared the reader carefully to recognize that the last sentence is not reality, to see the comedy—and the beauty—behind the boy's Miltonic pose. The “creature” described is, after all, a young boy who has imagined love for the first time and who inevitably has been unable to sustain his imaginary ideal. Yet like the boy, the reader is not content with such a description of reality, for it is also real that we value the emotional possibilities of human experience and that, as a result, people are capable of liberation through great imaginative transformations. In the last sentence of “Araby,” we see the boy reentering imaginative flight.

In “Araby,” the epiphany of the reader is directed back, finally, upon himself and his own seriousness. For, despite all the obvious comedy of the story, the reader does concentrate upon the boy's role—as countless articles on the Edenic imagery of the garden and the quest motifs of the journey reveal. By identifying with the boy, the reader reveals his or her own romantic predisposition, a predisposition shared with all humanity. By recognizing the combination of comedy and beauty in the boy's role, the reader affirms the qualities necessary for imaginative freedom.

With this reading of “Araby” we see that the ending of the short story is similar to that of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in that the “final” stage of the protagonist is not necessarily final, but is rather a dramatic, imaginative pose heralding a new stage of development. Thus the significance of “Araby” in terms of Joyce's later development lies not in its portrayal of disillusionment over human entrapment in factual reality, but rather in its exploration of the liberating human truth of psychological processes. It is this exploration of imaginative processes that Joyce will develop more fully in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses*. As Stephen Dedalus will say in *Ulysses*, “We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves.”

Notes

1. Ben L. Collins, “Joyce's ‘Araby’ and the ‘Extended Smile,’” *JJQ*, IV (1967), 90.
2. James Joyce, “Araby,” in *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes in consultation with Richard Ellman (New York: Viking Press, 1967). All subsequent references to “Araby” will be to this edition.
3. Collins, p. 85.
4. Harry Stone, “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” *Antioch Review* (Fall, 1965), p. 381.

Criticism: John J. Brugaletta and Mary H. Hayden (essay date 1978)

SOURCE: “The Motivation for Anguish in Joyce's ‘Araby,’” in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter, 1978, pp. 11–17.

[In the following essay, Brugaletta and Hayden question important plot elements of "Araby."]

In his discussion of James Joyce's "Araby," Epifanio San Juan, Jr. contributes to Joyce studies a predominantly valid discussion of plot.¹ We agree with San Juan in his assumption of the "relevance and qualified validity of all the existing interpretations of 'Araby.'"² Our only disagreement with this critic's view of the story—our point of departure from that of other critics who have discussed the story—is in the evidently universal assumption that the one crucial conversation between the narrator and Mangan's sister actually took place.³ "The boy promised Mangan's sister to bring her a gift," San Juan believes, later referring to the central passage as a "factual transcript of the first verbal exchange."⁴

In our examination of "Araby" and of a pattern which relates it to certain other stories in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,⁵ we find little reason to believe that Joyce meant to represent the physical presence of Mangan's sister in that back room where the priest had died. Indeed, there is much evidence that her absence from that event is a fact which is vital to the experience of the story. Put simply, Mangan's sister was not there; the boy imagined her, her words and her actions.

When Joyceans mention "Araby" at all, they often refer to it with a hint of an apology for the supposedly exaggerated anguish of the narrator.⁶ Joyce places this anguish, evidently with some care, at the end of the story. (It would have been easy enough for the author to have kept us with his protagonist a little longer, leaving him on the train home, or even arriving there, so as to emphasize the anguish less.) This placement combines with the strong terms used in describing the boy's emotions at the story's end ("driven," "derided," "my eyes burned," "anguish and anger") to give us a clear sense of this event's great significance, even apart from its epiphanic qualities.

Nevertheless, apparently many readers are struck with the notion that there is inadequate motivation for such intense anguish. It is easy enough to refer to the narrator's promise to Mangan's sister and of the frustrations he experiences in the ensuing quest as Joyce's explanation. Such motivation, however, must appear weak in contrast with the reaction they supposedly cause, the boy's youth and romanticism notwithstanding. If readers are not to chastise Joyce for offending their sense of psychological consistency, they will find themselves thinking, perhaps secretly, of the narrator's naiveté and childish idealism in order to explain away the disparity. This reading, of course, comes uncomfortably near to begging the question. Rather than allowing us to reread the story with satisfaction, it merely tells us we do not know enough, or remember enough from our own childhood, about the subject of the story.

When read carefully, however, "Araby" tells us exactly why the boy is so anguish-stricken; there is no need then to feel nearly so inadequate in our preparation for reading the story. We may begin by noting that the narrator and Mangan are peers, and that these boys are appreciably younger than Mangan's sister. This last is evident in the boys' hiding from her when she calls her brother in to tea, finally walking up to Mangan's steps "resignedly"; were they nearer to her in age they would openly challenge her authority, never bothering to hide, finally acquiescing, if at all, most probably with audible protests. It is also significant that they behave toward her under such circumstances much as they do toward the narrator's uncle, clearly an authority figure; if the girl exercises authority over the boys, she must be significantly older than they.

To pursue the disparity in ages between the narrator and Mangan's sister, we may also note that he watches covertly from the front parlor for her to leave her house each morning. Snatching up his books, he follows her in silence, walking up alongside the girl—still mute—at the last possible moment. He tells us he had virtually never spoken to her. Obviously he is fascinated by this older girl, awed to the point of speechlessness. The experience is a common one; nearly every post-pubescent boy has borne the image of some older girl through an everyday world which, in its harsh clashing of real things, seems very much like a "throng of foes." And nearly every older girl, thus idolized, reacts (when she recognizes the situation) not as the boy's peer but as his elder. Usually she will either humor the boy, enjoying the situation as a game, or she will ignore him for one

reason or another (lack of interest, often, or as part of an attempt to discourage the attention out of concern for the boy's feelings).

It must strike us, therefore, as odd that Mangan's sister acts as she does while talking with the narrator. The nervous turning of her bracelet as she speaks betrays a lack of self-confidence in the younger narrator's presence which a real sixteen-to-eighteen-year-old girl is unlikely to have. And what she says, in effect, is hardly more in keeping with the older-girl/younger-boy relationship: her coy (but nervous) hints that he will be doing something which fascinates her, an implication of her interest in the narrator himself, are the components of a peer male-female relationship, not the relationship which exists in this story.

This "conversation" in the room where the priest died is indeed a curious one. We take the foregoing as what may be called soft evidence of the physical absence of Mangan's sister on that important occasion, "soft" because based upon what we take to be no more than generally recognized psychological facts about young people in general. But harder evidence for her absence is plentiful.

A review of this harder evidence must begin with Joyce's clear rhetorical framing of the curious conversation in the form of an anecdote: he begins the passage with "One evening ..." and ends it (about thirty lines later) with "... that evening!" Except for the opening paragraph of the passage (a paragraph with its own crucial function as we shall see), the two participants speak throughout the passage. Clearly we are meant to see anecdotal integrity in this carefully framed section of the story. And yet halfway through the passage the narrator seems to be no longer in the back room but is viewing Mangan's sister at "the railing," at her own front door. We submit that this is physically impossible. If the narrator must lie on the floor "in the front parlour" in order to watch her door, then he cannot be watching her at her front door from the "back drawing room." This portion of the passage, at least, must be seen as occurring psychologically, not physically.⁷

But what of the remainder of this supposed rendezvous? Did Joyce mean for us to believe that this meeting, with its extremely awkward social implications for the participants, actually took place? Given the fact that the boy says he had spoken only "a few casual words" to her, did Joyce expect the reader to accept as literal fact this curious event with no hint whatsoever of arrangements made beforehand for the meeting, coincidental circumstances placing them together in such an odd room, or even a brief description of the girl's entering (or leaving) the room? Mangan's sister might just as well have materialized out of thin air for all Joyce tells us.

In point of fact, we believe that to be very close to what Joyce does tell us. Joyceans have not, heretofore, read the story carefully enough. Had they done so, they would have noted the carefully described retreat from the objective world on the narrator's part. This is the beginning paragraph of the passage, preparing the narrator (and the reader) for the subjectivity of the experience to follow. There was "no sound" in the house. He hears the soft patter of rain falling on the garden beds—a sound and no sound, a white noise, mesmerizing, shutting out other, possibly distracting, noises. There is a faint light of uncertain origin, yet it is "dark." The narrator comments on this diminution of the sensory functions, "I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves ... feeling that I was about to slip from them. ..." We must not be satisfied to think these the mere exaggerations of a hypersensitive boy. Taken literally, they help immensely in making better sense of the story. He has situated himself sensuously and prepared himself emotionally for an encounter within the imagination.

In the previous paragraph he had said, "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and phrases which I myself did not understand." This is just such an instance, though something new has been added, doubtless due in part to his being no longer amid the cacophony of the "flaring streets." He has retreated entirely from the world of "curses," "shrill litanies of shop-boys" and "nasal chanting." His senses no longer assailed by stimuli, he can focus his attention wholly upon the image and imagined voice of Mangan's sister which have been building within him. He presses the palms of his hands together in the attitude of prayer and

murmurs “O love! O love!” repeatedly.

To ignore the visionary nature of this experience is to ignore what Joyce tells us on more than one occasion about the psychological tendencies of this boy. On the night of the bazaar, he stares long at the empty front of the girl's house, “seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination.” And in the days following the supposed conversation, “her image came between me and the page I strove to read.” These are but after-shocks of that first psychological earthquake, differing only in their lesser degree of intensity and realism. The girl's physical presence is not required in order for the boy to see her.

The youthful narrator is not alone among Joyce's characters in his visualizing of absent persons. While his crucial vision, with its high degree of realism, is not reproduced with precision elsewhere in Joyce's early fiction, it does fall within a clear pattern of events in *Dubliners*, as well as in *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait*.⁸ In “The Sisters,” the boy-narrator is in the dark of his bedroom, when he reports,

I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. I murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region; and there again I found it waiting for me. It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle

(*Dubliners*, p. 11).

In this instance, the envisioned, the priest who was guilty of simony, is dead, a fact which renders his presence impossible. It may well have been this incident which caused Joyce to place the “Araby” conversation in the room where the priest had died. The two events are of a kind, and the brief allusion serves to point up the similarity.

This attempt to avoid the dead by thinking of Christmas brings us inevitably from the first to the last story of *Dubliners*, to Gabriel Conroy's vision of another dead man. Here again, in another setting of near-darkness and silence, the absent one becomes—at least temporarily—more unavoidably real than the physical surroundings as Gabriel “imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. ... The solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling. A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again” (*Dubliners*, p. 223).

Surely we are not meant to believe it is the snow which is tapping on the pane. Snow, even Irish snow, rarely, if ever, taps. This is Michael Furey, now dead, who had thrown gravel against Gretta's window to call her down to him. The imagined figure in this case neither speaks nor murmurs, but it does repeat, in a pallid way, one detail of Gretta's account of its former self, a detail which adds audibility to visibility.

In “A Painful Case,” the imagined presence is perceived tangibly and perhaps audibly: “As the light failed and his memory began to wander he thought her hand touched his” (*Dubliners*, p. 116). “She seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his” (p. 117). But minutes later, “He could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listened again: perfectly silent. He felt that he was alone.” (Ibid.) Emily Sinico is dead. James Duffy, having just read a newspaper account of her death, has imagined her presence under much the same circumstances as other *Dubliners* protagonists envision absent people: the pattern of relative darkness and silence remains consistent when the vision is successful. Indeed, in the third instance of “A Painful Case,” when the vision leaves Duffy, the silence was mightily disturbed only seconds earlier by a train with a “laborious drone” and a “pounding.” Furthermore, the

first instance in “A Painful Case” follows similar visions in “The Sisters,” “Araby” and “The Dead” in occurring in a bedroom.⁹

The four visions of *Dubliners* clearly are of a kind. It may even be seen as evidence of their unity that each of the four contains a factor not present in the other three: while in every other instance the imaginer has known and, in one sense or another, loved the imagined, in “The Dead” we are forced to think of Gretta's identity as fused with Gabriel's if we wish the pattern to remain consistent. In “A Painful Case,” tangibility has taken the place of visibility in the pattern. In “The Sisters,” the imaginer evidently is frightened by his “dream”; this obtains in none of the other visions. And in “Araby” the imagined is not dead, as are the priest, Emily Sinico and Michael Furey. What is more—and this fact possibly has misled readers of “Araby” more than any other—Joyce records dialogue from the narrator's vision. The boy in “The Sisters” had heard a “murmuring voice,” James Duffy had “felt” a voice, and Gabriel Conroy had heard taps on the window pane; but only in “Araby” are we given the exact words (or, more correctly, some of the exact words) of an imagined dialogue.

Two possible reasons for this last curiosity are not far to seek. First, the plot demands that the boy be led into promising the envisioned girl a gift from the bazaar. This would be difficult without at least some dialogue. But secondly—and this is more important in that it tells us exactly what we wish to know about the story—it goes a long way toward explaining the narrator's intense anguish later. Linked closely in a causal relationship with the unique dialogue is the narrator's evident acceptance of the vision as reality. He goes to Araby in order to make good the promise he thinks—and almost entirely believes—he has made. Direct quotation so nearly reifies the memory of Mangan's sister in the crucial passage that readers have thought her really there. The technique necessary for the character (the boy) has worked all too well on the reader.

Joyce's interest in the vision as literary device, now further developed, is sustained in *Portrait*. Here the pattern is associated with Stephen's obsession with his painfully ambivalent feelings for E. C. E. C.'s “virgin” image shames him in his lustful fantasies as he composes the “Villanelle of the Temptress” in his bedroom. He lies in his bed in the “dull white light” of a silent dawn, his senses “veiled,” and recalls that she approached him once and begged him to sing one of his “curious songs” (*Portrait*, p. 219). Her image dances teasingly before him until he distorts her “fair image,” confounding her with the whorish girls who have beckoned to him in his Dublin walks. Anger, and jealousy of the priest, whom he sees as his rival, consume him, yet he knows that “however he might revile and mock her image, his anger was also a form of homage” (p. 220). Like the narrator of “Araby,” Stephen lives on images of the girl, transforming them into events which can function as reality. The younger boy's character and psychological tendencies are consistent with those of Stephen, and in fact prefigure them, as critics have noted.¹⁰

But the “Araby” vision is much more concrete than any of the other four visions. He carries her image (though weakened) with him as far as Araby on his assumed quest. Once there, however, the immediate object of his quest within easy reach, the ultimate object—her image—fades away. Or, to be more precise, the vision of Mangan's sister fades into the physical presence of the young woman at the bazaar. The idealized image and its setting fade into the harsh reality of the concrete and necessary world: the soothing darkness of the upper room to the cavernous darkness of the upper part of the hall; the soft “silence” of fine rain to the sharp chink of coins on a salver; the gentle, somewhat coy dialogue of the vision to the flat contradictions and open flirting of the salesgirl and her English acquaintances; the shy (bracelet-twisting) admiration of the envisioned girl to the unencouraging, dutiful tones of the girl of flesh. And then the words which haul him back by the scruff of the neck from what little remains of his reveries: “O, I never said such a thing!” She did, perhaps, but her counterpart did not. And that fact no doubt suddenly bursts into clarity (and *claritas*) for the boy at that point, most occasions having informed against him.¹¹

He has been attracted by the “magical name” of the bazaar and has travelled there for the greater glory of that other magical name, the name which springs to his lips in prayers and praises. The vision had been his alternative to the real world, had indeed become at one point so realistic as to apparently fuse with reality for

him. But that vision, concrete though it was, proved too fragile for a world of real older girls, money, drunken and indifferent uncles, and the necessary crassness of a day-to-day existence. He had conjured up the spirit of love with an incantation (“O love! O love!”) only to have that spirit dispelled by the clumsiness of a physical world. The light is out now, as the voice has called, the light from within, and the upper part of the universe is in darkness. Nothing whatever remains for him to do; this is paralysis indeed. Anguish, however intense, is a perfectly appropriate reaction.

Notes

1. *James Joyce and the Craft of Fiction: An Interpretation of “Dubliners”* (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972), pp. 54–67.
2. San Juan, p. 54, footnote. Our emphasis.
3. “He talks to her only once. ...” Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1943), p. 421. “One day the girl speaks to him. ...” Harry Stone, “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, eds. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 349. Edward Brandabur seems less consistent about the girl's presence: “The intense incident in the priest's room implies the verging on a suprasensory transcendence of the conditions of reality” (p. 53). “In ‘Araby,’ the moment of invocation leads at once to a description of the first actual encounter between the protagonist and Mangan's sister ...” (p. 54). *A Scrupulous Meanness* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1971).
4. pp. 55, 56.
5. Hereafter referred to as *Portrait*.
6. “‘Driven and derided,’ ‘anguish and anger’—these reactions seem far too strong. Indeed they seem pretentious when compared to the trivial disillusionment which caused them.” Stone, p. 349.
7. Of course one may read a chronological break between the paragraph which begins “One evening” and the subsequent paragraph which opens with, “At last she spoke to me.” To do so, however, violates the integrity of the passage.
8. The novels date from 1904–5, the same year as the writing of “The Sisters,” “A Painful Case,” and “Araby.”
9. The situations of “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case” are obvious. In “Araby,” the priest had died in bed, making it the priest's bedroom, though not the boy's. “The Dead” similarly uses a variation upon the bedroom pattern: the hotel room is a bedroom for a price; not Gabriel's but anyone's bedroom.
10. As examples, see Brandabur, p. 37, and Stone, p. 345.
11. The girl is the familiar Joycean woman, the virgin/temptress, to Stephen “a figure of the womanhood of his country, a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness ...” (*Portrait*, p. 221). Joyce's male protagonists usually idealize the female, but almost invariably display an attraction/repulsion response to her.

Criticism: Donald E. Morse (essay date 1978)

SOURCE: “‘Sing Three Songs of Araby’: Theme and Allusion in Joyce's ‘Araby,’” in *College Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Spring, 1978, pp. 125–32.

[In the following essay, Morse explores the different literary allusions found in “Araby.”]

I'll sing three songs of Araby
And tales of fair Cashmere,
Wild tales to cheat thee of a sigh,
Or charm thee to a tear
And dreams of delight shall on thee break,
And rainbow visions rise,
And all my soul shall strive to wake

Sweet wonder in thine eyes.
And all my soul shall strive to wake
Sweet wonder in thine eyes.

—W. G. Wills, “Araby”¹

Adults enjoy being reminded, at a safe distance, of their own successful voyage through the rites of passage; for time first blunts, then obscures, the pain of being rejected by the first usually inappropriate and always unapproachable love. Many of the excesses committed in the name of Love appear later quite ridiculous yet with what great earnestness they were originally carried out! The dawn of adolescence found most of us supremely confident of our rightful place at the center of the universe and, therefore, all our acts held intrinsic importance not for ourselves alone but for the world at large. Later stepping back to “see ourselves as others see us,” we discovered that our emotional as well as physical universe was no longer Ptolemaic but Copernican, with ourselves located nowhere near its center. As a character in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* succinctly says: “Maturity is a disease for which no remedy exists unless laughter can be said to remedy anything.” Small wonder, then, that stories of a young person's initiation into the world of experience retain an almost universal appeal for adults.

The boy in “Araby” cannot laugh at his disillusionment, however, for the event is too overwhelming and too immediate.² During his brief visit to the bazaar he discovers that there is no place in the adult world for his dream of love, so he stands poised on the brink of maturity, but does not cross over—he is still too young. As he earlier reacted too intensely to the brief encounters with Mangan's sister, creating out of them an idealized portrait which he “adores,” so now he overreacts to his loss and sees himself “as a creature driven and derided by vanity.” His “eyes burn with anguish and anger,” for having invested so much of himself in his vision the discovery that it may exist only in dreams leaves him desolate. “Falling in love with love,” as Rodgers and Hart chorused in the 1930's, “is falling for make-believe”; and in large measure this describes the boy's painful realization. Commenting on the story's conclusion, Robert apRoberts tellingly writes:

The “anguish and anger” are the reactions of a young boy feeling this truth for the first time [that “Man is in love and loves what vanishes / What more is there to say?”], and the self-centeredness and self-dramatization are quite in keeping with the earlier creation by the boy of an inner world of love and hope at odds with reality.³

Joyce comments on the boy's “self-centeredness and self-dramatization” by comparing his activities, thoughts and emotions with those of characters in the story itself and in other literature. Within “Araby” there are suggestive parallels drawn between the boy and his uncle, the boy and the priest who used to occupy the house, and the boy and his playmates. Each comparison contains an implied criticism, warning or qualification of the youngster's actions, thoughts or feelings. When the boy fashions his ideal of love out of a few casual words and chance meetings, he acts as inappropriately as his uncle does later, when he seizes upon the mere mention of the bazaar's title, Araby, as an occasion for declaiming “The Arab's Farewell to His Steed”—a poem which sentimentalizes and exaggerates a man's relationship to his horse in much the same way that the boy exaggerates his relationship with Mangan's sister. The refrain typifies the poem's romantic overstatement:

The stranger hath thy bridle rein, thy master hath
his gold—
Fleet limbed and beautiful, farewell; thou'rt sold,
my steed, thou'rt sold.
'Tis false! 'tis false!—my Arab Steed! I fling them
back my gold! (4)

Another, although different, kind of overstatement is similarly treated. The boy pays the girl far more

devotion than is warranted by their tentative relationship: "Every morning," he confesses, "I lay on the floor in the front parlor watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen." This ludicrous abasement proves but the prelude to his morning ritual:

When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning ... her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

(p. 30)

His extravagance towards Mangan's sister is duplicated later by the uncle, who gives him far more money to spend at the bazaar than his age and purpose would warrant.⁵ This paralleling of the uncle's and nephew's actions helps emphasize the hyperbolic and self-indulgent aspects of the boy's worship.

Joyce also qualifies the boy's adoration by setting his confession of love in the room where the priest died, thus clearly associating the two incidents:

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times.

(p. 31)

The boy's generalized, vague emotion and lack of action are opposed by nature's clear, specific, fructifying activity in the back garden. Through the broken windowpane he hears "the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds." This description, suggesting as it does sexuality and fertility, contrasts with the youngster's remote adoration and the room's associations with death. Joyce earlier underlined some negative connotations of the priest when he carefully described the cleric's legacy to the boy as three faded, paper-covered books (one of which he likes best because of the romantic appearance of its yellowed leaves), and a bicycle pump which like Rip Van Winkle's gun—an analogous male sexual symbol—lies rusted from neglect and long disuse. These details suggest that, while his worship of the girl from afar is quite in keeping with his age and temperament, it also represents a temptation to follow the path away from life towards sterility and death. The boy does not declare his love in the fertile garden, but in the sterile house.

In the past, fecundity was noticeably absent from the house on North Richmond Street with its "brown imperturbable face" and is unlikely to return in the present. The uncle who comes home most nights with "a drop or two taken" combines with the indistinct aunt to make another infertile pair—at least as far as may be determined from the tale.⁶ The brown color of the house's facade, echoed in Mangan's sister's school uniform, is synonymous throughout *Dubliners* with the city's decay. Details of setting in "Araby" conspire to suggest that the health and vitality of the boy would improve if he stopped mooning about the house idealizing a remote and perhaps unworthy object, and instead joined his playmates in the street to play "till our bodies glowed." But having fallen in love with love, he continues pacing the rooms of the house indulging in his hopeless emotions while watching from a distance his "companions playing below in the street." Since he loves "what vanishes" his infatuation must inevitably lead to disillusionment, but as so much of the story suggests, this process is necessary if he is to replace his passive worship of an ethereal object with an active

participation in life.

A similar point is made through the several literary allusions used by the boy and the narrator. The youngster compares his exploits to those of a knight of the Holy Grail, while the narrator suggests certain parallels between the youngster and Dante. Like the knights of old he agrees to perform a task for his “lady”: “If I go [to the bazaar],” he says, “I will bring you something.” He does not succeed, however, hence cannot return to his lady. His failure is compounded, for he pictures himself not as any knight of romance but as the most famous knight, the one who achieved the Holy Grail. A Saturday afternoon shopping expedition with his aunt becomes the occasion for testing his purpose: “I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes.” He maintains his purity of vision against “the shrill litanies of shop-boys ... the nasal chanting of streetsingers” (p. 31). His choice of metaphor is overstated but consistent with his penchant for self-dramatization.

In contrast to his conscious choice—comparing himself with knights—is his unconscious selection of a simile to describe his feelings: “my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires” (p. 31). Beneath his platonic vision lies the stirrings of pre-adolescent sexuality of which he is not yet aware. The result is an unselfconscious mixing of metaphors drawn from romances, grail quests, religious worship and music that becomes a precise delineation of a young boy's first confused awakening to love:

I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes [the Grail knight]. Her name sprang to my lips ... in strange prayers and praises [religious worship] ... My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom [physical change, emotional confusion]. ... I did not know ... how I could tell her of my confused adoration [worship]. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were fingers running upon the wires [sexual attraction].

(p. 31)

If his jumbled impressions provoke smiles, it will not be so much at his expense as at our own recollection of a time when we, too, were unable to draw such nice distinctions between romance, religion, physical change and sexual attraction.

Joyce comments clearly on the boy's failure to discriminate between his youthful flights of fancy and reality by comparing many of his actions, thoughts and words with those of Dante when meeting Beatrice. In *La Vita Nuova* Dante details in prose and poetry how his life was transformed through encountering Beatrice, “she who confers blessing.” Although no word is spoken during their first meeting, Dante departs overcome with love: “from that time on Love governed my soul, which became so readily devoted to him and over which he reigned with such assurance and lordship given him through the power of my imagination that it became necessary for me to cater to his every pleasure ... her image ... remained constantly with me, was Love's assurance of holding me ...”⁷ The boy in “Araby” uses similar language to describe his state. Although Mangan's sister has yet to speak directly to him, he too is “overcome with love” and so carries her image through crowded streets, noisy shops and distracting schoolrooms. When at last she does speak to him, the parallel between him and Dante emerges more forcibly:

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer ...

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts.

(pp. 31–32)

... she greeted me so miraculously that I felt I was experiencing the very summit of bliss ... I was so overcome with ecstasy that I departed from everyone as if intoxicated. I returned to the loneliness of my room and began thinking of this most gracious lady.

(*La Vita Nuova*, Section III, pp. 4–5)

Each reacts to his lady's words with confusion. Each retreats from the company of others to contemplate his vision in private, and each begins to dwell on his lady's "image" at the expense of his everyday tasks. Dante writes that

after that vision my vitality began to slacken in its working for I had become wholly absorbed in the thought of this most gracious lady. ... I became so weak and so frail that many of my friends were concerned about my appearance; while others, full of malicious curiosity, were striving to learn about me that which above all I wished to keep secret.

(Section IV, p. 7)

The boy in "Araby" experiences similar difficulties as his schoolmaster's "face pass[es] from amiability to sternness." The teacher suspects him of idleness, but despite such "malicious curiosity" he never betrays his secret, nor does he buckle down to his tedious school work: "I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play" (p. 32). The games of his former companions also appear frivolous, for only her image is real. The boy now experiences what Dante describes so clearly:

The power of Love borne in my lady's eyes
Imparts its grace to all she looks upon;
The heart of him she greets is made to quake,
His face to whiten, forcing down his gaze;
He sighs as all his defects flash in mind.

(Section XXI, p. 38)

But there is a great difference between their experience of love. Dante's love will remain with him after youth fades and his beloved dies. Through Beatrice's intercession he will ascend into the very presence of God. Afterwards drawing on his literary gifts he will find the means to share his experience with others. The boy's adventure ends, as it must, in anguish at the bazaar, for he has no way of sustaining his vision and, therefore, must painfully relinquish it. Later, recording his feelings about the incident in "Araby," he rightly focuses on discovery and loss and not, like Dante, on discovery, loss *and rediscovery* beyond the grave.

By introducing the allusions to *La Vita Nuova*, Joyce increases the distance between the boy's and reader's perceptions of events. Comparing events in "Araby" with those in Dante's work, the reader gains precisely what the boy cannot have, a sense of perspective.

Joyce also helps define the limits and nature of the youngster's experience by introducing allusions to the hero's, particularly Dante's, descent into the Underworld. In much of the world's mythology the hero travels from the known into the unknown world by crossing over water, exactly as the boy passes over the River Liffey in the special train going to the bazaar. In classical mythology the way to the Underworld lies over the River Styx, which must be crossed alone in Charon's boat after paying the requisite fee. The boy is ferried over the Liffey "alone in his bare carriage," although "a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors" eager to gain admittance. (Their behavior is like that of the souls who arrive at the Styx without their penny for Charon, hence must remain forever on the shore opposite the Underworld proper.) In common with the hero, the boy must search for an entrance, find it, throw a sop to the guardian of the gate, then hurry inside to

confront his own mortality and learn of his fate. In this last section of “Araby” there are strong suggestions of Dante’s experience in the *Inferno*: on the road before the entrance the boy checks the time by glancing upwards at the clock, as Dante tells time by looking upward at the stars; he sees the sign on the building which “displayed the magical name” “Araby,” as Dante reads the inscription over the gate of hell, “Abandon all hope / ye who enter here”; inside he finds himself in a large hall girdled round by a gallery, as Dante notes the conical shape of hell with its many galleries or circles for the damned; he hears “a voice call ... that the light was out,” as Dante discovers that there can be no light in hell, for by definition it is the place which is without light or hope or grace. Once within the hall, his dream of love, which had accompanied him everywhere and which he had maintained in purity of heart, fails. Instead of the music of romance, he hears the commercial harmonies of silver coins clinking against a salver—the shopkeeper’s litany of the daily receipts. Araby, which promised “dreams of delight,” turns out not to resemble a Persian palace where a knight might select trophies worthy of sending to his lady, but a place of business where two foreigners, Englishmen, flirt with a salesgirl. When the boy finds himself before her stand, which is one of the few remaining open at this late hour, he discovers that the goods on display are far beyond his means. The lights go out, leaving him alone in his torment. For the youngster with no worldly experience this is indeed hell, for the loss of his “rainbow vision” deprives him of light, grace and hope.

Although his loss is painfully real, it is a necessary first step if he is to move beyond illusion into a deeper understanding of love. Mature love implies, as a character in Camus’ *Caligula* observes, being willing to grow old with another person; that is, being willing to accept whatever changes must inevitably take place not only in that person but in yourself as well. Such a long-term commitment is rarely made by the young and, it could be argued, is hardly ever kept by anyone. No character in *Dubliners* is able to make, accept or keep such a promise. In “The Dead,” Gretta Conroy’s one, true “romance in her life” lies unconsummated in a western grave. In “Eveline,” a girl rejects the very possibility of a love freely offered, in favor of emotional starvation. Maria in “Clay” clings to her dream of a “knight of bended knee” while moving inexorably towards death. Mr. Duffy in “A Painful Case” rejects any suggestion of companionship that might involve emotional commitment in order to return to his more familiar isolation and impending death. Bob Doran in “The Boarding House” accepts a marriage arrangement which promises not love but the blight of sterility. Adults in *Dubliners* appear incapable of sustaining love relationships. There are no happy marriages, only infantile compromises, such as Little Chandler’s in “A Little Cloud,” or shallow accommodations, such as Gretta and Gabriel Conroy’s. Other relationships also remain incomplete or closed: Julia Morkan is “arrayed for the bridal” with her chosen groom, Death; Freddy Malins in “The Dead” and Farrington in “Counterparts” rely on drink rather than love to sustain them through the good times and the bad.

Besides failed marriages and isolated individuals, Joyce includes other examples of unfruitful relationships, like the harmlessly insane Father Flynn who lives with his two elderly sisters in “The Sisters.” Unable to fulfill his chosen role while living, he spends most of his days in a back room shut away from other people and from his vocation. Only in death does he succeed in winning praise for making such “a beautiful corpse.”⁸ The former tenants of the boy’s house in “Araby,” another priest and his sister, although their garden contained “a central apple tree,” were not fruitful, neither did they multiply.

Given the Dublin setting and the context of *Dubliners* as a whole, it is doubtful if the boy in “Araby” will be able to go beyond the shattering of his illusions into the discovery of mature love, but such speculation really lies outside the tale itself. As the story ends, he has some notion of where he stands and perceives dimly through his tears the way he has travelled. Thus “Araby” succeeds in eliciting our sympathy for the boy’s plight while amusing us with his excesses—a double vision which appears remarkably similar to the one most adults adopt towards their own first encounter with romantic love.

Notes

1. This popular song with music by Frederic Clay became the bazaar's theme song. Don Gifford and Robert Seidman, *Notes for Joyce: Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, 1967), p. 38. Gifford's notes for "Araby" are the most complete and useful of those available.
2. All references to Joyce's "Araby" are to the corrected text in James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York, 1967), pp. 29–35.
3. "The Palimpsest of Criticism," *Antioch Review*, XXVI, 481. The occasion for apRoberts' article is a previous one by Harry Stone, "'Araby' and Joyce," *Antioch Review*, XXV, 375–410, which attempts to read backwards from Joyce's later works to "Araby," with misleading results which apRoberts carefully and accurately notes. Other critics have also done violence to Joyce's brief tale of interpreting grace notes as full dominant chords. See particularly Edward Brandabur's comments on the autoerotic elements in "Araby" or the boy's "itch of masochism," in *A Scrupulous Meanness: A Study of Joyce's Early Work* (Urbana & London, 1971), pp. 53, 56.
4. Poem by Caroline Norton (1808–1877), whose opening lines and refrain are quoted in Gifford, p. 41.
5. The uncle gives the boy a florin or two shillings. Gifford comments in 1967 that the money is "the equivalent of \$5.00 to \$6.00 in modern currency, a sizeable and generous sum for a boy who probably would be used to handouts of three pence or at the most six pence [a half shilling]," p. 41. The uncle's generosity is more evidence of his drinking.
6. Given the story's turn-of-the-century Dublin setting, the aunt and uncle are more likely to be brother and sister than husband and wife. In any event, as far as may be known from the story, they have no children.
7. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York, 1959), writes that "Dante was perhaps Joyce's favorite author" (p. 2), and Joyce himself remarks that "Italian literature begins with Dante and finishes with Dante" (Ellmann, p. 226). That Joyce knew much of Dante's writings by heart is well known. He would, of course, have read and memorized the original Italian. The quotations in the text are from *La Vita Nuova of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Mark Musa (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957). References to this translation give both page and section number. Section II, p. 4.
8. "He had a beautiful death, God be praised" and "such a beautiful corpse" are traditional phrases heard at wakes and funerals all over Ireland. Joyce chooses to include them, however, because their sentiments contrast so clearly with earlier descriptions of the Reverend James Flynn while alive.

Criticism: Joseph J. Egan (essay date 1979)

SOURCE: "Romantic Ireland, Dead and Gone: Joyce's 'Araby' as National Myth," in *Colby Library Quarterly*, Vol. 15, 1979, pp. 188–93.

[In the following essay, Egan examines Joyce's utilization of Irish culture and history in "Araby."]

Although A. Walton Litz points out that a "careful analysis of the last pages of 'Araby' shows how the boy's personal despair is extended symbolically until it encompasses religious and political failure,"¹ perhaps insufficient attention has been given to the story's national imagery drawn from Irish culture and history and set in motion by the narrator's love for Mangan's sister, "the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination."² The allusion here is to James Clarence Mangan, the nineteenth-century Irish poet, and primarily to his best-known work, the love song "Dark Rosaleen" (*Roisin Dubh* in Irish, or "Dark Little Rose")—in part a translation from the Gaelic of a lyrical address to a personified Ireland written by a sixteenth-century Tyrconnell minstrel (probably one of the MacAwards, the bardic retainers of the O'Donnells), but chiefly, in its present form, the poetic creation of Mangan himself. Ben L. Collins sanctions such an interpretation of Mangan's sister in "Araby": "To the world, Mangan is known, if at all, for his 'The Dark Rosaleen.' ... By allusion to this poem, the themes of love and religion are reinforced and the theme of nationality—about which Joyce has already concerned himself by mention of the come-all-you's of O'Donovan Rossa and the ballads about the troubles of the country—is introduced. Modern Ireland is in a like situation, beset by England and in need of a hero."³

Collins, however, does not explore the nationalism theme in “Araby” beyond this point and thus fails to mention its further reverberations in the story.

After inviting a reading of his story on the national level by the reference to Mangan's poem, Joyce renews the invitation by alluding subtly to other ideas and events fixed in the Irish consciousness. Throughout the story the Dark Rosaleen character is paralleled and varied by the mythic figure Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan, the traditional Irish heroine familiar to Joyce through Mangan's poem of that name and popularized in 1902 by W. B. Yeats's one-act play “Cathleen ni Houlihan.” In this patriotic allegory, derived from an eighteenth-century Jacobite song, Ireland again is personified, now as Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan (Kathaleen, daughter of Houlahan), the Lady Erin, who, enslaved by the foreign foe, draws followers to her service and devotion as she awaits deliverance. Notice the boy-narrator's thoughts about Mangan's sister: “I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood. ... Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. ... But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires” (pp. 30, 31).

Of course, as might be expected, there is in Joyce's story no trace of the sentimentality and Celticism found in Mangan's poems and in Yeats's play, for Joyce employs the Irish legends to indicate the vast discrepancy between the romantic vision of Ireland symbolized by the Mangan's sister of the boy's imagination and the reality of cheapened modern Ireland, with her “places the most hostile to romance” (p. 31). The notion of frustration and malaise in Irish life is suggested not only by the blind, mundane inhibition a shabby Dublin existence imposes (darkness and shadow are with us from the outset of the story), but also by the sardonic puns and inversions that punctuate the boy's quest for love and beauty. One can, for example, view the entire story as an extension of Thomas Moore's “Love's Young Dream,” from *Irish Melodies*:

Oh! the days are gone, when
Beauty bright
My heart's chain wove;
When my dream of life, from morn till night,
Was love, still love.
Oh! 't was light that ne'er can shine again
On life's dull stream.

(from stanzas 1 and 3)⁴

Thus even Mangan's sister, though “defined by the light” (p. 30), remains a “brown figure” (p. 30) amid the surrounding darkness, and her idealization is merely the product of the narrator's self-deluding infatuation. As the boy realizes at last, a distinction must be drawn between the vision of Mangan's sister projected by himself as her naive young worshiper, and the actual girl, who is perhaps too fond of her silver bracelet and, in a veiled sign of sexuality, carelessly shows the border of her petticoat.

When the boy fails to buy the promised gift for Mangan's sister at the bazaar and, implicitly, renounces his adolescent attachment to her, we have another suggestion of the defeat at the core of Irish life and quite possibly a wry inversion of another old song that Joyce, an accomplished singer, was familiar with, “Oh, Dear! What Can the Matter Be?”:⁵

He promised to buy me a trinket to please me,
And then for a kiss, O he vowed he would tease me,
He promised to bring me a bunch of blue ribbons
To tie up my bonnie brown hair.
Oh, dear! What can the matter be?
Johnny's so long at the fair.

(stanza 1 and refrain)⁶

The trenchant irony here, as the story's narrative tension and epiphany make clear, is not that the boy stays too long at the gaudy bazaar, but that he arrives there too late to buy a present for a rather ordinary girl who has, after all, no feeling for him.⁷

Although the reasons for Joyce's quarrel with Ireland and Irish life are various and complex, one can discover some of them through a reading of "Araby." Central to Joyce's disenchantment with his country is his belief that Ireland's connection with Roman Catholicism has not been fortunate. The religious symbolism in "Araby" has been the subject of extensive investigation;⁸ suffice it to say here that the sacred and ecclesiastical imagery associated with Mangan's sister, as well as the convent-school retreat she makes, emphasizes the idea of the union of Ireland and the Catholic Church. Mangan's sister, then, is not only, as we have seen, the symbol of an idealized Ireland, but also a representation, equally unreal, of the Roman Church as Virgin Madonna: "At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me" (p. 32). Accordingly, the sales-girl at the bazaar, which is described in terms of an Eastern "church after a service" (p. 34), functions as a foil to Mangan's sister: in her silly, vulgar flirtation with the two gentlemen at her stall, she becomes the Catholic Church as scarlet woman, the Whore of Babylon, who shows the boy "her wares" (p. 35), and also presents the image of a sordid contemporary Ireland. Still another, if incidental, national figure—an ironic Shan Van Vocht, "the poor old woman" Ireland commemorated in the song of the 1798 insurgents—is Mrs. Mercer, "an old garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose" (p. 33), the visitor to the narrator's home on the night of his fateful trip to Araby. Her dead husband's surname and trade and Mrs. Mercer's own hypocritical charity suggest that Ireland has become mercenary and petty, "poor" now in spirit.

In fact, the vagueness surrounding Mangan's sister herself (she has no first name and even her last is given indirectly), the hint of sexual blemish in her show of petticoat, and the idea that she is making "a retreat"—all call attention to the pervading vision of the story on the national level. Ireland, "the Western World," has lost her identity and integrity because of the exploitation of foreign, "eastern" influences—England, as well as Rome, as Joyce suggests by the "English accents" (p. 35) of the salesgirl and her gentlemen friends.⁹ In the cogent historical link between the two exploitations is the origin of the abiding national tragedy of Ireland. In 1155 Henry II of England asked Pope Adrian IV—Nicholas Breakspear, the only English pontiff in the history of the Church—for permission to conquer Ireland. At this juncture, according to some authorities, the Pope, influenced by rather exaggerated accounts of the fallen state of religion in Ireland, issued a bull, *Laudabiliter*, authorizing Henry to take possession of Ireland in the name of the Church. The king did not act immediately; but in 1166, when Dermot MacMurrough, ruler of Leinster, having been driven from Ireland by his enemies, appealed to him for aid, Henry directed him to raise an army of invasion from among the Norman vassals of Richard de Clare, earl of Pembroke, known in Irish history as Strongbow. The authenticity of the bull *Laudabiliter* has been challenged by many writers, but the fact that England invaded Ireland with some sort of papal approval—later, in 1172, reinforced by letters from Pope Alexander III—seems beyond doubt. The Irish historian Edmund Curtis makes this pertinent observation:

The grant of Ireland by the Papacy to Henry II constituted a "moral mission" under which Adrian and Alexander III constituted Henry king or lord of Ireland for certain purposes. Too much stress can hardly be laid on the moral and legal terms which accompanied the grant, especially the preservation of the rights of the Irish Church. When Alexander praises the lay princes for receiving Henry willingly, he assumes a bargain which had to be kept. Later generations of Irishmen right up to the seventeenth century fully accepted the papal donation as a fact—witness the Remonstrance of the Irish chiefs to the Pope in 1317—but both then and later they accused the Crown of England of having violated the rights of the Irish Church and the Irish people.¹⁰

Thus, in one of the many ironic twists of Irish history, the Church, as well as the Irish nation, came to rue what Rome itself had originally sanctioned—the English presence in Ireland. Ironically, too, Ireland remained loyal to Catholicism, whereas England, of course, disassociated herself from the authority of the Roman Church during the Reformation.

A recurring source of disillusionment in Joycean fiction is the grim truth that, in forwarding the destruction of Ireland's independence and integrity, the “foreigner” is aided by the Irish themselves; one can surmise that to Joyce's mind the treachery of MacMurrough—Dermot na Gall (of the Foreigners), as he is remembered in Irish history—was repeated by those later Irish “traitors” who, with the support of the Church once again, broke with Parnell, Ireland's “uncrowned king.” The East ever encroaches upon the West; though not actually quoted in the story itself, the first stanza of “The Arab's Farewell to His Steed,” the poem about to be recited by the narrator's drunken uncle on the night of the journey to Araby, the Oriental bazaar, obliquely indicates Ireland's betrayal at the hands of base self-interest:

My beautiful! my beautiful!
 That standest meekly by
With thy proudly arched and glossy neck,
 And dark and fiery eye;
Fret not to roam the desert now,
 With all thy winged speed—
I may not mount on thee again—
 Thou’rt sold, my Arab steed!
The stranger hath thy bridle rein—
 Thy master hath his gold—
Fleet-limbed and beautiful! farewell!—
 Thou’rt sold, my steed—thou’rt sold!(11)

At the end of this poem, written by the celebrated Irish beauty Caroline Norton, the Arab, overcome with remorse, refuses to sell his beloved mount:

Who said that I had given thee up?—
 Who said that thou wert sold?
'Tis false,—'tis false, my Arab steed!
 I fling them back their gold!

(from final stanza)

Alas, no such renewal of selfless love and loyalty altered Ireland's fate.

These observations return us to the beginning of our discussion—to Mangan's “Dark Rosaleen” and, in the context of “Araby,” to the bitter irony of its opening stanza, wherein the supposed speaker, the late-sixteenth-century Tyrconnell chief, Red Hugh O'Donnell, comforts his mistress Ireland with the prospect of military aid from Rome and its ally, Catholic Spain, against the depredations of a now Protestant England:

Oh! my dark Rosaleen,
Do not sigh, do not weep!
The priests are on the ocean green,
They march along the deep.
There's wine from the royal Pope
Upon the ocean green,
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,
My dark Rosaleen!
My dark Rosaleen!
Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
Shall give you health, and help, and hope,
My dark Rosaleen! (12)

Early in “Araby” mention is made of the priest who died in a back room of the narrator's house, leaving behind a rusty bicycle pump and a few paperback books—*The Abbot*, by Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*—the first two of romantic and/or religious matter, the last, significantly, about a thief. These images, together with the closing reference to the extinguished light in the upper part of the bazaar hall—that is, the altar, with its darkened sanctuary lamp signifying the loss of the Real Presence—testify expressively, though mutely, to the “theft,” through her relationship with the Church of Rome, of Ireland's vitality, aspiration, and hope. When the salesgirl, the figure of debased modern Irish life, coquettishly charges the two gentlemen at her stall with lying—“O, there's a ... fib!” (p. 35)—her accusation has symbolic reference to the various lies and deceptions practiced against Ireland herself. From the pervasive gloom of Joyce's short story emerges the mythic vision of a country, the victim of “a throng of foes” (p. 31), stripped of her nationality by folly and self-delusion and sacrificed to exploitative foreign power.

Notes

1. James Joyce (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 52.
2. James Joyce, “Araby,” in *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 33. Subsequent citations to Joyce's story will be to this edition.
3. Ben L. Collins, “Joyce's ‘Araby’ and the ‘Extended Simile,’” *James Joyce Quarterly*, IV (1967), 84–90; rpt. as “‘Araby’ and the ‘Extended Simile,’” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Dubliners*, ed. Peter K. Garrett (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 96. Among critics of “Araby,” Collins is somewhat exceptional in urging Mangan primarily as *nationalist* poet, though Harry Stone also mentions in passing Mangan's sister as “Dark Rosaleen.” (See “‘Araby’ and the Writings of James Joyce,” *Antioch Review*, XXV [1965], 375–410; rpt. in *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, p. 348.) Others have called attention to Mangan the Orientalist and thus to the relationship between Mangan's sister and the eastern imagery in Joyce's story. (See, e.g., Herbert Howarth, *The Irish Writers: 1880–1940* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1958], p. 262; and Homer Obed Brown, *James Joyce's Early Fiction: The Biography of a Form* [Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Univ. Press, 1972], pp. 54–55, n. 5.) Although the Oriental motif is certainly allied to the boy-narrator's dream of exotic romantic enchantment, there is also an element of ironic indirection here, similar to that in the title *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*, the major satire of another Irishman, Jonathan Swift; that is, in “Araby” eastern influences are not all “remote” from Irish affairs, as we shall discover.
4. *Poems of Thomas Moore*, 2 vols. (New York: Collier, 1902).
5. References to “Dark Rosaleen,” “Love's Young Dream,” and “Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be?” in other of Joyce's works have been thoroughly documented in Matthew J. C. Hodgart and Mabel P. Worthington, *Song in the Works of James Joyce* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959). Joyce also devoted an essay and a lecture to Mangan and his poetry.
6. *Heritage Songster*, ed. Leon and Lynn Dallin (Dubuque, IA: Brown, 1966).
7. Incidentally, the reference to “porcelain vases” (p. 35) and “great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall” (p. 35) prompts a recollection of “Ode on a Grecian Urn”; but, whereas the search for beauty and meaning is successful in Keats's poem, the boy-narrator of “Araby” encounters only blank despair at the end of his search, when the “light” of love and hope is extinguished.
8. For a summary of the relevant criticism, see Florence L. Walzl, “The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce,” *PMLA*, LXXX (1965), 445 and n. 50.
9. Cf. the ambivalent attitude of Gabriel Conroy, that anglicized Gael in “The Dead,” towards the values of the “West.”
10. *A History of Ireland*, 6th ed. (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 57.
11. As quoted in *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes*, pp. 468–69. An interesting discussion of the symbolic relationship between the poem and events in Caroline Norton's own life can be found in Stone, pp. 357–58.

Criticism: L. J. Morrissey (essay date 1982)

SOURCE: "Joyce's Narrative Strategies in 'Araby,'" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring, 1982, pp. 45–52.

[In the following essay, Morrissey analyzes Joyce's narrative techniques.]

In his analysis of Roland Barthes's poetics of the novel, Jonathan Culler points to a "major flaw" in Barthes: "the absence of any code relating to narration (the reader's ability to collect items which help to characterize a narrator and to place the text in a kind of communicative circuit)."¹ Yet, "identifying narrators is one of the primary ways of naturalizing fiction."² Paradoxically, Culler decides that although "the identification of narrators is an important interpretive strategy, ... it cannot itself take one very far."³ By examining Joyce's narrative strategies in *Dubliners*, we can challenge Culler's notion that "the identification ... cannot ... take one very far" in the interpretation of a text. We may also be able to make some tentative suggestions about the poetics of narration.

Any careful reader of *Dubliners* is struck by the strength and oddity of "Araby." Though it is shorter than "An Encounter," which precedes it, or "A Little Cloud," eight stories into the collection, "Araby" is far more memorable. The reason can be found in the narration. The first two stories in *Dubliners* are straightforward first-person narratives. "I" is the seventeenth word in "The Sisters," a story about a boy-narrator's isolated struggle to comprehend the mystery of religion, rumor, and insanity. "An Encounter" begins with the collective "us" (eleven words in) and shifts to the personal "I" as the boy moves from a diminishing group to his private, half-comprehended sexual encounter. "Araby," the third story, is the puzzle. It begins with its narrative code telling the reader that it is a third-person story: "North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house. ..."⁴ The narrator, distant, uninvolved, clearly not one of "the boys," critically views a fragment of smug, lower-middle-class Dublin. From the first line, with its clear epic preterite signal ("being" present preferent, "was" past tense) there should be no doubt that this will be a third-person tale. First-person narrators generally identify themselves immediately: "I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York ..." (*Robinson Crusoe*); "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip ..." (*Great Expectations*); "Call me Ishmael ..." (*Moby Dick*); "What's it going to be then, eh? There was me, that is Alex ..." (*Clockwork Orange*). In the few instances where the first-person narrator does not immediately identify himself, the tale is usually about tale-telling itself, for instance, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Even there, we are given a subtle signal that we have an involved narrator.⁵ In "Araby" there is no such signal. The opening is perfect third-person. Then suddenly, sixty-seven words into the story, a possessive adjective shifts our expectations: "the former tenant of *our* house." Thirty-nine words later there can be no doubt of the shift into first-person narration: "Among these *I* found. ..." Either Joyce has made a serious mistake in his narration, or he intends something by this shift.

As we read on in the story, we first notice a mixing of simple first-person "I" ("I found," "I liked," "I wished") and the collective pronoun ("Our house," "we met," "sky above us," "our shouts"). Gradually, the isolated "I" emerges, and the collective disappears. Very much the same progress occurs in "An Encounter" where, from paragraph thirteen through sixteen, the "I" gradually disengages himself from his companion Mahony for fear the man will think him as stupid as his friend. In "An Encounter" the disengagement is essential; the actual and the figurative encounter can only happen to the boy alone. This separation of the ego also suggests that growing up is a process of isolation, of separation from the group. Thus, Joyce is clearly not unskillful in his use of narrative codes; so there must be some explanation for this mixture of first- and third-person and for the shift from collective to isolated first-person in "Araby."

If we go to the next tale in the collection, part of the answer emerges. “Eveline,” the story of a girl “over nineteen” (p. 38) who tries, and fails, to flee from a stifling father and from Ireland, is told by a sympathetic, omniscient third-person narrator: “She sat at the window. ... She was tired ... she heard footsteps. ... One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play ...” (p. 36). Then in the last lines of the story, the narrator coolly withdraws his sympathy and merely observes her from without, judging her failure: “She set her white face to him, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (p. 41). She is now one of the damned, like Gabriel from “The Dead,” and Joyce’s narrative code demonstrates this. The following story, “After the Race,” is about the son of a Dublin “merchant prince” (p. 43), actually a butcher, who tries to keep up with the international racing set. For this tale Joyce uses his characteristically detached narrator, who stays mostly outside his characters, occasionally making aloof, damning judgments (“Rapid motion through space elates one; so does notoriety; so does the possession of money. There were three good reasons for Jimmy’s excitement” [p. 44]) or relating the characters’ confusion and anguish with his fine mixture of naturalistic, disparaging detail and moral censoriousness (“He knew that he would regret in the morning but at present he was glad of the rest, glad of the dark stupor that would cover up his folly. He leaned his elbow on the table and rested his head between his hands, counting the beats of his temple” [p. 48]).

Clearly “Araby” is the mediation between first and third person stories in the collection. It also mediates between those characters who are free of restraints, or who try to free themselves, and those who give up, who succumb to Dublin and Ireland.⁶ Until “Araby,” the children tell their own stories; after “Araby,” the narrator tells the tales of the lost souls. The half-man, half-child of “Araby” emerges slowly from the third person narration to tell his own tale.

In Joyce’s fiction (perhaps in all fiction) the choice of first- or third-person narration is at least the expression of an author’s moral relationship to his characters. Just as inevitably, the narrative stance implies reader responsibility. As the author becomes active as a judge, readers become passive. We need not judge lower-middle-class Dublin if the author judges it for us by describing a “blind” street with houses personified as having a “brown imperturbable face” or “conscious of decent lives within” (p. 29). But as the author becomes passive and apparently allows characters to tell their own tales, readers become morally active. We must decide how the boy really reacts to the bazaar, to the young lady at the door of the stall, to the money counting. Joyce has opened “Araby” by discouraging the reader’s moral alertness, only to make extraordinary demands on it by the end of the tale. This shift in reader responsibility is the reason for some of the strong reader response to the tale. Even this is too simple a description of “Araby.” It describes its place in the collection and its mixture of narrative codes, but it does not describe the full narrative complexity of the tale nor the reason for the mixture.

The first-person narrator in “Araby” is not one character, but three (or better, three moods of a developing adolescent). Appropriately, Joyce does not imagine that a character develops simply, moving from one stage to another and abandoning all of his old characteristics. Instead Joyce creates a tale of a boy at the edge of manhood, who has within him a simple naif, a poetic romantic, and a harsh adult censor. We can distinguish these three in their perceptions.

It is easy enough to distinguish between the naif and the romantic perceptions syntactically. The naif is actively engaged with particular events, and his direct sentences (with no internal modification) reflect this: “I found a few paper-covered books” (p. 29); “I like the last best because ...” (p. 29); “the cold air stung us and we played in the streets” (p. 30); “If my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid ...” (p. 30). In his romantic mood, the boy lovingly interprets and describes events; thus the simple subject/verb sentence structure is interrupted with internal modifiers: “Air, *musty from having been long enclosed*, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room *behind the kitchen* was littered ...” (p. 29); “The space *of sky above us* was of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps *of the street* lifted their feeble lanterns” (p. 30); “the street light *from the kitchen windows* had filled the areas” (p. 30).

The two perceptions of these two moods of the boy are also clearly distinct. The naïf is very matter-of-fact. He has found “the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump” (p. 29) under one of the bushes in the back yard. He prefers *The Memoirs of Vidocq* to Scott's *The Abbot*, not because *Memoirs* is more salacious and less romantic, but because its “curled and damp ... leaves were yellow” (p. 29). He does not personify the books with the usual “whose pages”; instead, it is “the pages of which.” He reports what must have been an ironic comment by adults as though it were simple fact: “He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister” (p. 29). The innocent “very” changes the whole tone of this adult sneer. By contrast, in his romantic mood, it is all hearts leaping, “confused adoration” (p. 31), borne chalices, “litanies” (p. 31), and prayers to “O love! O love!” (p. 31).

These two moods are never absolutely separated; they merge in the early part of the story. At times the sentiment of the romantic is syntactically phrased like an innocent's: “When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped” (p. 30). But the two tones are quite clearly there, overlapping though they be. The romantic loves personification (“the houses had grown sombre”; “all my senses seemed to veil themselves” [p. 31]; “the lamps ... lifted their feeble lanterns” [p. 30]); excessive adjectives (“the high cold empty gloomy rooms” [p. 33]), and melodramatic situations, kneeling on a “dark rainy evening” (p. 31) in the room where the priest had died and praying to the girl. Perhaps the two tones can be best distinguished in the paragraph which describes the boy(s) waiting for the bazaar. First there is the overcharged rhetoric and the complex syntax of the romantic: “At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word. ...” Then suddenly the simplicity of the child returns: “I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped it was not some Freemason affair” (p. 32). This is typical; he has two lives, one imaginative and the other literal and factual. In the latter, he reports the colloquial Irish phrasing of the aunt and uncle (pp. 33–34); even the girl's speech is reported in lilting Irish phrasing (“She asked me was I going to Araby” [p. 31]); and his actual encounter with her lacks all of the melodrama of the paragraph just before it in which he prays to her. It is first “murmuring: O love! O love! many times.” And then: “At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to Araby. I forget whether I answered yes or no” (p. 31).

Not surprisingly, the innocent active boy is part of a group of boys (thus the collective pronoun in the early part of the story) whose “shouts [echoed]” as they “ran the gauntlet,” and who “played until our bodies glowed” (p. 30). The romantic prays by himself in the dark, watches the girl every morning from under the blind, and isolates himself from his “companions playing below in the streets” (p. 33) on the night of the bazaar. Thus the same maturing isolation that we saw in “An Encounter” goes on here. In isolation, or in his imagination, he is romantic, a knight bearing his “chalice safely through a throng of foes” (p. 31). In fact, he is a young boy only slightly better off than “the rough tribes from the cottages” (p. 30), living with an uncle given to drink. Notice that although the realist and the romantic form a clear contrast in the story, both are actively engaged with life, one with living and sensing it, the other with translating it.

On the night he visits the bazaar, he begins as a romantic: “The high cold empty rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. ... I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination ...” (p. 33). By nine o'clock when he has had to cajole his drunken uncle for the florin, the romantic has been replaced by the realist. The syntax shifts to that of the active boy: “I took my seat ...”; “After an intolerable delay the train moved out ...”; “It crept ...”; “I remained ...”; “I passed out ...”; “I could not find ...”; “I found ...”; “I recognized”; “I walked” (p. 34); “I went ...” (p. 35). In frustration, anxiety, and anger, the character pays a shilling to get in, leaving him only eight pence for a gift and the trip home. Even before he realizes this, the romance of Araby has turned into a nightmare of anxiety and failure, and he can only “[remember] with difficulty why I had come” (p. 35). The lights are going out; he is alone (he was “alone in the bare carriage” [p. 34], and at the bazaar he is excluded from the flirtatious group gathered around the young lady “at the door of the stall” [p. 35]); only fragments of his fantasy remain (“I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall” [p. 35]).

At that moment the character turns into harsh censor: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (p. 35). This final sentence has both the force and directness of the naive boy (“I saw myself”; “my eyes burned”) and the poetic personifying capacity of the romantic (“a creature driven and derided by vanity”).

We have heard this third voice throughout the tale, as a kind of warning undertone. At times it is the neutral voice of a more knowing boy. When he says, “My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) ...” (p. 31), the parenthesis suggests that a wiser human could. Much the same is true when he says, “Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praise which I myself did not understand” (p. 31). At other times, the censor is brutally frank in his judgments: “Yet her name was like a summons to all my *foolish* blood” (p. 30); “I thought little of the *future*” (p. 32); “What innumerable *follies laid waste* my waking and sleeping thoughts” (p. 32). The voice of this censor begins to undercut the romantic musings of the character. The very word “imagined” takes on a new tone for the reader in the context of this censorious teller. This teller even censors the character’s physical sensations: “My heart *seemed* to pour itself out into my bosom” (p. 31); “All my senses *seemed* to desire to veil themselves” (p. 31). Here is the priestly bourgeois voice of the harsh cynic with its concern for the “future” and its willingness to call love “vanity,” folly, a “summons to ... foolish blood.” This voice has acted as a subtle narrative commentary on both the naive and the romantic moods of the boy. It has been particularly harsh with the romantic boy. The tragedy of the tale is that all three moods, or voices, coalesce in the final sentence, and it appears that the voice of the censor is dominant.⁷ He has taken on the strong syntax of the naive boy, and he has turned the romantic’s poetry back into social and religious rhetoric that judges and rejects the romantic impulse. The boy has escaped the group of wild, free boys only to fall under the repressive spell of adulthood in Ireland.

It is now clear why Joyce opens the tale in the third-person. It is to aid, perhaps to check, the reader. It is too easy for the reader to reject the romantic boy’s excesses and follow the knowing, intimidating voice of the bourgeois cynic. If we are so foolish, we will feel no tragic sensations at the end of the story; we will simply agree with the “wiser” boy. But we should feel tragic sensations, and we should know what it is that has been lost. Here the opening narration helps us. Its rhetoric is exactly that of the romantic boy, under better control. The sentences are internally modified, subjects separated from verbs by verbal and prepositional phrases and adjective clauses: “street, *being blind*, was”; “house *of two storeys* stood”; “houses *of the street, conscious of decent lives within them*, gazed.” Inanimate objects are personified: “houses gazed ... with ... imperturbable faces.” This romantic voice judges bourgeois and priestly values, but not with the crudity of the boy’s censor, who was essentially a name caller. In other tales this same narrator will be as harsh as the boy’s censor, but here he uses poetic perception for criticism; he sees the smugness of the houses; he perceives in colloquial language a truth about this place. A street without an exit is “blind”; this is both metaphorically and symbolically appropriate for bourgeois Dublin. The poetic antithesis between the Christian Brothers and the freed boys is the opposition on which the story is built, and it is given to us immediately by the morally active third-person narrator. This antithesis is the Irish conflict, and it is internalized in the boy: on one side, the deadly caution of the censor and, on the other, the vibrant life of a boy of two moods, one realistically recording the odors of the ashpit and stable, the other romantically translating curses, sales litanies, or Mangan’s sister into beauty.

With this one text, the identification of the narrative code has taken us very far indeed. It has explained both its oddity and its strength. By helping us judge the several moods of the boy, it has determined the tone of the story. It has also allowed us to speculate about the poetics of narration: about shifts in author-reader responsibility, about the moral responsiveness of the reader, and about the way narrative codes affect the reader.

Notes

1. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 203. Jean Ricardou has recently set out a brief structuralist code of narration ("Time of the Narration, Time of the Fiction," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 16, [1978–79], 7–15), but it is concerned with the backward and forward movements in time, the speed of narration, simultaneity, and repetition rather than with narrative stance. For a discussion (without resolution) of the complexities of narration in "Araby," see the article by the MURGE group in *James Joyce Quarterly*, 18 (1981), 237–254.
2. Culler, p. 200.
3. Culler, p. 202.
4. "Araby," in *Dubliners: Text, Criticism and Notes*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 29. All other references in this article will be to this edition and will be cited in the text. I have occasionally added italics to the quoted text.
5. See L. J. Morrissey, "The Tellers in *Heart of Darkness*: Conrad's Chinese Boxes," *Conradiana*, 13 (1981), 142.
6. A number of studies have examined the theme of entrapment and freedom in this collection; see, for example, Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox: Form and Freedom in His Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 1–21.
7. Although he does not discuss narrative moods, David E. Jones in "Approaches to Dubliners: Joyce's," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 15 (1978), sees the boy caught between "quagmire" and "fantasy," with Joyce the final mediator (p. 114). He rather surprisingly concludes that the boy is "saved by a measure of self-realization" (p. 115). He ignores how clearly the tale fits the tragic mythos of autumn in which obstacles triumph over human will and endeavor.

Criticism: David W. Robinson (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: "Narration of Reading in Joyce," in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Winter, 1987, pp. 387–92.

[In the following essay, Robinson considers the imagery in "Araby" and its relationship to the narrator of the story.]

... Of the three opening stories in *Dubliners*, "Araby" presents by far the clearest framing of narrated events within the controlling viewpoint of a definite narrator. Here, finally, is a narrator whose relation to his early self can be confidently gauged and whose interpretation of the past has some claim to authoritativeness—or so it seems. A fairly consistent level of ironic detachment helps us locate the narrator, who then serves as a model for what we might think about the young boy's adolescent passion. Like the other two stories, "Araby" is largely about interpretation—reading—whether of the written word or of signs encountered or acted out in society. As readers we are offered a chance to read these signs more skillfully than does the narrator himself.

As the last story of the opening triad, "Araby" unites the preceding focuses of desire (for the exotic, for the mysterious, for meaning, for truth) in the culminating symbol of sexual desire, Mangan's sister, who becomes the occasion or site, finally, of the boy's imaginative "writing"; that is, he responds to her unattainability as an object of desire by directing his energies toward a replica of her within his imagination. This is part of a logical movement from childhood to adolescence, with interest in the opposite sex displacing more childish games; but naturalism is superseded by the insistent gnomonic references in the opening pages and beyond. As the first paragraph of "The Sisters" described a "lighted square of window" (*Dubliners*, 9), so "Araby" begins with a series of physical objects delineating flawed rectangles and empty cubes which become associated with the earlier themes of physical and mental paralysis:

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbors in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

(*Dubliners*, 29)

Words both as sounds and ideas tie this paragraph to passages in the preceding stories. The blindness mentioned in the first sentence is of course not the physiological variety, but the word is strikingly situated, and by the paragraph's end the inanimate houses on this inanimate street will be credited with human minds and human faces. "Blind" is a word straining against its context, furthering a series of references to physical debility (paralysis) and, in "An Encounter," to blindness in particular. The layout of the street, so carefully described, consists of a row of houses on either side, forming a rectangle, so that the vacant house at the end, "detached from its neighbors in a square ground," serves as the removed portion of a gnomonic parallelogram whose flawed remainder will be the setting of the story. The house in which the boy lives contains a vacant back room on the first floor, and a number of "high cold empty rooms" (*Dubliners*, 33) on the second, which are not only abandoned, but were formerly inhabited by a now-dead priest (again) whose absence the boy seems eager to fill. The boy is already trapped in a network of associations that link blindness, paralysis, vacancy, silence, and death, all variations of an absence that he attempts to remedy, first by reading the dead priest's books (cf. "The Sisters"), next by joining his friends playing outside in a deathlike world of dark winter cold ("Our shouts echoed in the silent street," *Dubliners*, 30; cf. "An Encounter"), and finally by pursuing the girl.

The description of this girl identifies her with the gnomons just described (the empty house, the silent street, the missing priest). The passage, "She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light of a half-opened door" (*Dubliners*, 30), bears a curiously geometric stamp, as though we are seeing "defined" a certain class of "figure." The rectangle of light from the door (part of a larger, partly dark rectangle) and the shadowed silhouette of the girl within that light are both geometrically gnomonic, while a different sense of the word explains the behavior of the others when they see her:

If Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly.

(*Dubliners*, 30)

Mangan's sister indicates whether or not the evening's play is finished. Not only is she gnomonic in this sense, but so too are the boys, in other senses: they interpret the sign she gives them, doing so from within shadows of their own, and they carry as part of their identity the re-signation resulting from the action being forced on them.

The narrating boy's relationship to Mangan's sister consists wholly of distanced representation of her. As soon as he begins watching the girl from the window, he begins also to blind himself to any real perception of her, substituting an "image": "Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance" (*Dubliners*, 31), including any place more substantial than his imagination. That floating word "blind" recurs when he looks through a window with drawn blinds, separating himself as much as possible from the girl he is nominally observing: "One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house [...] I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves" (*Dubliners*, 31). The boy is, of course, reenacting the priest's "death" to the material world upon the taking of his vows, and in reading *Dubliners* it is hard to miss the point that such a death is more than metaphorical. Imaginative activity, whether on the part of the boy or the reader,

never accomplishes what it ostensibly sets out to do. Since substitutions follow substitutions without any conclusion but death, the pursuit of final meanings and sublime images is also a desire to escape the contingency of life, that is, to die. The pursuit of such meanings is, however, the most urgently *alive* activity in these stories, although the methods used in searching out meanings are the same ones that delude so many of the book's characters. In order to adore his own blessed virgin, the boy must withdraw from the world of the senses and contemplate an image that substitutes itself for fleshly desire without wholly obscuring its origin. The boy wills his own blindness, which in the context of these stories means that he has entered a metonymy beginning with desire for meaning and ending only with death. Somewhere along this chain the reader, too, can be found, trapped, like the boy, by its necessities. But not trapped in an overall paralysis like the boy, whose world is crowded with the dead and whose fellow citizens are hardly alive. Readers can live to read another day, writers to write; the boy, as a fictional character, is fixed, even when the story involves him in a struggle to read his own experience.

Balancing the symbolic afflatus of the story's first half, the second half chronicles the steady collapse of the boy's imaginative inflations (which have blinded him to some rather urgent interpretive necessities) as they are pricked on hard-edged reality. Each narrated event is in some way a disappointment, beginning with the rude awakening from reverie that greets the boy in Mrs. Mercer. The boy plummets from an evocation of the Virgin Mary, celebrated priestlike as he walks about in the upper rooms of the house singing, to a monstrous parody of youth, beauty, and holiness: "She was an old garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose" (*Dubliners*, 33). The boy next waits impatiently until his uncle arrives—drunk. When he finally procures the money and prepares to leave, the uncle is on the verge of reciting *The Arab's Farewell to His Steed*, a debasement of everything the boy associates with the word "Araby." The train that takes him to the bazaar is "deserted" (*Dubliners*, 34)—a fitting state of affairs for any *real* Araby. Once he arrives, his haste forces him to squander money on an expensive entrance. And once inside, he finds not a center of exotic life, but a tremendous gnomon: "Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognised a silence like that which pervades a church after a service" (*Dubliners*, 34).

The irony of the story's conclusion is that the boy completely fails, until the very last, to interpret accurately the relation, and distance, between his desires and physical reality. He fails, in effect, to interpret himself, even though perfectly competent to interpret other signs, as when his uncle enters the house: "At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the halldoor. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. *I could interpret these signs*" (*Dubliners*, 33; my emphasis). The interpretation itself, that the uncle is drunk, remains unstated, suggesting that the boy's evident attention to his surroundings cloaks a continued reluctance to confront sordid reality head on, at least insofar as he is personally affected (for this effect is what he would like to deny). The one reality he cannot ignore, and the one he could most easily have "interpreted" had he wished to, is money, specifically the lack of it—four pence left at the story's end (deducting return train fair) with which to buy a gift. Money turns out to be the one potent signifier in the simoniacal society the boy has tried from the beginning to evade. As an arbitrarily fixed symbol, it stands for the power of society to determine meaning (hence value) with unchallengeable force, and thus reflects the boy's paralysis in a world of action which, once recognized, so completely negates individual meanings that the boy sees himself drained altogether of reality. Just as the money in his pocket will buy him nothing, the thirdhand romantic narratives that constitute his view of the world will do nothing to recoup the lack that he senses, and without those narratives, he is himself as much a blank spot as Mangan's sister (like her, he is nameless) or, for that matter, as Father Flynn. Hence: "Gazing up into the darkness *I saw myself* as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (*Dubliners*, 35; my emphasis). Looking at the darkness that is himself, he is "driven" from within by desire, "derided" from without by alien signifier chains such as money. The empty vision comes to him in a dark, silent hall like the blind, dark, cold, silent street at the story's beginning and the silent, empty houses. The boy appears to have gone nowhere, to be trapped in the same web of deadness as before, having won at most an equivocal awareness of his condition. If the boy recognizes the banality of his predicament in the epiphanic conversation

at the story's end, we recognize the boy's continued lack of self-knowledge (and by implication, our own similar lack as readers) in his final rethematizing of the events in the story.

The boy's ambiguous deflation occurs precisely where a close reading of the opening symbol structures leads one to think it would. Setting aside for a moment the dense gnomonic references I have already discussed, no reader can escape noticing the odd pattern that presents itself as the narrator describes the garden:

The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

(*Dubliners*, 29)

Without a doubt we are handed the Garden of Eden in this passage; the problem is, what should we do with it? Thematically, the Eden allegory fits, since the story depicts the boy's fall into sexual awareness. There is even the brief moment when Mangan's sister acts like (though not much like) a temptress on pages 31–32. Yet Eden and the Fall seem *excessively* potent symbols, too rich in associations to be used in such an offhand way. One wishes that a stronger thread of allegory could be followed through the rest of the story.

But it cannot be, I believe, and the fact that it cannot sends me back to the passage just quoted, which contains the datum that the boy found, under one of those vaguely Edenic bushes, “the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump.” This surely is the last straw: the temptation to allegorize the pump into, at the very least, a snake, is irresistible, but also ridiculous. Rusty or not, this pump is too far-fetched a symbol to be taken seriously. Who would care to claim that this is no ordinary bicycle pump, but that it is really (on some allegorical plane) Satan himself, the great tempter, *disguised* as a bicycle pump? Yet the symbol is also obviously *there*. In an attempt to arbitrate between critics who would read “Araby” naturalistically and those who habitually pursue symbols, Bernard Benstock once said of the pump that “even Freudian analysts have avoided concrete conjecturing on that suspicious object” and dismisses it as nothing more than a naturalistic detail. Benstock is not far from right (indeed, no critic would want to be stuck with such a symbol), but it may be unwise to pigeonhole the detail into an ostensibly neutral category. The pump is not a very good symbol, but it *does* have a definite impact on the reader who notices it with alarm while trying to make sense of the other Edenic resonances. The pump, being of Joycean manufacture, *deflates* the allegorical afflatus which the combined hints about Eden have conjured in the mind of the reader. First we are invited to form an abstractable meaning; then we are mocked by the absurdity of what we have created. The dual meanings of *gnomon* have reached their fullest development by the end of “Araby,” where the explicit meaning introduced in “The Sisters” (a geometric figure defined by lack) has become a general, implicit background for the action, and the originally implicit meaning (an interpreter, a knower) has assumed a dominant role, defining the functions of boy, narrator, and reader with considerable power.

The stance of the narrating “voice” in the remaining twelve stories in *Dubliners*, a fluctuating omniscience which judges or withholds judgment irregularly, may be understood through the object lesson of the first three stories—that even the simplest kind of narration is grounded on an imposture, which exposes itself in the course of any sufficiently complex work. The first-person narrative mode is exhausted and destroyed by the end of “Araby,” turned inside out after beginning in “The Sisters” as a mere hint, the mannerisms of the speaking voice, and developing into a fully articulated stance of detached yet interested irony. The fictiveness of the narrator, once established, prepares the reader for the ensuing, even more disingenuous stories. In these, and in his later books, Joyce throws us at the mercy of the language by subverting every hint of authorial or narratorial intention. Yet the fertility of the language constantly implies deliberate arrangement, and the text, besides, is not a natural, found object—somebody wrote it. The special flavor of Joyce's work comes from the frustration that attends every effort to construe specific intentions, that is, meanings, which half appear

wherever one looks. The texts are always booby-trapped. In view of this, the interpretive hypotheses we base on Joyce's language ought, ideally, to collapse rather quickly back into the protean possibilities of words, instead of assuming a permanence the text itself never claims.

Criticism: Phillip F. Herring (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: "Trials of Adolescence," in *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle*, Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 3–38.

[In the following excerpt, Herring reveals the structural and thematic links between Joyce's "Araby" to "The Sisters" and "An Encounter."]

"Araby" is the last in a set of three stories about how a youth is thwarted in his quest for transcendence. Each of the stories begins in the tedious surroundings of home or school, in reaction to which boys set for themselves idealized destinations involving eastward journeys: in one case it is a mystical state of mind associated with the priesthood, exotic dreams, and Persia; in the next story it is the Pigeon House at the most easterly point of Dublin's harbor (and anything that might symbolize). In the third story a bazaar named "Araby" casts an eastern enchantment over an adolescent mind. A further common characteristic is that the boys lack a kind of enlightenment necessary for their graduation to a more advanced stage of maturity; this they may eventually achieve, but the greatest benefit of their shocking *rites de passage* will be to illustrate the uncertainty principle of life itself.

"Araby" immediately reveals structural and thematic links to its two predecessors:

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbors in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

(29)

Metaphorically speaking, the most serious problem for the young boys in *Dubliners* is their blindness, i.e., a youthful naïveté accompanied by introversion, sensitivity, and romanticism (as the protagonists understand the term) that makes them shun the tedious reality of their daily lives. Blindness was, of course, literally Joyce's most enduring affliction, and the biographical strain in the stories is salient enough to remind us that for him this condition had a special meaning. (In *A Portrait*, for instance, the breaking of Stephen's eyeglasses on the cinder path brings him unjust punishment and humiliation, primary determining factors in his evolution as an artist. In the temporary dimness of vision Stephen sees for the first time his powerlessness.)

To describe the boy's street in "Araby" Joyce could have written "cul-de-sac," the standard term on Irish street signs, or even "dead end" in the American sense, equally suggestive, but he used "blind" to foreshadow the boy's fruitless quest. (Later the boy spies on Mangan's sister from beneath a window blind.) This blind street may indeed be a "synecdoche for all the ways of Dublin" as Edward Brandabur suggests (51), but North Richmond was also a real "cul-de-sac," and Joyce lived on it in 1894 when he was twelve, during which time the "Araby" bazaar was a featured attraction in Dublin.¹

Joyce uses the street to illuminate oppositions in ironic ways. Geometrically it resembles a *gnomon*—a parallelogram disabled at one side for traffic to pass while the other end is closed off.² On the blind end of the street is an uninhabited house "in a square ground"; a neighboring house is occupied by surrogate parents apparently blind to the implications of a boy's restless spirit. On the weak, open-ended side of the *gnomon*,

facing the vacant house is the exit through which he will travel to “Araby” on an errand that will force him to see that he has been a romantic fool and that the bazaar is a place that caters to such as he.

In addition to blindness and seeing, closed and open, there are other dichotomies. The street is quiet except after school. During school hours the boys are confined, so that when they are released they celebrate their freedom noisily. One house is empty, the others are inhabited. The inhabited houses are conscious of decent lives within, while by implication some Dublin houses must be conscious of indecent lives within, or perhaps some are just unconscious. The strategy of personification may imply that houses must be inhabited to be conscious, since the segregated house seems distinct from its neighbors as much in its lack of awareness as in its location at the blind end. Occupied houses see the reality of their inhabitants' lives; the vacant one has neither inner light nor tenants to be conscious about.

The boy is likewise set apart from his neighbors, oblivious of the inner lives of people he meets—dislocated too through a self-conscious and adolescent romanticism from more typically extroverted boys with whom he has ceased to play. Like the boys in “The Sisters” and “An Encounter,” he knows he is different, but unlike them his psychological isolation depends upon blindness to the epiphanies of his world that point vulgarly toward the antiromantic nature of reality. In geometric terms his vision creates gnomonic structures, illuminating one level of experience while blocking out others;³ if *gnomon* can be a metaphor for inadequacy, as in the case of Father Flynn, then we are dealing with a figure who lacks the vision, experience, and maturity to play the role he has chosen for himself.

The second paragraph reinforces the imagery and opposition of the first by stressing vacancy and decay, and by introducing a protagonist-narrator who seems attracted to the musty smells of vacant rooms. The dead priest, so charitable to institutions, has left behind useless papers, three old books, and a rusty bicycle pump that would fit neatly into T. S. Eliot's “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” Stone (344–67) and Atherton (“Araby”) labor to show that each of the books is a thematic key, but the titles probably have just enough relevance to encourage readers to inflate them with meaning. (After all, Joyce supplied the pump.) There is no indication that the boy has read them, especially since he views them as physical objects, preferring the one with yellow leaves. Like his predecessors in *Dubliners*, what he seeks is not to be found in books but in the daily life around him.

Despite his affinity for darkness, enclosed spaces, and musty smells, the protagonist enjoys playing outdoors. Yet rough play with the neighborhood children, though exhilarating, loses its appeal as he succumbs to a more mature, more private kind of stimulation. Joyce's imagery of light and darkness, often remarked upon, serves not so much to emphasize the gloom of Dublin seasons as to highlight the confused tensions in the lives of his characters. When dusk falls, the houses grow somber; feeble lanterns stretch out to a violet sky. In this obscurity the children play till their “bodies [glow].” There are “dark muddy lanes,” “dark dripping gardens”; “light from kitchen windows” shines through the darkness; when the uncle returns or Mangan's sister appears to call her brother to dinner, the children elude them by hiding in the shadow. From there the protagonist peers at another shadowy figure—Mangan's sister—“her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door.” (Voyeuristic scenes in *A Portrait* and *Ulysses* are, of course, foreshadowed.) In door and window Joyce chooses to reemphasize gnomonic shape along with the interplay of light and darkness, vision and blindness, though in the window he has reversed the dark-light aspect to form a shaded rectangle with light entering the lower section: “The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen” (30).

Unlike Stephen and Bloom who were only momentarily enchanted, respectively, by the “bird girl” and Gerty MacDowell, the hero of “Araby” feels a passionate commitment of many days duration; but like them he too will find that silent encounters with feminine beauty provide insight, though neither gratification nor commitment. In each case the silent language of adoration is more prayerful Mariology than Petrarchan laudation, with fantasy playing an important role. This somewhat obtrusive religious imagery of “Araby” conforms to the movements of expectation and disappointment, the central journey pattern in the stories of

youth (just as it is in most of Joyce's narrative units describing maturation). Imitating a courtly love tradition of which he is presumably ignorant, the boy creates a false madonna and worships her fervently; upon arriving at the bazaar on "this night of Our Lord" (33), he immediately recognizes "a silence like that which pervades a church after a service" (34), and might well be reminded of the money-changers in the Temple, as several critics surmise.

Brooks and Warren note that during the latter part of "Araby" the boy's confusion is emphasized. It is a condition he actively magnifies, believing it necessary to romantic euphoria, a confusion of the senses prefigured both by the play upon blindness and by his misuse of the language of prayerful adoration. True, it is the only vocabulary the youth has for praising feminine virtue, but he uses it for self-intoxication rather than wooing: "her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood" (30); "her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand"; "how could I tell her of my confused adoration"; "I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves"; "when she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer" (31). But like the bird girl and Gerty MacDowell, Mangan's sister hears no words of praise.

Confusion gives way to an intense determination to reach "Araby." Obstacles impede his way, but he completes the third journey of the *Dubliners* collection. His counterpart in "The Sisters" while paying his respects to the dead sought to clarify the nature of his friendship with the priest; in "An Encounter" the boy seeks through adventure to transcend the daily tedium of his life; for his part, the protagonist of "Araby" sets out to purchase a trophy that will make him seem desirable to Mangan's sister. Whether the vehicle for transcendence is religion, adventure, or romantic encounter, the result of each journey is displacement, shock, self-ridicule, and a new awareness of self and world (in "The Sisters" a process implied rather than described).

In "Araby" one sign that the destination is a mirage not of desert sands but of cityscape is the story's title, with its suggestion of a music-hall backdrop; another is the boy's use of an unexpected bazaar entrance. Clearly he has encountered in the external world a carefully devised confusion to balance the internal one he has nurtured. The purpose of the bazaar is to make money by providing an exotic atmosphere that appeals to the *Dubliners'* need for adventure or romance, hence the imagery of usury (Mrs. Mercer; the constant clink of coins; the buying and selling of wares). The boy's blindness to reality, his incessant confusion, his use of Mangan's sister to promote a sustained euphoria—the pressures of adolescence have steered him into a very antiromantic, commercial port of call.

In "Araby" Joyce's delicate balancing of the particular elements of the boy's romantic expectation with those present in the bazaar was a brilliant achievement. Quester and goal are each gnomonic shapes that complete each other. The enamored youth deludes himself, the bazaar deludes the populace; the false romance of the youth's delusion encounters the bogus romance of the Café Chantant and "Araby"; his earlier blindness to all that inhibited his romantic vision is finally dispelled by epiphany, the sudden clarity of insight being timed to match his waning view of this darkening vanity fair.

Since the first three *Dubliners* stories form a trilogy of youth, the key words on the first page were made to unlock meanings in all three stories, but they must be stretched slightly to fit the context, just as the boy in "The Sisters" does, until they reinforce a unity of design and help to unravel the three enigmatic endings. Although we are not always told precisely what the boys feel, they seem momentarily to share in the paralysis discovered before turning hurriedly away in a panic of self-awareness. (The ending of "The Sisters" does not show this, but any projection of geometric lines beyond the final ellipses would likely show parallels with the next two endings.) The boys of "The Sisters" and "Araby" obviously have simoniacal relationships, since some kind of commercial exchange is involved in their attachment to priest and madonna figures. As we have seen, gnomonic structures, accompanied by the interplay of light and dark images, become essential components in the boy's "seeing" both sweetheart and bazaar. An incomplete figure himself due to romantic blindness and immaturity, he travels in the rectangular shape of "a third-class carriage of a deserted train" and

en route spies “the lighted dial of a clock” (34), the tardy hour of which forecasts the hopelessness of his journey. No series of ellipses is necessary to call our attention to what is missing in either the romantic impulse or in the structure he imagines to be the instrument of his fulfillment.

“Araby” turns out to be “a large building”; inside is “a big hall girdled at half its height by a gallery”; “the greater part of the hall was in darkness” (34). It is within this spacious *gnomon*—loosely definable here as an incomplete structure with one section in darkness—that illumination occurs, much as it must have come to Father Flynn in the darkened confessional. As the upper hall gradually darkens, ironically providing the ideal atmosphere for spying on girls and priming the imagination, the boy turns his back on “Araby” now more fully conscious of sight as a faculty that leads one from innocence to experience through disillusionment: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (35). Blindness is no more. This exit from Munsalvaesche should allow our young Parzival eventually to shed his fool's costume.

In the preceding *Dubliners* stories epiphany is accompanied by trite or deceptive language, meaning residing in silence or elliptical language rather than in the verbal camouflage that is the oil of social intercourse. Joycean epiphanies take one unawares, provoked by commonplace events and vacuous language that seem to belie the fact that for the initiate this is a primal scene of discovery. So it is in “Araby”:

“I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation:

—O, I never said such a thing!

—O, but you did!

—O, but I didn't!

—Didn't she say that?

—Yes. I heard her.

—O, there's a ... fib!”

(35)

The keenness of the boy's disappointment is commensurate with his sensitivity to language. Like his prototype in “The Sisters,” he orients himself by means of totem words that seem to reveal alternative worlds. It is as much the name of “Araby” as the girl's attraction to its wares that lures him to the bazaar.

Brewster Ghiselin is not quite on the mark when he says, “The response of the boy to the name *Araby* and his journey eastward across the city define his spiritual orientation, as his response to the disappointing reality of the bazaar indicates his rejection of a substitute for the true object of the soul's desire (328).”⁴ Such a view diminishes the boy's personal responsibility for his disappointment, and suggests that he is clear about what he expects to find. Harry Stone is similarly wide of the mark in neglecting this aspect of the story. Stone writes convincingly of Yeats's story “Our Lady of the Hills” as a source for Joyce's portrayal of the girl in “Araby” as false madonna, yet it must also be emphasized that no falseness is discoverable in the girl herself as both Stone and Ben L. Collins (97) suggest.

As in the Yeats story, in his imagination the boy makes of the girl something she is not—an unrealistic figure of idolatry. The seven veils of mystery in which the boy cloaks her probably hide an ordinary Dublin girl of her age. Falseness resides, rather, in the voyeurism and mysticism that engender the reaction of an

inexperienced lover who must learn about life the hard way, by looking for sustenance to a commercial establishment that matches his own temperament for falseness, a shabby bazaar that trades on the gullibility of wide-eyed locals by cloaking itself in the name (but not even the borrowed robes) of oriental exoticism. Neither boy nor reader mistakes the facade of Duessa's castle, realizing that falseness lies within both quester and goal, and deliverance is not from any "throng of foes" (31), but from illusions tenaciously held.

Notes

1. See Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 110, Plate III; and Atherton, "Araby" (40).
2. Cf. Friedrich, "The Perspective": 73.
3. A prerequisite for this selective blindness is isolation, a topic emphasized in Brooks and Warren. Meaningful interaction or communication with others is avoided since apparently the boy believes nobody can help him find his way.
4. Like most *Dubliners* stories, "Araby" teaches a lesson: not that lovers are fools, or that romantic feeling is only for experienced lovers, but that love is both spiritual and carnal. In a famous love letter to Nora, Joyce wrote, "One moment I see you like a virgin or madonna the next moment I see you shameless, insolent, half naked and obscene" (*Letters* 2: 243). The boy in "Araby" has been captivated by an illusion that human love is only spiritual.

Criticism: Albert Wachtel (essay date 1992)

SOURCE: "The First Trinity," in *The Cracked Looking Glass: James Joyce and the Nightmare of History*, Susquehanna University Press, 1992, pp. 23–37.

[In the following excerpt, Wachtel views "Araby" as the third story in a trilogy—the other two being "The Sisters" and "An Encounter"—and deems it an important transition to the other stories included in *Dubliners*.]

Although they depict the meanness, entrapment, and blindness of the citizenry, the first two stories of *Dubliners* are actually about the discovery of those same qualities in the protagonists. "Araby," third in the series, is the final example of such self-scrutiny before the authorial voice presents the victims and the struggling might-have-beens of Dublin life.

Until the protagonists of the first stories discover and acknowledge their errors, it seems to them possible to direct their disapproval at others. In "The Sisters," the boy resents Old Cotter and refuses the offering of the old woman. In "An Encounter," the protagonist disdains Mahony and the Dillon boys. Similarly, in "Araby" the sources of failure appear at first to reside outside, in certain relatives or sales people, in streets or houses or the bazaar where the fragment of conversation we alluded to earlier (p. 21 above) actually occurs:

—O, I never said such a thing!

—O, but you did!

—O, but I didn't!

—Didn't she say that?

—Yes. I heard her.

—O, there's a ... fib!

What the exchange means to the speakers we cannot say, but a reconstruction of the protagonist's store of attitudes and memories when it occurs can reveal what it means to him.

Just as the narrative voices of the other stories often adopt the limitations and styles of their protagonists, the narrator of "Araby" adapts his story at critical points to the patterns of thought he had as a child. In the first paragraph, for example, streets and houses are given human attributes. North Richmond Street is a "quiet street" because it is "blind." Taken by itself, the sentence escapes pathetic fallacy: "blind" can be read as a synonym for dead-end; "quiet" as descriptive rather than an attribution. But what follows forces the issue. A school, we are told, sets the boys free, and the uninhabited house on the block is an outsider, exiled from its "neighbours." "The other houses of the street, *conscious* of decent lives within them, *gazed* at one another with brown *imperturbable faces*" (p. 29, my italics). The images are elegant and consistent, but self-consciously poetical. The anthropomorphic attributions constitute the first clue to the nature of the boy's problem, a romantic tendency to impose his vision on his environment.

As if to reassert that the father-priest figures who influenced the boys in the earlier stories are irrelevant here, the clergyman in "Araby" is dead. The books and the priestlike men who appear in "The Sisters" and "An Encounter" are alluded to in the early references to a dead priest and his unread volumes, both secular and religious. Too young to be moved by Scott's romance, free of the dangerous attractions of *The Devout Communicant*, too innocent sexually to respond to *The Memoirs of Vidocq*, the boy lets his fancy work upon the material properties of the books. He prefers Vidocq "because its leaves [are] yellow" (p. 29). His fantasies cannot be attributed to the influences of individual men or books; they arise from within himself.

He is attracted to the girl who lives across the street but does not know how to approach her. Lacking a firm model upon which to pattern his reactions, he gets his responses reversed. In the case of Vidocq's book, he ignores the words and reacts to the entity in which they appear; in the case of Mangan's sister, rather than responding to the girl herself, he idolizes her name—an ephemeral sound, so insignificant finally that it is not included in the story at all. He becomes her "devout communicant." "[H]er name was like a summons to all my foolish blood" (p. 30). He sublimates his personal feelings and his sexual appetite into a romantic, religious, and mawkish sentimentality: "I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring, *O love! O love!* many times" (p. 31, Joyce's italics).

Joyce set himself the task of transforming the bread of everyday life into the host of art by exposing its essential nature. Carrying the frail image of the girl through the streets, the boy in "Araby" disdains common life. "The shrill litanies of shop-boys" and the "chanting of street singers" seem neither spiritually nor aesthetically significant to him. He explicitly rejects living itself: "These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes" (p. 31). His unexamined emotions alienate him from himself, turning his language into a babble of "prayers and praises which I myself did not understand." Like the deviate of "An Encounter" he is caught up and hypnotized by his own words, relinquishing his hold on the "real world" in which the story occurs.

Mangan's sister, on the other hand, deftly applies secular conventions to the situation. Not only does she know her own mind; she notices the boy's admiration for her as well, and well she should: he has been trailing her to school for months. Insufficient attention has been paid to what she tells him when they finally exchange words.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*, I forget whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar she said; she would love to go.

(p. 31)

Mangan's sister is generously offering to accompany the boy to the bazaar, but she lays herself open indirectly, in keeping with common social practice. Blind to her intent, however, the boy misses the hint and asks why she *can't* attend. He misunderstands what "I would love to go" can mean. Rebuffed, the girl toys with her bracelet, cooking up a response: "She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent" (p. 32).

Though the symbolic import and the allusive suggestiveness of the scene, linking her to both virgin queen and archetypal temptress, are undeniable, they are less vital to the exchange than an understanding of the basic failure in communication that occurs. Whatever the girl's role may be in relation to the temptress of earlier fictions, her basic intent is to make herself available to the boy as a friend.

Armed with this awareness, we return to the flirtation between the salesgirl and the two English youths at the bazaar. Hearing them, the boy has only to link their situation to his exchange with Mangan's sister in order to reach an illuminating realization. Imagine it as he would: a girl has hinted at her willingness to be approached; her young man and his friend, immature, though more perceptive than the protagonist has been, tease her for offering a date; embarrassed, but shielded by her indirect approach, she responds, "O, I never said such a thing!" And the rest follows until, "Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything" (p. 35). This time the question is direct, but Mangan's sister too had asked if he wished to buy anything. Although his fidelity to an amalgam of romantic and religious rituals was matched by her obedience to the constricting social convention that girls must communicate indirectly, she at least was aware of his interest and tried to oblige him. He, blinded by unassimilated sensual desire and misplaced religious ecstasy, failed to read the meaning of her words. Like Stephen Dedalus in the *Portrait*, the boy failed to take a gift for "which he had only to stretch out his hand" (p. 69).

The bazaar itself, no matter how tawdry, is insufficient to have destroyed his illusions. It is true that when he arrives he finds money changers defiling a salver with their coins, but a bazaar is not a temple and he does not react adversely to the sight. It is also true that the exchange between the salesgirl and the young men is mundane and that the men have English accents. But since the flirtation at the booth can as easily be linked to the "throng of foes" as to Mangan's sister, the boy need not feel disappointed unless he has made some such connection as we have suggested between his conversation and theirs.

Critics have persisted in claiming that the bazaar disillusioned him, but the boy's initial response to it, like his response to Mangan's sister, has religious overtones. The bazaar has "a silence like that which pervades a church after a service" (p. 34). And after the salesgirl approaches him he looks "humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall ..." (p. 35). Even when deserted, the bazaar retains an element of mystery, but the boy has come to realize that he has lost an opportunity. The flirtation between the salesgirl and the Englishmen is hardly epiphanic in its own right; rather, when the protagonist perceives the consonance between it and his earlier conversation with Mangan's sister, both the former and the latter are clarified for him. The boy realizes that by failing to understand and take advantage of Mangan's sister's subtle offer, he had missed an opportunity to be with her. Araby is, perhaps, disappointingly, just another bazaar, but the boy has been more importantly disillusioned about himself.

The nature of his failure becomes clearer if we depart from the text for a moment and contrast it with a related success. Joyce is said to have regretted that he had limited powers of invention, that he could not generate a fictional event without a strong basis in fact. But the faculty of invention is innate; we all create and live within sometimes fanciful fictions by which we try to understand and reconcile ourselves to the world. But some of us accurately chart the terrain of our experiences, while others obscure it. The advantage of the latter is that they temporarily insulate their believers against suffering; their liability is that they open them to the pain of having their fancies destroyed, exposing them to the subsequent anguish of working raw-nerved upon

a harsh world.

There is no ultimate escape from fictions, then, but the possibility exists that destructive effects of the delusive kind can be minimized by an imaginative—that is, shaping—power, the same faculty Coleridge had in mind when he distinguished two varieties of imagination from fancy—in his scheme, the faculty by which degenerating memories are given new order, by placing the head of a woman on the body of a horse, for instance. The first of the imaginative powers, on the other hand, is the singular ability to create a sense of the whole of something real by means of partial perceptions. On a limited, visual scale this “primary” imagination is what we use every day in supplying full round heads to all the faces we see. This power, and the secondary ability to exercise it upon invented circumstances, Joyce had in abundance. The boy in “Araby” has not yet developed the primary power with regard to his life. Instead of working openly and imaginatively upon the real world to enlarge his understanding and fulfill his desires, he imposes what Coleridge would call fancy upon it: he conceives of houses as people, sees a girl as a saint, and love as a chalice. “Araby” tracks the destruction of his false notion about the “holy spirit” of secular love. It describes a necessary cutting away from vain romantic roles and blind assumptions.

In the end, the boy recognizes himself as “a creature driven and derided by vanity,” but even here he overdramatizes his failure. Caught in an artificial world in which spiritual values are confounded with romantic aspirations, he is defeated by an egotistical belief in the singularity and sacredness of his feelings. The love he has cherished is a product of fancy, compounded of an urge to possess the girl and of the degenerating memory traces of religious feeling. Like the Virgin's head on the body of a Venus, the combination is interesting, perhaps, but disconcerting. For no such object of love exists outside the mind that concocts it.

A similar attitude was alive in Joyce: “My love for you allows me to pray to the spirit of eternal beauty and tenderness mirrored in your eyes or to fling you down under me, ...” he confesses to his wife, and he goes on to describe a lustful and self-consciously animalistic coupling (p. 181). Thanks to the dimension of time, his conflicting feelings admit of satisfaction; he can worship Nora at one moment and abuse her as the eternal sow the next. Joyce may never have reconciled himself morally to such paradoxes of love, but in his art he understood them. In like manner, the narrator of “Araby” (if we indulge ourselves momentarily and imagine him real) may fail to develop a consistent vision of his lovers, but as artist he both perceives and embodies what he takes to be his youthful failure.

Neither Araby nor Mangan's sister is his primary obstacle. Instead, he learns, he himself has failed. The possibility of friendship was offered him and he myopically declined. Childishly, he attributes a finality to his failure which it need not have, but for the moment it crushes him. His story is less about disillusionment with the world than about the disabusing of the self, a lifting of the blinds through which a boy has peeped at life.

The protagonists of “The Sisters,” “An Encounter,” and “Araby” understand their own roles in the situations they recollect and have to that extent freed themselves from complicity in their defeat. Each is an artist now, a storyteller, but was a boy when the action occurred. Their histories constitute a thematic unit and, though we shall not do so here, they can be read as phases in a single life. Each story seems to be about a failing in someone or something that the narrator once encountered in the world at large but each ends with the recognition that whatever the state of the external world there has been a more crucial failure within the boy himself. In the course of his microcosmic history he gains an important insight, and he atones for his sins by confessing them, not to the representative of some putative god, but within himself and to us. The boy's development is the crucial concern in each of the first three stories, and in each the addressable questions the story raises and the fictional base it develops direct us back to the boy and his experience of enlightenment, dispelling at the same time the perplexing and insoluble problems that might otherwise trouble the reader. As we shall see, the adult protagonists in *Dubliners* either cannot see, or refuse to acknowledge, their affinity for defeat. Those who cannot see are victimized; those who choose to remain ignorant become willing slaves.

Criticism: Garry M. Leonard (essay date 1993)

SOURCE: "The Question and the Quest: the Story of Mangan's Sister," in *Reading Dubliners Again: A Lacanian Perspective*, Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 73–94.

[In the following essay, Leonard utilizes the theories of Jacques Lacan to analyze the depiction of Mangan's sister in "Araby."]

The displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindness, in their end and in their fate.

(Lacan 1988c, 43–44)

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

(*Dubliners*; hereafter cited as *D* 35)

I had read "Araby" several times before I noticed and became curious about the fact that the Araby Bazaar is really the place where Mangan's sister wishes to go. The surprise and confusion of the boy's aunt when he asks if he may go makes it clear that he has not mentioned the event until after his conversation with Mangan's sister. She is the one who introduces "the magical name" that is also the title of the story, but what is her story? If she is not the protagonist of the story, can she be seen as the contagonist whose powerful absence makes the boy's presence in his own narrative possible?

Blanche Gelfant, in her introduction to a panel entitled "A Frame of Her Own: Joyce's Women in *Dubliners* Reviewed" at the Ninth Joyce Symposium, cites the boy's fantasy relationship to Mangan's sister as typical of what male critics have done with the women they have come upon in Joyce's fiction: "The reader can see Mangan's sister only as she has been appropriated by a male viewer—indeed, three male viewers: the deluded boy, the retrospective narrator, and the author. A fourth must be added, the male critic, whose objectivity as observer of Joyce's women has until recently gone unchallenged" (1988, 263). One has only to look over some of the male commentaries on "Araby" from the sixties and seventies to see that Gelfant's indictment of the male critic is justifiable.¹

But is Joyce really the third male appropriator standing between the reader and Mangan's sister? I do not think so, and Marilyn French, in the panel that Gelfant introduces, also suggests otherwise: "Joyce's women are not mere mythic figures, types, such as appear in the work of so many other male authors. They have a reality of their own which is palpable even though the men who occupy the foreground of the stories largely ignore it" (1988, 267). Male critics have often appropriated the women in Joyce's fiction with at least as much ingenuity as any of the male characters in *Dubliners*. Mangan's sister, for example, has been featured as a virgin, a whore, Ireland, simony, and so on, in various essays. Like the boy of the story, male essayists have too often discovered that Mangan's sister represents the very thing they fear is lacking in their own arguments. And yet it is her frustrated desire that calls the boy into being. I suggest that her unspoken story speaks to who the narrator becomes in the course of what he presents as his story.²

The narrator says, "I kept her brown figure always in my eye." Once readers refuse to take his word for it, they see that this is not so. What he always keeps, as the symmetry of this phrase suggests, is his *I*, which is constructed in relation to the representation of Mangan's sister that he has appropriated by his "eye." It is this that allows him to believe in the fictional unity of his masculine identity, which in turn grants him the illusion of bearing his chalice (his presumed subjectivity) safely through a throng of foes (what Lacan terms the

Real).³ I go even further and suggest that the subject of “Araby” is the desire of Mangan's sister in the sense that her function in the boy's narration as absence and lack is what permits his subjective presence. He represses awareness of the question of her desire by incorporating it into what he presents as his quest. As a result, what he takes to be his identity has been constructed relative to another (Mangan's sister) and is destined to be taken apart in relation to someone else (the shop girl at the bazaar). The appropriating gaze he directs to Mangan's sister is reflected back to him—in an inverted and disorienting form—by the indifferent gaze of the shop girl who asks if he wants to buy something. As the delirious subjectivity when setting out on his quest founders, the question of woman returns, and the boy becomes the object of another's gaze: “Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder. I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real” (*D* 35). The masculine quester becomes the feminine question—masquerading to appear “more real.”

By moving from the subject controlling the gaze to the object controlled by it, the narrator moves from the exhilaration of having the Phallus to the more debilitating posture of consciously pretending to be the Phallus for the benefit of another's desire (“I lingered ... to make my interest in her wares seem the more real”). More real for whom? Certainly not the narrator; although he now knows he is pretending, earlier he knew he was the real thing, both of these moments equally represent reality inasmuch as both misrepresent the Real. The illusion of having the phallus (based on the lack of Mangan's sister—her inability to satisfy her desire to go to the Araby Bazaar) allows the boy to emerge as the only one worthy to go in search of the one, true (nonexistent) object of desire (the Holy Grail). He is a selected signifier destined to bring back the elected signified. Certainly the narrator feels found out by the end of this story (which was never his story), but his final epiphany is a new pose. Like so many of Joyce's characters, he is learning that in the masque of subjectivity—in disguising the face of the slave—sincerity is crucial; once you can fake that you have it made.

The boy sees Mangan's sister as a representation of what Lacan calls the woman; he imagines who he has become by positing his completeness on her lack.⁴ He lives in a world of words, rather than the world itself—what Lacan calls the Real—which is whatever has not been represented, distorted, interpreted, or reconstructed in the Symbolic Order of language. In this kingdom of words he is able to imagine himself as king, and this allows him to believe in himself as a subject. But in the world of words, the subject is a signifier with no signified. The subject takes its place in a signifying chain and is, henceforth, forced to model its very being on the moment of the signifying chain that traverses consciousness. A woman who appears to the masculine subject as feminine—as the Woman—appears as the locus of the question about the masculine subject's identity. She seems to represent the response given by the subject to the question of knowing what he is for the ‘other.’ Essentially, the Other is a concept designating the reference point from which one establishes identity—between consciousness and unconsciousness, between others and language, somewhere between one's sense of what is inside and outside. If the masculine subject could only possess the *original* signifier—which does not exist and which Lacan calls the Phallus—then he would no longer be merely a signifier that acts as a signifier for another signifier in a chain that goes on forever. But this can never be because there is nothing certain in the Symbolic Order—nothing that directly corresponds to the Real—that is capable of stopping the chain reaction.

For the narrator, Mangan's sister is a representation of femininity—the opposite of masculinity—which is to say she does not exist for him except as the representation of lack that confirms the fullness and authenticity of his masculine subjectivity. The Woman represents to the masculine subject the Other, which is the locus from which the subject's question of his existence is presented to him. This question can bathe and support the subject, but it can also invade him and tear him apart. When a woman is taken to be the Woman by a masculine subject, she is perceived as enigmatic and powerful because she appears to have the power to nurture or destroy—to confirm the authenticity of his identity or to undermine it. In fact, she has the power to do neither; the enigma of femininity merely reflects back to the masculine subject a division that already exists within him.

But does Mangan's sister exist outside the boy's "I/eye"—outside his representation of her as the Woman? Joyce shows us she does by allowing the possibility that, although the boy's narrative seeks to repress it, *she has noticed him looking and is looking back at him*. A commonplace criticism about this story is that the girl does not notice the narrator—perhaps because he is too young or, perhaps, because he has kept his confused adoration a secret. But I argue for the opposite assumption: she has seen him looking at her and that is why she begins their conversation (a fact as curiously easy to skip over as the fact that she brings up the subject of the Araby Bazaar). To begin with, he must have distinguished himself from her brother in her eyes because he consistently refuses to take part in his attitude of playful disobedience toward her: "Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railings looking at her" (*D* 30). Certainly, the narrator wishes to worship her in private, but he really has two impulses, and the second one has been insufficiently noted: one impulse is to remain unseen while seeing her (he pulls the window blind to within an inch of the sash), and the other is to have her see him while he appears to be looking elsewhere (every morning he contrives to cross her path as though by chance).

What can it mean, then, when he says "*at last* she spoke to me" (emphasis added) except that she has noticed him noticing her and has finally decided to act? And, when she does speak, her remarks (and the narrator heralds these remarks as "the first words," making it clear that he has been expecting something to begin), although narrated indirectly by the boy and, thus, apparently haphazard and indifferent are, in fact, rather cleverly designed to test the extent and nature of his attraction to her without risking embarrassment or rejection on her part. She is a girl curious about her recently discovered ability to attract the male gaze (a discovery selected by Molly Bloom as an extremely important one in a girl's life). The fact that the narrator is young and naïve is precisely the point; she would scarcely experiment with this new dimension of her being with someone like Blazes Boylan, because he would certainly lack the subtlety to interpret it in a manner flattering to herself. That her words to the boy come "*at last*" suggest that she has been fascinated by the game and even prolonged it. Finally, her choice of remark, asking him if he is going to an event that she cannot possibly attend, by rule of her parents, is not at all arbitrary but a clever way of drawing out his attention while at the same time protecting herself from it; she is still a little frightened of what his gaze might mean, but she longs to be nearer to it.

In an important essay, Devlin points out that a major component of Leopold Bloom's enjoyment of Gertie McDowell (his consumption of her image) depends on his belief that she is only stimulated by being looked at, not by looking at him: "Oddly enough, Bloom does not think of women being stimulated visually, through provocative sights, in an elision of the possibility of female scopophilia. ... He fails to think of her as a voyeur or recognize the full extent of her own visual pleasure, refusing to see her as the pruriently viewing subject, himself as the exhibitionistic object. But after all, since when is a fairly overt masturbation not an exhibitionistic act?" (1988, 140).⁵ The boy also exhibits himself to the girl morning after morning (although certainly less overtly than Bloom). My point is that the excitement of both Bloom and the narrator of "Araby" is contingent on the dynamic of their upholding their *I* by keeping the figure of a woman in their *eye*. But how is it possible to maintain this illusion about the unity of their subjectivity if the women they have appropriated for the purposes of stimulation have also or, in the case of Mangan's sister, have already appropriated their image in order to stimulate themselves?

Mangan's sister speaks to him first, and as she does so she turns a silver bracelet "round and round her wrist." Is this self-consciously sexual, a subtle variation of Gerty leaning farther back? Not necessarily, but I insist this shows that she is concentrating on what she is doing and saying and experimenting with her ability to direct the boy's gaze. The point is made that the narrator's two friends are fighting one another for each other's caps, and yet he is standing quietly before her staring at her hand and the movement of her bracelet. She would have to be conscious of his quiescent attitude against a backdrop of puerile high jinks. She could not possibly confuse his attitude of reverence with their attitude of juvenile disregard. While she turns the bracelet, the narrator describes her as "bowing her head towards me" (*D* 32). This gesture is not the same thing, I would like to point out, as bowing her head down (as looking at the ground and away from him). I

argue she is looking at him, even moving her face closer to him, and the proof is the curious absence in the narrator's extremely detailed description of any mention of her face or her eyes. Instead, he details the light of the lamp, her hand on the railing, the curve of her neck, and the border of her petticoat. Taken all in all, this is the observational standpoint of someone who is avoiding the gaze of the person he is looking at. She is watching him watch her and he, not wishing to understand this, looks elsewhere.⁶

After he is alone, the narrator gives the reader the impression that he has created an image of Mangan's sister in precise detail: "I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress" (*D* 33). But this projection of her image is not a duplication at all; it has been edited significantly. There is no re-creation, for example, of her hand turning her bracelet, nor is there any recollection of her head bowing toward him. That the narrator forgets these two movements is evidence that he has already repressed the question of her desire, which these gestures betray, in order to appropriate her image as the negative of his own. After dressing her in this image he needs to see, the boy strips her of language; although she brought up the subject of Araby, she is silent in his image of her while he burns with impatient desire to go to this same bazaar. Thus, the mediated image of Mangan's sister that Gelfant complains of is, in fact, the girl in the boy's imagination, but Mangan's sister exists alongside the boy's narration and can be glimpsed through those gaps in the text where the boy's story falters. Her desire is the subject of the story because it is the subject of the boy's unconscious where it directs—right alongside but outside of his awareness—his conscious intentions that he misrecognizes as a call to destiny.

Having taken the unusual tack of discussing this story as though it were the story of Mangan's sister, I need to explain why she is absent from the narrator's story (although not from Joyce's). Pearce describes a narrative paradox that forces the reader, in the interest of wholeness, to present a narrative with holes. He gives several explanations for this, but one is most pertinent: "Some holes result from the failure to recognize or the need to suppress stories that are not valued or might be threatening; that is, the stories of woman." (1988, 79).

The boy in "Araby" must suppress the story of Mangan's sister (specifically of the awakening of her own confused desire) in order to tell his story—in order to have a story—so that he can believe in the myth of himself and, thus, bear his chalice safely through a throng of foes. This strategy will work until he comes upon another woman at the bazaar who is also enjoying and resisting the pleasure of looking and being looked at by two men. In essence, what was repressed returns because he has been displaced to a new position where he observes what he would not see when he was in the same position as the two men. He sees that the shop girl is looking back, that she is informing the structure of the conversation while appearing to be indifferent to it. In essence, he sees that she is looking, and in the only signifiers that are available to him (and too often to male critics) this makes her lewd, and himself as well, because it forces his earlier voyeurism into a strictly physical register unmitigated by the ennobling features of chivalry or courtly love. The shop girl's candid flirtation does not offend him—it indicts him. What the narrator retreats from in the closing moments of the story is the vague dread that something exists beyond the representations available to him—what Lacan calls the Real—that calls his being, (represented by his quest) into (quest)ion. The boy's concluding observation about himself is a reinterpretation of the Real and, thus, is no more true than his earlier perception of Mangan's sister, but it does restore reality to him because instead of the intolerable scenario of seeing himself being seen by Mangan's sister, and by the annoyed and distracted shop girl, he now reports *I saw myself* as a creature" (*D* 35). It is better to be his own creature than to be feminized by the objectifying gaze of a woman.

To reiterate, a woman is perceived by the masculine subject as what Lacan calls the Woman. A man comes upon this image and takes it to be the Other who has knowledge of the impossible signifier that gives meaning to the endless play of signifiers. For the masculine subject, the relief of discovering the Woman is something like the relief of a traveler, lost and bewildered in a snow storm that seems to represent first one thing and then another to him, who suddenly trips on something and, crouching down to examine it more closely, takes it to be his own doorstep. Marching resolutely through the storm of words that speak who he is, a man seeks the

meaning of his own past in the future that the enigma of femininity seems to promise. The feminine mystery seems to contain for him something previous to, and outside of, the murderous signification of the Symbolic Order that, as Lacan puts it, speaks through him and directs him: "We make our destiny, because we talk. We believe that we say what we want, but it is what others wanted, most particularly our family, which speaks to us. ... We are spoken, and because of that, we make of the accidents that push us, something 'plotted'" (Ragland-Sullivan 1988, 118).

Lacan designates this "something beyond" in the Woman as *jouissance*. This complex term refers to a sense of fusion and naturalness—before cultural myths, before speech—that is comparable to the infant's pleasure in the object constancy provided by his own mirror reflection. By making Mangan's sister fictional, the boy is able to plot the fact of his own destiny, which seems to harmonize his body in a manner outside the linguistic manipulations of the Symbolic Order: "My body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires" (*D* 31). Here, words and gestures—precisely what was elided from his fantasy image of her—return as confirmation of his identity rather than a challenge to it. A suggestion of a mirror response is in this description (every movement of the girl generates a reflective movement in the boy) except that he, not Mangan's sister, has become the mirror image constructed relative to another. Under the guise of worshipping her image, he is worshipping his image—the imaginary stage mirror reflection of fusion and wholeness outside and previous to the Symbolic Order (the mythical fusion, certainty and oneness of what Lacan calls the Imaginary Order). Significantly, he cannot account for her importance to him in language: "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why)" (*D* 31). We see from this passage that he knows her name, yet he withholds it from the story, for to name her would be to make her equivalent to a word, and this would once more close himself off from the prespeech fusion and sense of oneness that lies beyond representation. Gabriel Conroy's early love letters exhibit this same fear that using a woman's name will murder what is beyond the sign that seems to unify him: "Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?" (*D* 214).

The overheard conversation of the shop girl—her display of desire beyond his representation of what the feminine is—subverts his fiction of Mangan's sister and would subvert his subjectivity as well if he did not reinterpret the real under the guise of self-enlightenment. At the conclusion of the story, he sees himself in order not to see that he is being seen and that his "self" is nothing but what he imagines the Other sees: "In the scopical field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way—on the side of things, there is the gaze that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed, in the Gospel, *They have eyes that they might not see*. That they might not see what? Precisely, that things are looking at them" (Lacan 1981a, 109). For the boy to know that the shop girl has glanced at him once or twice, he must be, at least as far as he is aware, staring at her steadily. But this time the girl's sporadic glance overmasters his steady gaze because he knows that she knows that he is looking at her. "This is the phantasy to be found in the Platonic perspective of an absolute being to whom is transferred the quality of being all-seeing. At the very level of the phenomenal experience of contemplation this all-seeing aspect is to be found in the satisfaction of a woman who knows that she is being looked at, on condition that one does not show her that one knows that she knows" (Lacan 1981a, 75). Mangan's sister presents a more teasing and exciting image to the boy because it does not occur to him that she knows he is looking at her, yet, as I have already argued, every shift of posture is, on her part, a conscious reaction to the effect of being gazed upon. Likewise, in an antinomic way, there is nothing erotic, nothing supportive of the myth of the "self" in the exchange of looks because she sees that he knows that she knows that he is looking at her. Neither can pose as an object of desire for the other because it is the structure of desire that is based on a lack in being, not the illusion of an object that will satisfy and complete them, that has been made visible by their exchange of looks. "If I go I will bring you something" the narrator says to Mangan's sister (*D* 32), and it is the fact that the object is unnameable that gives it an alluring status as the thing that will complete him. Once he is standing before items for sale at the bazaar, however, he is faced with a simple and tawdry commercial transaction; it is not only the shop girl's dutiful surveillance that unnerves him but also her sudden

demand that he say what he wants: “She asked me did I wish to buy anything” (*D* 35). Her realistic question, impossible to appropriate as a reflection of his own desire (he does not know what he wants), details his Real, and illusory, quest.

The advantage for the masculine subject of converting an individual woman into what Lacan calls the Woman—an image of femininity that does not exist—is that this image then operates (to extend the boy's analogy) as a chalice wherein the bread and wine of fragmented experience is converted into the body and blood of unified subjectivity. Accompanied by the sacred image of the Woman, the narrator is able to move through any scene, however variegated and threatening, without fear of dissolution. For the masculine subject, a woman becomes a symptom that helps ward off any discovery of how tenuous his subjectivity really is. Mangan's sister—somewhere beyond representation—plays the harp that is his body. If he did not imagine her, he could not believe in his masculine subjectivity as an instrument of certitude capable of endless harmony. The world is lost for the sake of the word. What is needed is possession of an object that will authenticate all other objects. The boy's quest for the Holy Grail is a search for what Lacan designates as the Phallus. It is not an anatomical object for several reasons—the primary one being that it does not exist. So rather than despair of finding it, the masculine subject embarks on a lifelong campaign of mistaking different objects for this primary signifier.

Indeed, when the subject looks for the Phallus, the search must result not in finding it or failing to find it (both alternatives lead toward psychosis) but in repeating the act of losing it. This repetition keeps alive the illusion that the Phallus exists and may yet be found again, and this illusion, in turn, creates a crucial effect on the masculine subject that is nothing less than the experience of consciousness. The mythical unity of this consciousness is always on the verge of being subverted by the unconscious, which exists not before it or underneath it but in tandem with it. Thus, the boy's spurious certitude is presented by Joyce as precariously balanced over an abyss of oblivion: “All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times” (*D* 31). The word love, repeated like a chant, wards off the danger that the other for whom the boy has constructed himself (Mangan's sister, who authenticates him) may be alien and dangerous. Because she confirms his unity, she is also uniquely capable of reminding him that he is permanently alienated into the otherness that exists in the gap between the word and the world. This impossible state of things that makes things possible is what Lacan calls desire.

Lacanian Desire, therefore, is essential and insatiable because it is the result of a fundamental lack-of-being that the subject consciously denies. The impossibility of satisfying desire actually permits the effect of subjectivity because it allows the subject to continue past each new object of desire as it inevitably proves fraudulent. The object of desire appears to frustrate the subject when, in fact, it contains within its structure the unbridgeable division that is always already present in the subject; the enigma of femininity, for example, merely reflects to the masculine subject the division that already exists within him. In patriarchal culture, an ideological world helps hide this fact and defines the feminine solely as that which is not masculine, as that negativity that authenticates masculine identity by embodying enigmatic anonymity. This same ideology relegates the female to an identity limbo where she is taught to mask her lack of identity to guarantee the spurious certitude of the masculine subject. The cultural praise she accrues for successfully doing this helps to mitigate the vertiginous effects of denying the problematics of her own sexual identity.

For Lacan, the Woman is a mythical species that, like Tinkerbell, does not exist beyond a masculine subject's belief in her. This imaginary being that confirms their fictional unity is then perceived by the masculine subject as either enchanting (Mangan's sister) or treacherous (the shop girl). Mangan's sister is enchanting in that she seems to promise wholeness only to the narrator, and the shop girl is treacherous in that she seems to offer wholeness to everyone but the narrator. From his displaced position as alienated observer at the Araby Bazaar, he witnesses the masquerade of femininity and sees how the masculine subjects participate in its construction (thus unconsciously directing the construction of themselves). He then loses faith in the Woman,

which simultaneously deconstructs the myth of himself and forces him to begin telling his story anew, this time as a blinded and humbled Samson rather than Sir Lancelot. Femininity is absence, or lack, for the narrator—a placeholder like zero in the numerical system of the boy's narrative—it can neither betray nor bestow anything. But a masculine subject is compelled to view it as always doing one thing or the other in order to continue believing in the fictional unity of his subjective consciousness. In other words, it is the subject that is fraudulent not the object of desire. Put in the context of “Araby,” it is the narrator who is fictional, not Mangan's sister. Both Mangan's sister and the shop girl exist in his narrative and beyond it by remaining nameless, yet some part of them (jouissance) subverts the narrator's representation of them; it is their unrepresented story that writes his story.

In Lacan's analogy about how the subject constructs himself, he describes the subject as attaching himself at various points to the existing Symbolic Order the way upholstery is anchored to the existing wooden frame of a chair. This gives shape to an otherwise shapeless chair, just as attaching one's self to the existing Symbolic Order gives identity to an otherwise fragmented subject. The buttons that secure the upholstery to the frame (Lacan calls these buttons *points de capitons*) are key signifiers that anchor the subject to the existing linguistic code. The subject does not know what the key signifiers mean; he only knows they imbue him with a sense of meaning. And it is this buttoning down of the self to the linguistic code that generates a sense of being. The linguistic code to which the subject buttons himself, such as the representation of the Woman, takes on the role of the Other. It presents the question to which the subject imagines himself to be the answer. But if it imbues him with certitude, it can just as easily invade him with incertitude. It can hold him together or tear him apart. Neither state is based in the Real, although each may be said to represent the two poles of the subject's reality. What is real is that the strategies and avenues of fulfillment that are available to a given subject are given by this code and in many ways predetermine what the subject is often fond of calling his destiny.

The narrator tells Mangan's sister that if he goes to Araby he will bring back something for her. She has not asked him to go, and she does not tell him what she wants. He wants to get her what she does not even know to ask for, hoping that she will then give him what she does not possess; this is the powerful masquerade around a non-relation that Lacan calls love. Mangan's sister, as an object of desire, causes the narrator to desire, but she has no significance for him. Whatever he might bring her from the fair, it will not be what she wants, but only what he imagines she wants. The image of Mangan's sister as the Woman, in its metaphorical function as a symptom, has linked the narrator's conscious and unconscious desires in such a way that unconscious fantasy is able to force its way into the signifying chain in a fervent quest to obtain something he cannot name for someone who has not asked for it.

The result is a complete shift in the boy's interests, away from everything that has been of interest in the past toward a quest for what the Other knows about who he is. But there is no Other of the Other (even though the Woman would be this Other of the Other if she existed). Once a woman is transformed into the representation of the Woman, the search for the knowledge in the Other that verifies the masculine subject's existence is made possible. But, on the other hand, this same transformation, although it authorizes the quest, also makes absolute the impossibility of the subject ever completing it. So those moments where the narrator murmurs incoherent prayers to the image of Mangan's sister allow him to “bear his chalice safely through a throng of foes” because his belief in her, although she does not exist, is sufficient to cover the reality that he does not exist either (that the presumed unity of his masculine subjectivity is a fiction). By linking the narrator's conscious and unconscious desire, the image of the Woman connects subject and system as a point de capiton, and this determines both the necessity of his quest and the certainty of its failure. One does not find, or fail to find, the Phallus; one repeats the act of failing to have it, which is then understood as having lost it. Only through narration can the boy misrecognize this scenario of repetition as his destiny.

Unable to acknowledge the impossibility of satisfaction that the structure of desire has forced upon him, the narrator quickly introduces an obstacle to his goal by saying he will bring her something. In this way, the

obstacle between him and what he takes to be the object of his desire will seem real and, therefore, surmountable rather than Real and, therefore, impossible to represent or overcome. He is caught in a structure in which the object of his desire becomes the signifier of his own impossibility. Every knight-in-armor, rather than face the debilitating nonrelation of the sexes, chooses to embark on a difficult and dangerous journey with an image of the Woman burning in his breast. The quest is a necessary obstacle, not an unfortunate one, on the interminable path to true love although it will be perceived as difficult and burdensome by the amorous knight. The male subject *must* go on a quest so that the inevitable failure to complete himself—to find the phallus—will seem to be the failure of the quest and not of the quest(ion) of his own subjectivity. In this way, the nonrelation of the sexes between the knight and his lady will be obscured by the erection of an impossible object (the Phallus). Put another way, by seeing femininity as an enigma, by seeing the desire of the Woman as inscrutably elsewhere, the knight is able to imagine a bridge over the unbridgeable division upon which he has founded the supposed unity of his subjective consciousness; the bridge will appear real as long as the Woman appears mythical. In short, the narrator of “Araby” has employed for himself the convention of courtly love that Lacan characterizes as “an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it. ... For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation” (1982b, 141).

Femininity is not an essence; it is a representation. As such, it is a constructed identity—constructed by the male subject—and the representation does not contain or account for female desire. He desires it—the representation—rather than her because the masquerade of femininity appears to him as a lack-in-being that he gratefully defines as not masculine. The Woman masquerades as feminine—as the Phallus—to reassure a man that she does not have it, but at the same time her masquerade proves that it must—somewhere—exist or how could she know to imitate it? Of course, she has learned to perform what he needs to see, not anything that actually is, and so the masculine and the feminine waltz around the nonrelation of the sexes with a two-step of mutual misrecognition. Lacan says, “It is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved. But she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one to whom she addresses her demand for love” (1982, 84). A woman thus desires the Phallus, and so a man struggles to appear as if he has it. She desires the ability to bestow on him the gift he demands of her so that he can feel that he has had it all along. The Phallus can only play its role when it is veiled because there is nothing behind the veil. The erection of meaning that it enjoins on the masculine subject involves the subject in constant slippage because what is meaningful always contains its own vanishing point. In short, meaning does not reflect the sexual order; it compensates for a supposed unity that is fictional. Courtly love—the boy's quest on behalf of Mangan's sister—elevates her to a place where her inaccessibility disguises his lack. Thus, she becomes a symptom for him that wards off his unconscious and ensures the consistency of his relation to the phallic term.⁷

The Woman shows in her masquerade of femininity what she does not have by pretending that she has it and, thus, becomes what he desires but at the price of having no way to pronounce the quest(ion) of her own desire. She serves for the narrator as a metaphor for the phallus and, thus, becomes for him a symptom that disguises his lack. As a symptom standing in the place of the Other, Mangan's sister represents for him the initial signifier upon which his divided subjectivity is based. She appears to answer the question of who he is and this allows his self-ordained quest to subsume all previous concerns: “I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play” (*D* 32). He has reinterpreted the Real to form a new reality, and the self-deprecating tone in this sentence will surface again at the close of the story when he does the same thing. The representation of femininity that the narrator worships is the only signifier that cannot signify anything. Because the image of Mangan's sister has been constructed to signify nothing, it can signify him.

In traveling to the Araby Bazaar, the boy boards a special train. People press against the doors in an attempt to enter, but they are pushed back and told that it is “a special train for the bazaar” (D 34). For the entire trip past “ruinous houses,” the boy remains “alone in the bare carriage.” At the end of the ride, the uniqueness of his journey persists as he steps out of the train on to “an improvised wooden platform” just recently constructed. Standing alone on the deserted platform, he sees in front of him “a large building which displayed the magical name.” All these details suggest that the boy sees his journey as traveling to someplace other than Dublin. It is different from anywhere; it is magical. The boy's fantastic hope for the place gives it a fairy tale quality. The tawdry building seems enchanted to him only because of an enormous act of faith on his part. Its status as magical is as tenuous as the fantastic unity of his subjective consciousness. The magical power of symbolization begins when a child realizes something is missing. The power of language to evoke what is not present depends on the feeling that something is lacking. His later realization that the bazaar is a commercial sham, perpetrated on the naïve for profit, will destroy the place as symbol but will have no effect on the powerful dynamic of symbolization. The narrator experiences his sexual awakening as the advent of unity, whereas Joyce's story of the presence of Mangan's sister outside the confines of the boy's narrative gives an opposite account of sexuality based solely on its divisions (division of the subject, division between subjects). It is her representation in the boy's narrative as the Woman and her absence from it as *a* woman that makes his story of himself possible. “Araby” is not about the loss or gain of this or that object, it is about the impossible structure of desire for both the masculine and feminine subjects.

The boy on the improvised platform sees displayed before him what is described as “the magical name” rather than the word “Araby.” Like Mangan's sister, the bazaar implies something beyond what can be named or represented. What the narrator hopes he will see is the world before it has been crossed through by the word. The actual bazaar is irrelevant; in his own mind, he has traveled beyond time and space to the land of the Other, authorized to do so by a woman who, as The Woman, represents this land. This magical name does not exist anymore than she does. He hopes to discover the lost object that would end the primacy of the signifier over his subjectivity. He presumes she must desire this most precious of all signifiers because it was her appearance to him as lack—as feminine—that convinced him of the existence of a Holy Grail that could authenticate who he is. The magical bazaar could return him to the imaginary pristine duality of the mirror stage before he seized the false scepter of language and began to rule a world within the world where words are always ruling him (the boy, like Martha Clifford in *Ulysses*, does not like “that other world”).

The Araby Bazaar is magical for the boy because he believes it will be a place beyond mere representation where the lost object he needs to complete himself will be found. This object is not hidden in a geometrical or an anatomical space; if that were so, he would have found it long ago. It is not hidden at all; it is always elsewhere “in” a symbolic structure that can only be perceived in its effect. In taking upon himself her pilgrimage, he is inevitably drawn into becoming the object of her desire, even as he tries to make her subject to his desire. Like the minister in Poe's story “The Purloined Letter,” which Lacan analyzed, the narrator of “Araby” appears to be in control while he observes Mangan's sister; he understands everything she does relative to himself. But when he is displaced to her position at the close of the story, suddenly he demonstrates the traits of femininity (passivity and self-effacement) that he had previously attributed to her (likewise, after the minister steals the letter from the queen, he assumes her position, passively waiting for someone to steal it from him). The structural shift at the close of “Araby” makes the point that femininity and masculinity are effects of one's position in the Symbolic Order rather than inherently biological. Only the presence or absence of the phallus marks the distinction between the two positions. Whoever pretends to possess the Phallus is placed under the banner “feminine” and whoever struggles to represent it lines up under the banner “masculine” (which is why Lacan defines a man as someone who finds himself male without knowing what to do about it).

In front of the booth displaying the vases, the narrator witnesses another woman masquerading with two men as feminine in the sexual waltz of nonrelation; she has said something that the men want to possess. Curiously, they do not repeat what she has said (do not put it into words) but only insist that she has expressed

it, each man calling on the other one to verify this, which, as one can see by now, is no verification at all. The boy is suddenly observing people who believe themselves to be unseen. In this new shift of position, he witnesses a scene of flirtation from which he is absent. In seeing the anonymous shop girl flirting with the two men—in seeing her looking at them—he is, in effect, seeing the earlier version of himself being watched when he had believed himself to be unseen. As Lacan makes clear, the Symbolic Order constitutes the subject, and if the subject's position within this order shifts, then the orientation of his subjectivity, which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier, will shift as well (1988c, 29). By watching and overhearing the girl and the two men, he views the earlier construct of his subjectivity, now revealed as imaginary, which, at the moment the quest began, he took to be himself. The look of Mangan's sister, repressed at that time for the sake of a seamless narrative, returns. The Real, which is the endless return of the moment of the subject's own impossibility, threatens to break through and show the fabric of his story to be no more complete than a complex weave that is made up of as many unconscious gaps as it is of conscious threads.

But this gap in subjectivity—what Lacan calls *aphanisis*—is equally present in his earlier conversation with Mangan's sister. When she asks him if he is going to the bazaar, he hears her saying, “Will you go and bring something back,” thus transforming her question into his quest. Were he to tell her she has said this, she would have to respond, like the shop girl, “I never said such a thing!” What follows her question is, to my reading, the most significant sentence in the story: “I forget whether I answered yes or no.” What a strange ellipsis in the narration of his story. He is not in doubt about anything else he has narrated up to this point. He forgets *what* he answers because he wishes to pose *as* the answer. At the moment the quest is inaugurated, the boy as subject (as question) disappears. He loses his authority at the precise moment she authorizes his quest. Later in his narration, as the meaningful dimension of the quest starts to fade, the boy's sense of his own subjectivity once more restricts him to the self-conscious and the trivial rather than the unified and heroic: “Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flower tea-sets. ... I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real” (*D* 35).

The narrator's consciousness flickers back and forth between these two moments of forgetfulness that mark the beginning and end of his quest. The two moments are threaded together by various acts of interpretation that are motivated by desire (indeed, Lacan says interpretation operates in the same manner as desire) and controlled by language. The quest, which he had hoped would untie the knot of the Symbolic Order, only succeeds in repeating the act of tying it. The boy's quest, which outlines the structure of desire, is impossible. He sets out to find the phallus/chalice because the desire of Mangan's sister, which he has appropriated as his desire, convinces him that it must exist and that it is the thing he requires to complete himself. What sets the quest in motion is the discovery that she lacks something. But in order for her to verify that he is something (masculine), she must be seen as nothing, (feminine). Put most simply, the divided structure that constitutes the narrator's subjectivity is inevitably reproduced in what becomes the unattainable object of his desire.

The conversation of the woman and the two men revolves around the issue of whether or not she has *said* something. “O, I never said such a thing!” the woman begins. “O, but you did!” one man counters. “O, but I didn't,” she responds in perfect counterpoint. “Didn't she say that?” one man says to the other. “Yes. I heard her,” he replies. “O, there's a ... fib!” says the woman. Once more, one sees that it is the woman's desire that is unspoken. What has she said? The men keep her in a posture of negativity that allows them to affirm one another. (“Didn't she say that?” “Yes. I heard her.”) There is another significant ellipsis when she says: “O, there's a ... fib!” (*D* 35). What word does she veer away from? We cannot know, but certainly the word *lie* is a strong possibility. A fib is a lie, but it is a lie about something that is trivial in substance or significance. What has been made trivial (and she participates in this as part of the masquerade of femininity) is the substance of her desire. She is locked into a continual masquerade of absence that confirms their presence. In this conversation she is, in her essence, not all. The men repress the fact of her desire—her *jouissance*—by representing it themselves. Once more the unspeakable dictates what gets spoken in a Maypole dance around the nonexistent Phallus. “On the one hand,” Lacan says, “the woman becomes, or is produced, precisely as

what he is not ... and on the other, as what he has to renounce, that is, *jouissance*" (1982b, 49). The men reserve for themselves the right to interpret, the woman supports that right by posing as enigmatic. The content of her statement—what she actually said—is not relevant, and this allows their narrative to become so.⁸

What the narrator wishes to find at the Araby Bazaar is something that will not set him forth on another repetition or shift him into a new register of signification that requires a fresh act of faith about his subjectivity. What he yearns for is an ending—the discovery of certitude beyond the forever shifting signifiers of language. Were he to find the Holy Grail/Phallus, his subjectivity would seem like a chalice that could neither be spilled nor declared empty. In beginning his search for what Mangan's sister lacks, for what she means, he has begun a search for what *he* means. But interpretation does not lead to knowledge (the two men are not interested in what the shop girl has actually said), it leads to the point where knowledge stumbles over the Woman. Her *jouissance* is an area of excess that is supplementary to male desire, not complementary to it, and knowledge, as it comes to the male subject, is merely the organized renunciation of *jouissance*. Most commentators on "Araby" agree that, by the end of the story, the narrator has learned something about himself. Yes, but this knowledge will become the new obstacle he will place between himself and the objects of his desire. It is not frustration of a particular desire of the narrator that occurs in this story—after all, he is never able to say what he wants—rather it is to use Lacan's phrase, "frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated and which the more it is elaborated, the more profound the alienation from its *jouissance* becomes for the subject" (1981b, 11).

Significantly, the boy's famous closing insight about himself is not presented in terms of looking inward but in terms of seeing himself: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (*D* 35). Far from putting an end to the myth of himself, he inaugurates a new fiction of what he imagines the gaze of the Other sees, which he has now learned must be who he is *really*. He reinterprets the Real, denigrates his earlier interpretation, and presents his new interpretation as the reality that was behind the appearances all along. But insight is just another guess at what it is the Other sees. The subject responds anew to the itinerary of the signifier in a manner that incorporates its directives while still preserving the subject's illusion of an autonomous identity and a satiable desire. "Epiphanic light," Ragland-Sullivan has stated in a recent overview of Joyce and Lacan, "is the return of the void into the Real of phallic meaning, where the void shows the place of division and the 'truth' of loss around which humans elaborate lives" (1988, 122). Elaborating on this, I would say the Joycean epiphany is the imaginary light that staves off Real darkness. The subject imagines himself to make the world real. In his new identity, the narrator is "derided by vanity." To be derided is to be laughed at contemptuously, to be subjected to ridicule. But how much better it is to be subjected to ridicule than not to be a subject at all. Who would not consent to wear a mask if the alternative was to have no face at all? Driven by vanity? The narrator will continue to be so driven. A vanity is a piece of furniture where a woman puts on her makeup, when she becomes a representation of femininity, when she is encouraged by the mirror to abandon the question of who she is and imagine herself instead as something that initiates a man's quest. At her vanity, a woman becomes the Woman; she masquerades as lack so the man can masquerade as completeness. Her vanity protects him from knowledge of his emptiness, that is, of *his* vanity. The two types of vanity are the two sides of the division over which he builds a bridge from one moment of forgetfulness to the next.

The necessity of the boy's humiliation, which he presents to himself as "knowledge," is certainly a painful realization, but it is one that protects him from realizing the greater pain of psychic and symbolic castration. Not perceiving his own castration, he feels free to act again, to set another scene where he will imagine himself as seeing a woman while remaining unseen. He does not hear the signifier that Lacan gives voice to as follows: "'You think you act when I stir you at the mercy of the bonds through which I knot your desires. Thus do they grow in force and multiply in objects, bringing you back to the fragmentation of your shattered childhood'" (Lacan 1988c, 52). In his final observation of himself, the boy's discovery of himself is, in fact, yet another discovery of who he is not. In telling readers who he is now, he is not lying, only telling a fib.

1. Harry Stone, to cite one example, is comfortable declaring that “all women, for Joyce, are Eves: they tempt and they betray” (1965, 392). Stone, like many male critics of the sixties and seventies, shows the same self-indulgent perspective on women as the narrator of “Araby,” but I do not think this does justice to the complexity of Joyce's perspective.
2. Bernard Benstock writes: “Of all the fierce winds of controversy surrounding Joyce the most volatile remains that of the impact of the theories of Jacques Lacan” (1988b, 16). My approach here is informed by Lacanian theory, but my primary purpose is to problematize Joyce's representation of Mangan's sister and show it to be far more subtle than the perspective of the narrator.
3. As Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains, “Lacan maintained that mind is not a unity; personal reality is built up by structures, effects, and the fragments of perceived fragmentations. Reality, therefore, is to be assessed in details, allusions and wisps of meaning” (1986, 187). The Real is what lies beyond representation; although it cannot be directly apprehended, it is always a threat to the subject's reality.
4. As Lacan explains, “When any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as not all that they are placed within the phallic function ... except that The woman can only be written with The crossed through. ... There is no such thing as The woman since of her essence ... she is not all” (1982, 144).
5. Later in this same chapter, Devlin makes the general point, which I am also making in a more specific way, that “the critical complaint that Joyce's women are male-defined seems to me one-sided” (1988, 143).
6. Devlin says of Bloom's attitude toward Gerty McDowell, “He does not envision the female eye as being possibly prurient, sexually intrusive, as being the organ of kinetic stimulation, as a compromising eye that secretly enjoys naughty sights” (1988, 137).
7. This is also how a woman comes to be seen as standing in the place of the Other and believed by the man to guarantee the reality of all his fantasies about himself and assure him of the authenticity of his masculine sexuality.
8. In a similar dynamic, one never sees the contents of the letter that changes hands in Poe's story. Because there is no certain signified, the signifier speaks through the subject.

Criticism: Margot Norris (essay date 1995)

SOURCE: “Blind Streets and Seeing Horses: Araby's Dim Glass Revisited,” in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Summer, 1995, pp. 309–18.

[In the following essay, Norris explores stylistic elements of “Araby,” particularly the narrative voice in the story.]

Joyce's “Araby” not only draws attention to its conspicuous poetic language: it performatively offers the beauty of its art as compensation to the thematized frustrations of the story. The little boy whose heart is broken by a city “hostile to romance,” transmutes his grief into a romance of language. Joyce, whose *Dubliners* stories tend to bear rhetorical titles, makes of “Araby” a rhetorical bazaar that outstrips in poetic exoticism the extravagant promise of the empty and sterile commercial confection that so disappoints the child. In an early essay on *Dubliners*, Frank O'Connor writes of “Araby,” “This is using words as they had not been used before in English, except by Pater—not to describe an experience, but so far as possible to duplicate it. Not even perhaps to duplicate it so much as to replace it by a combination of images—a rhetorician's dream, if you like, but Joyce was a student of rhetoric: (20). I construe this gesture of stylistic virtuosity less as an exercise in aestheticism than as a self-critical performance. The story's narrative performance of offering art as balm to heal the anguish of a modern city's paralysis enacts the quintessential Modernistic practice repeated in Eliot's “Waste Land” of turning to poetry for modern spiritual redemption. But by evoking literary

traditions consonant with its chivalric preoccupations and temper, “Araby” intertextualizes itself with diverse nineteenth century medievalisms¹ whose archaic and mannered aestheticism Modernism generally abjures. To resolve this paradox of “Araby”’s incongruent Romantic appeal—a problem that *Portrait* criticism also confronts and resolves as stylistic imitation, parody, or ironic pastiche—I intend to treat the story’s peculiar language as a multi-valenced textual performance: a self-incriminating narration whose rhetorical aims the text encapsulates and subjects to an immanent critique. This critique anticipates the later social criticism of aestheticism by Herbert Marcuse, and particularly his concept of “affirmative culture”—a notion recently used by Peter Buerger to criticize the self-contradiction in which Modernism implicates art—“art thus stabilizes the very social conditions against which it protests” (7). But I will argue that “Araby” critiques affirmative culture rather than abets it, and that the story destabilizes its own compensatory gesture by emptying its own rhetoric to restore it to the idiomatic, “marketplace” sense of “rhetoric” as a figure for elaborate but insubstantial speech. “Araby” the story, the ornate but empty narration, doubles “Araby,” the ornate but empty bazaar. “If I go ... I will bring you something” (32), the boy promises Mangan’s sister, but he returns empty-handed—except for the story of their double, encapsulated, frustration. “Araby,” the story, offers readers a similar rhetorical empty-handedness.

I plan to track the story’s compensatory strategy—its production of artful language to supplement unsatisfied desire—through a set of ontological operations by which the narrative consciousness attempts to constitute itself as a subject. “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity” (35). The story’s closing moral turns on itself by concluding with a parabolic maneuver, by having the narrative consciousness turn itself into an allegorical figure, “a symbol of” something, as Gabriel Conroy might put it. The boy has been transformed by his own narrative voice into a figure of fable, of the mirrored emptiness that is *Vanitas*. “Araby” therefore doubles its thematic preoccupation with the chivalric quest implicit in its famous trope of the imperiled Grail (“I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes” [31]) by further formally cloaking itself in the allegorical and parabolic rhetoric of chivalric literature. The question is whether the closing self-allegorization constitutes an epiphany²—a moment of illuminated enlightenment or transcendent anagnorisis—or whether the parabolic gesture enfolds other philosophical maneuvers within the story that offer knowledge and insight as reversible or retractable: the ocular voyeurism that turns upon itself as a “gaze;” the antonomasia of romance and desire that ricochets as a self-naming of its own failure; mythification oscillating with demythification. The reader confronts a variety of hermeneutical options at the end of the story—ranging from “straight” acceptance of the boy’s self-estimation, to sympathy with the idealist’s victimization by vulgar philistinism, to critique of the narrator’s exploitations of the juvenile experience by turning it into an aestheticized social parable.

The curious figure of the reflective darkness (“Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself”) of an extinguished dream (“the light was out”), suggests that this story will be illuminated by blindness, and that the boy who finds emptiness in “Araby,” the figure of romance, is in turn found empty, a personification rather than a person, by the story. This strange locution at the story’s end, that has the darkened gallery of “Araby” appear to “see” the boy in a way that lets him see himself, as though it were a dark mirror catching him in its eye, recapitulates the strange topopoeia of the story’s opening, where streets are personified as “blind” and houses as “seeing.” This topographia frames the narration in a way that sets it up for a chiasmus: the story that opens with the ‘real’ estate of North Richmond Street closes with its antipode of the ‘unreal’ estate of “Araby”—but only after the two places have, as it were, traded places. What makes the crossing over possible is that “Araby,” the name of a longing for romance displaced onto a mythologized Oriental geography, suppresses the mediation of commerce and conceals the operations by which the fantasy of an exoticized and seductive East is a commercial fabrication produced by that realm the boy finds “most hostile to romance”—the marketplace. Commerce produces not only the trinkets and commodities the boy does not want, the vases and tea sets he spurns, and the parcels he bears like an irksome cross while shopping with his aunt every Saturday night. Commerce also produces fantasy and magic through language, “The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me” (32). The narration of “Araby” is presumably neither a commodity, or a charity, like the ambiguously configured

bazaar in the story.³ But it resorts to the same power of language, the power to aestheticize and glamorize what is common and mean (“the magical name”), that the operation of advertising borrows from poetry. The narrative voice of “Araby,” with its gift for personification, could easily be that of Little Chandler, or rather “T. Malone Chandler,” as he Celticizes himself—

As he crossed Grattan Bridge he looked down the river towards the lower quays and pitied the poor stunted houses. They seemed to him a band of tramps, huddled together along the river-banks, their old coats covered with dust and soot, stupefied by the panorama of sunset and waiting for the first chill of night to bid them arise, shake themselves and begone. He wondered whether he could write a poem to express his idea.

(73)

The “Celtic note” of wistful sadness to which Chandler calculates to aspire (“The English critics, perhaps, would recognise him as one of the Celtic school by reason of the melancholy tone” [74]) can also be heard in the lapses into pathetic fallacy in “Araby” (“the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns” [30]).

But the personifications of place in “Araby” transcend Little Chandler's affectations because of the complex temperamental and moral intersubjectivities the narration establishes between the boy and places of his habitation and imagination. North Richmond Street is introduced as blind, mute (“a quiet street”), with emptiness inside (“An uninhabited house ... stood at the blind end” [29])—a proleptic figure of the boy at the end of the story. Much like the story with its confession of solipsistic interiority, the houses on North Richmond Street engage in both sober introspection (“conscious of decent lives within them”) and discreet censoriousness (“gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces”). The story's solipsism and insularity is figured by the opening topography of North Richmond Street as “blind,” as a cul de sac and dead end from which escape is baffled. The slippage of meaning that leads that figure of the “blind” from spatial to ocular closure, links the street, and its houses with their virtual hermetic seals, to the larger thematics of closed economies in which exchange, and communication, is doomed to recirculation. The boy's house—while not clearly identical with the uninhabited house at the end of the blind street—is figured as an enclosure of negativity, of death, waste rooms, waste papers, waste people and waste lives. The sealed rooms—“musty from having been long enclosed”—circulate as little air as the rusty bicycle pump abandoned in the garden. They in turn mirror that figure of closed economy: Mrs Mercer, the pawnbroker's widow, who extends her late husband's business of recycling used goods to her philanthropy (“collected used stamps for some pious purpose” [33]), and to her communication (“I had to endure the gossip”). Herself constructed like a closed system, Mrs Mercer, not surprisingly, feels herself endangered by fresh air (“the night air was bad for her”). The story's allusions to baffled pneumatic circulation itself circulates verbal bafflements, like an impaired pentecostal pneuma or wind, from other *Dubliners* stories (“one of them new-fangled carriages ... them with the rheumatic wheels” [17]).

The slippage of “blind” continues to recirculate through the narration's tropological system. The narration describes the boy's voyeurism of Mangan's sister by slipping further meaning off the protective screen that is called a “blind,” onto its meaning as an ocular shelter used by hunters to conceal or camouflage them from their prey (“The blind was pulled down ... so that I could not be seen” [30]). This figurative transformation of the boy's house into a version of a duck or deer ‘blind’ is quite congruent with the boy's subsequent activity of essentially ‘stalking’ the girl, who is described as a “brown figure,” a deer (or dear):

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her.

Visually, the boy's voyeurism enacts a curious visual encapsulation that we might miss were it not for the introductory image of the 'seeing' houses. The nearly closed blind, with its slit for peeping, functions like an eyelid closed but for a slit—transforming the front parlor into an eye that harbors the peeping boy. The boy's own ocular gesture—"I kept her brown figure always in my eye"—is thus doubled, as the 'seeing' house keeps the boy in its eye. This strange figuration has complex ontological implications since an eye cannot see itself (except as mirrored or reflected, that is, as some other eye would see it). The boy in his hunter's "blind" thus looks out from a blind spot, what Jacques Lacan has termed a "scotoma." The implication of the boy doing his seeing from the site of his blind spot, is that he cannot see himself, cannot see himself as a voyeur or a stalker, for example, since he sees himself only as a worshiper or a lover. Unlike Stephen, whose peeping at girls or women may have earned him the threat of ocular extinction—"the eagles will come and pull out his eyes" (8)—this boy's eyes merely burn in anguish and anger at seeing his own solipsism.

My evocation of predatory images of the hunter emerging from a 'blind' to stalk his prey are intended to impugn the boy not for malignancy—since he clearly intends the girl no harm—but for the unwitting or blind psychological oppression that obsessives, including obsessive lovers, may inflict on their objects of desire. My intention is to complicate idealistic readings of the love story of "Araby"—"Palpably and poignantly a story of adolescent love, 'Araby' rises to this still larger representation, of subjective division under the clash between the idealist's discriminating ardor and adverse insuperable circumstance" (Beck 106)—by exploring the maimed discourse produced by the boy's scotoma, his inability to see himself as the girl, for instance, might see him. Mangan's sister, whose name is both familiar and seductive to the narrator—"yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood" (30)—is nonetheless antonomastically displaced onto the rowdy boy who is her brother, and the rowdy poet ("between the drunkard and opium-eater"), who serves as her eponym.⁴ Mangan's sister has difficulty in the story extricating herself as a person or a subject from the boy's image or imago of her because the narrative voice, like the boy, imagines itself as safe in its blind—able to peep and catch fleeting and fragmentary glimpses of her without having to imagine her as peeping back, and catching the voyeuristic boy, and the voyeuristic narration, in her own 'gaze.' Indeed, her world of peers organizes itself into such a peerage of boys peering at the girl from the shadows, as she peers for them in vain—"Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street" (30).

As much as imagined "symbol of" something as Gretta Conroy on the stair, Mangan's sister is to the boy mute, blind, and empty, a cut-up fetish apprehended chiefly in metonymic parts as a rope of hair, a silver bracelet, a white curve of neck, an illuminated hand, a white border of petticoat. Her brown figure, like the somber brown houses on her street, is never interiorized or furnished with the thought and feeling that would make her come to life. The narration (like the boy) never stops to wonder whether the girl knows that she is followed every morning, or to contemplate how her knowledge—ensured by the boy's passing her to let her know he has been walking behind her—makes her feel. Does she suspect she is being watched through the slit in the blind? Does she recognize herself as an object of obsession—like Reggie Wylie, who may have stopped riding his bicycle in front of Gerty MacDowell's garden to escape her infatuation? Or does the boy's strange behavior play music on her body, as hers does on his? These questions—which might have encompassed the function of her 'gaze,' her looking back and keeping the boy, and his narration, in her own eye—are never raised by a narration whose blind spots and solipsisms mirror the closed psychic system of the boy.

The subjectivity of the girl can be imagined at all, even if only extratextually, because she speaks. When Mangan's sister speaks, her speech is like a startling irruption in the boy's fantasy, and in the narration. He had dreamed of how it might be if he spoke to her—"I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration" (31)—but he did not dream that she would speak to him. Her subjectivity, her feelings, never enter into his fevered imaginings. Thus it is startling when she does speak directly to him, the more so because in her inaugural speech, she announces to him her desire.

Indeed, she gives her desire a name—“*Araby* ... It would be a splendid bazaar, she said; she would love to go” (31). In naming Araby as her desire, Mangan's sister appears to be speaking the extratextual fullness of her own name, as though she explicated and amplified her own magical name by endowing it with the interiority of her own desire. Joyce described James Clarence Mangan as a fabulist of Araby—“The lore of many lands goes with him always, eastern tales and memory of curiously printed medieval books which have rapt him out of his time” (CW 77)—with spiritual kinship to the fictional girl who bears his name. Mangan's sister, then, may be as much a romantic as the boy, although her desire is so thoroughly ingested and internalized by him that it becomes utterly expropriated from her. His gesture in embracing her desire and its name exoticizes her image—“The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me” (32)—without leading him to her interiority, her feeling and intentions in calling to him the magical name.

Neither the boy, nor the narrative voice, wonders about her overture, which, unexplained, nonetheless issues a series of hermeneutical prods to the reader's speculation. Is the girl's convent retreat—like Stephen's in *Portrait*—scheduled to preempt and suppress sexual feeling in pubescent girls? Does the girl, whose silver bracelet betokens small vanities, resent (“It's well for you, she said” [32]) the Church displacing her dreams and scenes of romantic opulence and exotic splendor with impending puritanical strictures and punitive threats? Knowing that one of the neighborhood boys has been watching and following her, does she determine to initiate a conversation that she knows will serve as a romantic provocation? And what happens when the story ends? Does the boy return without a gift, without a romantic story to tell her, without a reciprocal speech of desire—or any speech? Will she neurotically attach herself to the memory of his unrenewed childish devotion as Gerty MacDowell does to Reggie Wylie (“He called her little one in a strangely husky voice and snatched a half kiss [the first!]” [13.203]), or as Gretta Conroy does to Michael Furey? This speculative retrieval of the girl's subjectivity and interiority rips the narration open, and would let fresh and stirring hermeneutical air circulate through our reading of the story's suffocating idealism if the text would let us escape its solipsistic enclosures. But as it is, the interiority of Mangan's sister is consigned to the fate of the brown houses on her street—destined to be furnished, perhaps during her convent retreats, with the leavings of dead priests (“He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister” [29]). Judging from what we know of his house—that some of the “waste rooms ... littered with old useless papers” were no more than giant wastepaper baskets—his gift seems a depressing and moribund legacy for any sister.

Yet the story does contain some apertures that would allow circulation along ‘flaring’ routes (“We walked through the flaring streets” [31]). Children's play and the marketplace are the two such open social systems that could allow bodies, activities, communication, and culture to circulate. The streets come alive with the noise in the street that is Stephen's Blakean god, when the Christian Brothers' School sets the boys free, or when the drunken men, bargaining women, cursing laborers, and nasal street singers teem over the shopping district on Saturday night. But the boy's temperament and ideology repeatedly repudiate these active social spaces, and his repulsion by the quotidian, by mass or crowd activities like children's play or the teeming marketplace figured as a “throng of foes” (31), assimilates the boy's values to High Modernist ideology—the Arnoldian recoil from mass culture that surfaces in the aestheticist elitisms of Eliot and Pound. Critics too, consequently, tend to embrace these repudiations of the quotidian as the enemy of romance, without attending their possible interrogation or critique by the text. The boy, attracted to the Orientalism of “Araby,” fails to recognize in the Dublin street life the colorful gestures and music of an indigenous bazaar, more spontaneous in its diverse cultural productions (“the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you* about O'Donovan Rossa,⁵ or a ballad about the troubles in our native land” [31]) than the francophonic affectations of the staged commercial simulacrum, the *Café Chantant* (Gifford cites the Baedeker description of Paris coffeehouses as “a cut below the music halls” [48]) he finds in “Araby,” closed, its only music the fall of coins on the salver to announce its mercenary character. But the boy is clearly attuned to a different music, perhaps the lure of the uncited but silently glossed *Magic Flute* of Mozart which is, unquestionably, ‘some Freemason affair’ (“I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped

it was not some Freemason affair” [32]). The opera, with its Eastern occultism, its romantic quest, and trial by gauntlet of spirits, could serve as an analogue for the boy's imagination, for the “dreams of delight” promised by the theme song (“I’ll sing thee songs of Araby”) of the historical “Grand Oriental Fête” held to benefit the Jervis Street Hospital in May of 1894. We are left to imagine what songs were sounded, as the boy “went from room to room singing” (33) through the “cold empty gloomy rooms” of his house, on the afternoon of the bazaar.

The boy and narrator display far greater ambivalence toward the liberative potential of children's play, although the boy eventually repudiates that too, once he falls under the spell of eastern enchantment. The theme of romance is introduced circuitously, along the detour of old books and old gardens, as a slip along the verbal gloss of leaves, from yellow book leaves to green plant leaves, makes possible the transition from the musty, hermetically sealed house to the verdant garden and its mysteriously alive environs. Narratively, the yellow leaves of the dead priest's chivalric books leave their pages to drink in rain that lets them come to life again as “the dark dripping gardens redolent with living odours and resonant with the living music of live creatures—“the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness” (30). The narrator replaces, in the suppler and more scrupulous prose of this lovely description, the florid and histrionic sentiment elided when the narration cuts short the uncle's impending recitation of Caroline Norton's *The Arab's Farewell to His Steed* (“The stranger hath thy bridle-rein, thy master hath his gold;—Fleet-limbed and beautiful, farewell!—thou’rt sold, my steed, thou’art sold!” [Gifford 47]). The children's play in the winter evenings is explicitly described as an exposure to fresh air, as a stimulus to circulation—“The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed” (30). Conflict contributes to that stimulation—“we ran the gantlet of the rough tribes from the cottages” (30)—both in neighborhood play in the marketplace where the boy and his aunt run a gauntlet again, “I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes” (31). This “mimic warfare,” as it is called in “An Encounter” takes on the medievalistic colorations of the Crusades, with the gauntlet of “rough tribes” of (presumably) low-bred children from the working-class cottages representing some sort of infidels. But the boy's chivalric fascination with Mangan's sister strips the meaning of gauntlet, back to gantlet, to its archaic armorial form as a mail or metal glove, a rigid but protective barrier to touch or human contact. Thus the boy's adoration is figured in the solipsism implicit in the prayerful gesture—“I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times” (31)—that has him touch and speak to himself rather than to his beloved. Invoking the Grail legend a number of years before Eliot in “The Waste Land,” the boy's romantic pilgrimage ends in a dark and silent hall likened to “a church after a service”—not unlike Eliot's ruined Chapel Perilous, “There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home” (l. 389).

Is the story or narration of “Araby” the very thing the boy was actually seeking: not a gift for the girl but a gift of idealism and spiritual healing for himself—a modernist poetry as Grail to redeem the paralytic philistinism of a moribund European capital? Does the narrator compensate the boy that is his disenchanting self, for having found the dream of romance empty, by rebuilding it in the form of a quest narrative in which he is re-aestheticized and re-idealized, the sensitive young man transformed into knight errant? Where does such a project leave Mangan's sister, except as a set of synecdochic (“Araby”) and metonymic images? What did the boy become, or what other identities implicitly cohabit his function as a poetic storyteller? Is he a romantic academic like Gabriel Conroy, or an intellectual celibate, like Mr Duffy, or a poet manqué like Little Chandler, or a priest? If “Araby” has become another version of the dead priest's chivalric books with their yellow leaves, an archaic and decadent aestheticism that will inspire other idealistic young boys—our own students, perhaps—to indulge their nostalgia for the solipsistic self-absorptions of first-love—then is it not itself a sort of dead priest's leavings? Each of these functions replicates the closed circuit of communication and exchange that thematizes the spiritual paralysis in this story less as a figure of motor cessation than as a pneuma of stale and trapped air. The boy's closing confession of vanity, which the narrative urges us to disbelieve, becomes the final rhetorical gesture of empty doubling: the creation of a moral fable with a specious moral.

Notes

1. See R. B. Kershner's extensive discussion of the dead priest's discarded books—especially Sir Walter Scott's *The Abbot*—and their curious gloss on the adventures of the boy in “Araby.” “Scott's novel is peculiarly double-voiced; the ideology of nineteenth-century realism and Evangelical admonishment coexists uneasily with romantic ideology, so that Child Roland emerges as a figure both farcical and heroic, both chastened and victorious. The boy of ‘Araby,’ unfortunately, is trapped in a very different sort of narrative, where the idealism that is Roland's saving grace is exactly the quality responsible for the Irish boy's failure” (54).
2. Warren Beck, who delicately explores “Araby” as an adolescent love story, traces its movement “through self determining events to self-realization in a Joycean epiphany” (96) although he argues that the boy does not yet appreciate what he learns. “In ‘Araby’ the boy has been frustrated by externality, in the guises of the tardy drunken uncle and a slow train, but he is more lastingly grieved by discovery of a universal ineradicable flaw, the gap between idealization and its confined operation. This also is epiphany, but at first sight almost too appalling for him” (109).
3. The most detailed account of the 1894 Whitsuntide Araby bazaar to benefit the Catholic Jervis Street Hospital can be found in Donald Torchiana's *Backgrounds for Joyce's Dubliners* (56–60). But the charity function of the bazaar is elided in the story—suggesting that neither of the children, the boy or Mangan's sister, nor the boy's aunt (she “hoped it was not some Freemson affair” [32]) or uncle, are aware of this purpose. As a result, the thematic, symbolic, and ironic possibilities of “charity” as the boy's destination or purpose are difficult to determine, even in the context of a full extratextual history—which includes disreputable exploitations (“a number of people who ought to be respectable, with roulette tables, which they ran for the benefit, not of the hospital but of their own pockets” [quoted from the *Irish Times* by Torchiana 57]).
4. Gifford quotes two stanzas from one of James Clarence Mangan's most popular poems, “Dark Rosaleen.” This poem's rhetoric of solipsistic address, that negates the interlocutory function of the woman who figurates the poet's inspiration, could serve as a model for the boy's adoration in “Araby.”
5. The “come-all-you” about O'Donovan Rossa that the boy consigns to the throng of foes who threaten his chalice, might figure another ‘breath of fresh air,’ a topical and improvised art designed for spontaneous and mass circulation, to stand in contrast to archaic chivalric books of the sort that shape the boy's imagination and the narrator's rhetoric. The images and lore associated with Donovan—including dynamite (he was known as “Dynamite Rossa”) and the circulation of exile (he was imprisoned, exiled to the United States, but returned to Ireland in 1891)—also make him a foil to the entrapped figures of the story.

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Criticism: Robert Fuhrel (essay date 1998)

SOURCE: "The Quest of Joyce and O'Connor in 'Araby' and 'The Man of the House,'" in *Frank O'Connor: New Perspectives*, edited by Robert C. Evans and Richard Harp, Locust Hill Press, 1998, 173–87.

[In the following essay, Fuhrel discusses the motif of the quest in Frank O'Connor's "The Man of the House" and Joyce's "Araby" and contrasts the setting, tone, point of view, and themes of the two stories.]

A young man narrates a tale about a time when, as a boy, old enough to leave the house and travel some distance by himself but innocent in matters of the heart, he had created an imaginary world in which he was a hero. Focusing on everyday matters is a continual problem for the boy. Desiring to please an older female, he recalls having traveled in quest of something for this lady. He reaches his destination and meets another woman, but he is sadly disappointed. Nothing turns out as he had imagined; as a result, his views of the world and himself significantly change. Though he fails to bring back anything for the woman, he has taken an important step toward maturity.

A reader familiar with the work of James Joyce immediately recognizes this summary of "Araby," a story in *Dubliners*. Yet the motif of the quest, an important, recurring element in world literature, also underlies another important Irish short story, "The Man of the House" by Frank O'Connor, although the similarity ends with the plots. Like the unnamed narrator in "Araby," Gus in "The Man of the House" is a young boy who goes on an errand for a loved one. On his travels he meets someone, and the experience, seen in retrospect, changes his ideas of himself and his world. However, given the authors' different ideas of their own roles as writers and of the sound and function of stories, the differences in setting, tone, point of view, and theme are both significant and understandable.

Joyce's story reflects his urban upbringing, his education, and the purposes he expressed in letters he wrote attempting to get *Dubliners* published. "Araby" is set in the Dublin of Joyce's youth, and the setting and plot are based on his experiences. The location of O'Connor's story is never specified, and, for all we know, the events could be entirely imaginary.

Joyce didn't consider himself imaginative, preferring to take notes on what he saw and heard around him, later arranging and transforming those notes into fiction, departing from fact when it suited him. Besides, his intention in *Dubliners* "was to write a chapter of the moral history of [his] country and [he] chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed ... the centre of paralysis. ..." ¹ Joyce believed that a person must be "a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard" (Scholes and Litz 267). A number of facts testify to Joyce's fidelity to his experience in writing "Araby."

First, the setting is entirely urban, essentially unrelieved by nature. The only exceptions are ruined remains, gardens described as either "wild" with "a few straggling bushes" and a "rusty bicycle pump" or "dark" and "dripping ... where odours arose from the ashpits. ..." ² Ellmann's biography, *James Joyce*, reproduces the cover of the program for a real "Araby in Dublin," a "Grand Oriental Fete," which Joyce presumably attended in mid-May of 1894, when he was twelve, about the age of the protagonist. ³ Further, the Joyce family once

lived on North Richmond Street, only a year later than the period when Joyce attended the Christian Brothers' School there, between two periods with the Jesuits. Given Joyce's praise of the Jesuits for instilling in him the rigorous habits of organization he demonstrated, and given his father's well-known preference for Jesuit education, it is entirely appropriate that this interim with the less worldly Christian Brothers, during his adolescence, is the setting for "Araby." For this is indeed, in the life of the protagonist, a dark, confused time, full of illusions and misunderstood emotions. Not surprisingly, all that is mentioned of the school is in terms of escape: the "blind street" was "quiet ... except at the hour when the Christian Brothers School set the boys free" (29). "I chafed against the work of the school" (32). One notable departure from fact, though not from spirit, is that the boy in the story lives with an aunt and uncle rather than with his parents, but if we view the narrator as a portrayal of the youthful author, the behavior of Joyce's often drunken father helps to explain the boy's being an orphan in the story. For that matter, even the uncle in the story comes home late and at least slightly inebriated, causing a crucial delay in the boy's departure for the bazaar.

Frank O'Connor, very familiar with Joyce's work, approached the short story differently. According to William Tomory, "O'Connor often commented on Joyce's fiction—not just because Joyce was Irish and such a towering literary influence, but because he had come to be at odds with what Joyce's fiction represented."⁴ While Joyce's story is narrated relatively straightforwardly in comparison to his later work, it is full of his typical allusions to obscure books such as *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq* (29) and poems like "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed" (34). In contrast, Tomory points out that one "would search O'Connor's fiction in vain for stream of consciousness, interior monologue, or phantasmagorical dream sequences" because, as O'Connor says in *Towards an Appreciation of Literature*: "The nineteenth century novel still seems to me incomparably the greatest of the modern arts, the art in which the modern world has expressed itself most completely."⁵

Richard Ellmann greatly admired O'Connor as well as Joyce, and he, too, comments on O'Connor's lack of the experimentation that so characterizes Joyce, especially in the later work: "He saw that his own art must radiate out from a single nucleus, must not attempt detachment or alien centers of consciousness in the manner of James or Joyce."⁶ In the same article, Ellmann discusses O'Connor's noted penchant for revision, one aspect of writing he shared with Joyce. However, Ellmann makes clear that even in this shared habit, O'Connor had a different purpose: "When he repeatedly revised his work ... he did so not only to make it more wrought, but more free; for all that he had learned with desperate acquisitiveness stood in the way of primary apprehension."⁷

The reader's primary apprehension does not seem to have been a priority of Joyce, despite his efforts at self-promotion. Though he supplied charts and schemes to help a few selected critics understand his work and wrote detailed letters of explanation to his publishers and patrons, one suspects to help them more effectively publicize his writing, much of Joyce's technique is involved with puzzles and references obscure to the common reader, something O'Connor shunned. For example, in "The Man of the House," as opposed to Joyce's method in "Araby," O'Connor tells in plain language a tale devoid of allusions to other works of literature. Also unlike the Dublin of "Araby" is the setting of O'Connor's story, which cannot be precisely determined. It seems to be far more rural, perhaps a small village or the outskirts of a city as it takes the boy no time to get out into the countryside. A similarity between the two stories involves the protagonists' attitudes toward school. Gus, in "The Man of the House," reflects that he "had always known a fellow could have his troubles, but if he faced them manfully, he could get advantages out of them as well. There was the school for instance. ..." Gus doesn't go to school this day because of his mother's illness, but he walks by it while journeying to get medicine for her and notices "the chorus of poor sufferers through the open windows, and a glimpse of Danny Delaney's bald pate as he did sentry before the front door with his cane wriggling like a tail behind his back."⁸ Neither boy seems particularly concerned with success in school, although the boy in "Araby" does comment on the concern of his teacher about the boy's daydreaming.

The urban setting of "Araby" is particularly grim, appropriate to Joyce's view of the city. One house is "uninhabited" and "detached from its neighbors." The other houses have "brown imperturbable faces." The boys play in "dark, muddy lanes" (29) and must run "the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages," probably like the cottages where O'Connor's Gus lives.⁹ Physically, in "Araby" the surroundings are bleak, but the boy's imagination transfigures all, however briefly, as it does in O'Connor's story as well. The insistent dreariness of the setting makes the reader wonder how any degree of imagination on the part of the boy can for long hold out against his surroundings, and in fact, the week is not out before the transfiguration, along with the boy's youthful naiveté, is shattered.

The boy in "Araby" thinks he is in love, and he goes on a quest in search of something for the lady he thinks he loves. Because of his attraction to his friend Mangan's¹⁰ older sister, to whom he has never spoken "except for a few casual words," the boy is able to interject into "places the most hostile to romance" an element of magic. When he shops with his aunt, walking "through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers" and "the shrill litanies of shop-boys" (30–31), he imagines, "I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes" (31). The young boy in "The Man of the House," on the other hand, doesn't allow his imagination to rule him for long: for a brief moment only the world around him is transformed, and he feels "exalted, a voyager, a heroic figure" (187), but primarily he remains conscientious about sticking to his duty and finishing the errand for his mother. Nevertheless, he will also be distracted by a young lady, if only temporarily.

In "Araby" the boy is very confused, and he doesn't know whether he "would ever speak to [Mangan's sister] or not" or how he "could tell her of [his] confused adoration." His feelings are permeated with religious images, and in the chivalric image so similar to that in "The Man of the House," the boy blends his attraction for the girl with the thought of the divine. O'Connor's young protagonist has heard his mother describe him to her friend Mrs. Ryan as "'the best anyone ever reared.'" Mrs. Ryan responds by remarking, "'Why then, there aren't many like him. ... The most of the children that's going now are more like savages than Christians'" (185). He wishes to please his mother and realizes that if he isn't careful, he will disappoint her. "One slip and I should be among those children that Minnie Ryan disapproved of, who were more like savages than Christians" (185). He, too, sees himself as the lone bearer of the sacred in a profane world.¹¹

When the boy in "Araby" finally speaks to Mangan's sister, he promises rashly to bring her a gift from Araby, a "splendid bazaar," to which she off-handedly replies she would "love" to go, though she cannot because "there would be a retreat that week in her convent" (32). She has always been inaccessible, and he has watched her either from the street below, gazing up to where she has stood at the top of stairs in the doorway, or from across the street, peering voyeuristically at her through blinds. Always railings or walls have stood between them. But now Araby itself takes over his mind. "The syllables of the word 'Araby' were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me" (32). Reaching Araby and winning this girl's love become his confused quest. In stark contrast, the young boy in "The Man of the House" has never before met the girl who momentarily leads him astray, and the quest he is on is for his mother. But this young lady is enticing. She urges him, after helping him to drink the bottle of cough medicine, to fill it up with water, and he cannot refuse her. "Mother was far away, and I was swept from anchorage into an unfamiliar world of spires, towers, trees, steps, and little girls who liked cough bottles. I worshiped that girl" (189). However, it takes but a moment and the empty bottle to bring him to his senses, and he "remembered my mother sick and the Blessed Virgin slighted, and my heart sank" (189).

Numerous critics have commented on the myth of the quest undertaken by "one who has been stirred by chivalric love in the tradition of the Arthurian romances."¹² Concepcion Dadaufalza points out that the quest itself was "meant to bring fertility to a blighted land."¹³ This accurately describes Joyce's view of Dublin. The sterility of the Dublin setting, Dadaufalza explains, is reflected partly in the barrenness of the boy's relationships. Though he has playmates, they remain unnamed. His love is known only by her relationship to her brother. The boy himself lacks parents and lives in the home of an apparently childless aunt and uncle,

surrounded by a “dead priest, an apparently unmarried sister, and a pawnbroker's widow.” No wonder he seeks a Grail.

The boy in Joyce's tale does finally get to Araby after what seems to him an interminable delay caused by his uncle. He pays more than he had planned to get into the bazaar, which is about to close, and he “recognize[s] a silence like that which pervades a church after a service.” He remembers only “with difficulty” why he had come and realizes he cannot buy anything. As he hears the English accents of a young woman and two men engaged in a most banal conversation, the boy's dream bursts. All his illusions about his maturity, about Mangan's sister and what he thought was her interest in him, about the exotic Araby, and, most significantly, about himself are destroyed, and the story concludes: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity: and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (35).

In order to understand Joyce's choice of setting, style, and theme, one must recall, again, that Joyce wrote this story as part of the whole of *Dubliners* “to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city,” as he wrote in a letter to Constantine Curran reprinted in Scholes and Litz's volume (259). In other words, his purpose was moral in addition to artistic. Only by careful examination of conscience, such examination to be conducted by him, did Joyce believe the Irish could free themselves of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual paralysis he felt they were suffering. Had he remained in the home of his youth, as portrayed in “Araby” and the other *Dubliners* tales, he, too, would have fallen victim to Dublin's paralyzing influences: as self-exiled artist, it fell to him to aid in the cure of his countrymen.

None of this need to awaken his fellow Irishmen seems to have bothered Frank O'Connor. On the contrary, he is on record as having said about himself that “the thing this man likes best in the story is the story itself. ... I like feeling that the story-teller has something to communicate, and if he doesn't communicate it he'll bust.”¹⁴

Another aspect of “Araby,” its style, is a matter of debate. Joyce himself called it “for the most part a style of scrupulous meanness.”¹⁵ Joyce agreed only most begrudgingly to alter or omit certain phrases to which the printers had objected, but he was determined to change nothing else. Again, to his prospective publisher, Richards, Joyce wrote, “These details may now seem to you unimportant but if I took them away *Dubliners* would seem to me like an egg without salt.”¹⁶ Further, he argued, “You say that it is a small thing I am asked to do, to efface a word here and there. But do you not see clearly that in a short story above all such effacement may be fatal.”¹⁷

While Joyce here certainly refers to particular words and phrases, his insistence by implication is that every word was deliberate and important, something O'Connor also demonstrated. In fact, O'Connor went further, revising his stories incessantly, both before and after publication. By “scrupulous meanness,” Joyce was not referring to a sparsity of detail, for the stories are thick with references to popular and classical culture, the history and rituals of Catholicism, and the history and culture of Ireland. A perhaps not entirely undeserved criticism of Joyce is directed at his display of erudition, an integral part of his method. If his writing relied on plot and character alone, his stories would be nowhere near as rich as they are, but then again, they wouldn't be his stories. As it is, the language is appropriate as the voice of an imaginative narrator, perhaps himself an artist, reflecting on his youth, but it is hardly ordinary life described in “Araby.”

Frank O'Connor's “The Man of the House” is another story told in the first person by a narrator recalling his youth, but here we have the youth of an imaginative but plain-speaking person. He is younger at the time the story takes place than the twelve-year-old in “Araby,” for he tells us that when he reads the police court news to his mother, “I wasn't very quick about it because I was only at words of one syllable” (185). This boy, too, is fatherless, but in O'Connor's tale this detail is directly functional; it is the lack of an adult male in the family that motivates the boy to try to act maturely. On the other hand, the mother is more than present; she, not a peer, is the object of the boy's affection, for whom he ventures out into the potentially dangerous world. As in “Araby,” the boy's imagination transforms what he sees there. A “wooded gorge” becomes “the Rockies,

Himalayas, or Highlands ..." (185). The city below, seen from a hilltop, appears "more like the backcloth of a theatre than a real town," causing the boy to feel "exalted" (187). On his quest to bring back a bottle of medicine for his mother, he notices a "murmuring honeycomb of factory chimneys and houses" and a "gently rounded hilltop with a limestone spire and a purple sandstone tower rising out of it and piercing the clouds. It was so wide and bewildering a view that it was never all lit up at the same time" (187). The details described here are much more grounded in the boy's physical surroundings than are the descriptions in "Araby," which much more often reflect the boy's emotional state.

At home, Gus sees himself as more manly, more useful, than he really is, but this self-perception is based on the desire to provide for and please his mother. He tells her he won't go to school but will care for her instead. He has a very practical imagination when focused on his duties. He notices her illness right away, orders her to bed, builds the fire properly, and makes her breakfast, though he is less than successful with the tea. He informs his mother's employer that he isn't sure if he will allow her to come to work, and he is elated when the boss agrees with his assessment of the situation. He successfully journeys to a nearby pub to get some whisky for his mother; in the pub he faces adults who threaten him, as the boy in "Araby" feels threatened by the crowds in the street. Gus sees a drunk in the pub, "grinning at me diabolically," who mistakes him for his "old flower" and calls him "a thundering ruffian" and "the most notorious boozier in Capetown" (186). As in "Araby," here again youth is threatened by an inebriated adult.

When Gus gets home, with his mother is Minnie Ryan, "gossipy and pious" (185). She corresponds to Mrs. Mercer in "Araby," who is described as "an old garrulous woman ... who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea table" (33). And when Gus goes out to play, he deliberately stays close to home, so as not to lose his concentration and be counted among the savages. Like the boy in "Araby," Gus views himself as the saved one among the heathens.

Common to the two stories also is the theme of economic frustration. The boy in "Araby" cannot buy what he would like for his beloved, even if he could find something suitable, because he has spent too much on the special train to get to the bazaar and must still get home. In O'Connor's tale, the boy cannot both light a votive candle and buy candy. Before he can even go to the dispensary, he must visit the Poor Law guardian for the humiliating purpose of proving the family cannot pay for the doctor's visit. When the doctor arrives, apparently drunk, like the man in the pub, he does nothing but needlessly advise the boy to "Look after your mother while you can," and then he writes a prescription. Presumably, more money would have provided a better physician, but Gus thinks little still of a doctor who "never washed his hands" (187).

So far, the details, including a poor, fatherless family with a sick mother and a boy who clearly dislikes school, another gossipy old lady, a man blindly drunk in a bar, and a doctor "like all the drunks of the medical profession" (186) seem to be as dismal as those in "Araby." But the sordidness of the description is undercut by the boy's acceptance of his world and his determination not to escape from it but to manage it maturely. Waiting for the bazaar, the boy in "Araby" is wont to wallow in self-pity and confusion, expressed in phrases like "I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves. ... I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. ... I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life" (31-32). Gus, on the other hand, although aware of his shortcomings, still welcomes the challenges of the real world. He reads to his mother and successfully ventures to the pub, but both incidents are affected by his youth and inexperience. Even though, as he admits, he has begun "to feel the strain of my responsibilities," he knows that "Concentration ... was what I had to practice" (185).

Later, he is sent to the dispensary for the cough-bottle. This trip is directly reminiscent of the quest of the boy in "Araby." Gus must go "through a thickly populated poor locality," down a "stoney pathway flanked on the one side by red-brick corporation houses and on the other by a wide common with an astounding view of the city" (187). The boy balances the poverty of state housing with the "astounding" view; he sees both the bad and good at once. Here, however, he starts to lose his concentration. The view is "bewildering." His thoughts

turn to religion, as do the boy's in "Araby," but this boy is far more practical if just as naive. Seeing a cathedral's spire and deciding to spend his penny on a candle to the Blessed Virgin, for his mother's recovery, he is "sure I'd get more value in a great church like that so close to heaven" than in an ordinary one down in the town (187).

Arriving at the dispensary, he meets the young lady who is destined to dispel his illusions. In "Araby" she was the banal shopkeeper flirting with two men, totally disregarding the boy, who brought him to his senses; in "The Man of the House," Gus is certainly paid attention to by the more experienced girl, but it becomes apparent to him that she only wants his cough-bottle. At first, he is attracted to her "pleasant, talkative" manner, her worldliness—"She obviously knew her way around"—and her green eyes (188). Gus is seduced from his mission and dismisses any need to light a candle. "In a queer way the little girl restored my confidence," he explains—a result quite different from the effect of the girl in "Araby" on that boy.

After they finish off the sweets he buys with the money he had intended to use to light "a candle to the Blessed Virgin in the cathedral on the hilltop for [his] mother's speedy recovery," the girl asks to try his mother's cough-bottle: "She took a long drink out of it, which alarmed me" (189). She then shares the rest with him and convinces him to "Finish it and say the cork fell out." At this point, he realizes, "I had sacrificed both to a girl and she didn't even care for me" (189). But he can still hope for a miracle, and he goes into the nearest church, conveniently the cathedral with a shrine to the Blessed Virgin, and promises to buy a candle with his next penny. He returns home, broken in pocket and spirit (he, too, has wasted his substance on frivolities), thinking that his weakness, his failure to concentrate, has conquered him once more. But he phrases it quite differently than the boy in "Araby"; all Gus says is, "All the light had gone out of the day, and the echoing hillside had become a vast, alien, cruel world" (190).

When he arrives, he finds his mother still sick, and he breaks down in tears. She consoles him and says she was only concerned for his safety. This elicits from him the truth about the medicine; as a result, she mothers him even more. His lack of concentration, far from being the problem he has considered it, has forced her to resume her role as mother and protector. Although Gus is sure he is a failure, he has accomplished his mission in spite of himself. His return from his illusion of himself as a man to the realization that he is still a boy, in need of a mother, cures her, the very miracle he had sought.

We have what appears to be the same story told in two very different ways. The plot elements are remarkably alike though the characters differ, as do the writers' techniques. Joyce characteristically loads his tale with references to obscure books, popular ballads, and poems, but he undermines the references by having the narrator tell us the boy liked the books because they were old and yellow, putting the ballads in the mouths of nasal street singers, and having the boy leave while his uncle is just beginning to recite the poetry. "The Man of the House" is empty of such allusions, with the result that the boy comes across as a normal child instead of a budding artist. Joyce's tale is unrelievedly dark, from the blindness of the street at the beginning, through the short days of winter dusk, to the darkness of the empty hall at the conclusion; O'Connor's story begins on "a lovely summer morning" (184), and the boy has visions of himself as a knight on a hillside where "sunlight wandered across it as across a prairie" (187). These differences are significant, but more striking are the differences in the language of the two stories, differences that make "Araby" sound like the work of a writer and "The Man of the House" the work of a storyteller.

For example, consider this portion of the description of his surroundings given by the boy in "Araby": "When we met in the street the houses had grown more somber. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns" (30). O'Connor, in contrast, rejects almost all figurative language as he has his narrator say: "At the end of the lane was the limestone spire of Shandon; all along it young trees overhung the high, hot walls, and the sun, when it came out in hot, golden blasts behind us, threw our linked shadows onto the road" (189). Both boys are confused about their emotions, but the boy in "Araby" expresses himself in phrases such as: "Her name sprang to my

lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom" (31). Gus is more likely to say things like "I worshiped that girl" (189). As opposed to Gus, who on more than one occasion "loses his concentration," the boy in "Araby" puts it differently: "What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening!" (32). When Gus realizes, very quickly, that he has been tricked by the young lady, he says, "I saw her guile and began to weep" (189). This is certainly more directly stated than the words of the boy in "Araby" at his awakening: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (35).

Here are two writers intensely interested in the word, but one seems more interested in the magical properties of it, the other in the functional. O'Connor relates one famous anecdote, often repeated, that illustrates the two authors' different attitudes. He says he had visited Joyce in Paris, and states, "I had admired an old print of Cork in the hallway and wondered what the frame was made of. 'That's cork,' said Joyce. I said, 'I know it's Cork, but what's the frame made of?' 'That's cork,' Joyce repeated, and it was."¹⁸ Hugh Kenner comments: "Being an old fashioned story teller for whom words have chiefly instrumental interest, O'Connor thought Joyce was going out of his mind."¹⁹

In any case, one of O'Connor's main interests was getting the voices right, as he made clear on many occasions. O'Connor, as he himself said, could not "pass a story as finished unless I know how everybody in it spoke. ... If I use the right phrase and the reader hears the phrase in his head, he sees the individual."²⁰

Different goals and attitudes about stories led Joyce and O'Connor to two very different treatments of essentially the same situation. While Joyce was primarily an experimenter interested in "Europeanizing" Irish literature, O'Connor seems more in the tradition of the Irish storyteller, the *shanachie*, though with the crucial difference that his art was certainly not one of improvisation. James D. Alexander discusses O'Connor's attitude about fiction and his differences with Joyce's methods. Regarding O'Connor's narrators, Alexander points out that they "may not be reliable—often ... partly reliable—but his voice, even when ironic, confers the 'warmth' on the literary creation."²¹ A perfect example is Gus in "The Man of the House." When he is giving and getting instructions from his mother at the start of the story, he suggests to her that eggs would be a good choice for dinner. Then, in one of his frequent asides to the reader, he informs us: "That was really only a bit of swank, because eggs were the one thing I could cook, but the mother told me to get sausages as well in case she was able to get up" (184). Also, according to Alexander, O'Connor used "the word 'cold' for Joyce's technique in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, to describe the quality of detachment he finds in Joyce. ... Anything that gets in the way of the account, any reportage for its own sake, word play, allusion or symbol, struck O'Connor as sterile exhibitionism and was to be avoided."²²

While no doubt an accurate assessment of O'Connor's feelings about Joyce's methods, this ignores the fact that Joyce was deliberately "cold" to many of his characters, whom he had not so much created as found in Dublin and in himself and whom he did not wish to portray sympathetically. Given such different ideas about the story and its purpose, it seems even more remarkable that the two writers would use the same quest motif in stories so similar in plot. One explanation of the similarity lies in O'Connor's undoubted respect for Joyce despite whatever criticism he might have leveled at him. In Eric Solomon's memoir of being O'Connor's student, he recalls that of O'Connor's many qualities, his lectures were exceptional, and Solomon states emphatically, "Frank O'Connor's classroom concert is what I recall best. He would read from Joyce's 'Araby.'"²³

Notes

1. This is from a letter Joyce wrote to Grant Richards on May 5, 1906, quoted in James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), 269.

2. All references to "Araby" are to the Viking Critical Edition mentioned above. For these particular quotations, see 29–30. References hereafter will be cited in the text.
3. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), Plate III, following page 80.
4. William M. Tomory, *Frank O'Connor* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1980), 58.
5. *Ibid.*, 57.
6. Quoted in "Michael-Frank" in *Michael/Frank*, ed. Maurice Sheehy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 26.
7. *Ibid.*, 27.
8. All references to "The Man of the House" are to Frank O'Connor, *Collected Stories* (New York: Random House, 1981). This quote is from page 184.
9. That Joyce, like his protagonist in "Araby," was distinct from the "rough tribes" was emphasized by O'Connor in a projected broadcast scheduled for July 16, 1937, for Radio Eireann, a broadcast never made because of last-minute censorship. The transcript for the talk was published five days later in *The Irish Times*. In it, O'Connor says that the real tragedy of the Parnell split "was the desolation of the spirit it produced among the people, of whom Joyce is the very pattern. ... This despair produced a violent overweening individualism" and "the desire to break forever with the tribe." This is discussed in Alan Cohn and Richard F. Peterson, "Frank O'Connor on Joyce and Lawrence: An Uncollected Text," *Journal of Modern Literature* 12 (1985): 211–20.
10. Most of *Dubliners* was written while Joyce was living in Trieste, when he was also writing overtly political newspaper articles for the Italian press. During this time, he also wrote in praise of James Clarence Mangan, author of "Dark Rosaleen," one of the better known personifications of Ireland. Perhaps naming the object of his young protagonist's infatuation "Mangan's sister" in some way identified her for Joyce with what many young men of the time desired, a more traditional Ireland, a desire the more mature Joyce did not share. Joyce at this time was also lecturing on Irish history and teaching conversational English; his teaching methods included much discussion of politics, as attested to by his former students in the documentary entitled *Is There One Who Understands Me?: The World of James Joyce* (Producer and Director Sean O'Mordha). Dublin: Radio Telefis 1982. Dist. Princeton: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, FFH 897. Videocassette. 120 mm.
11. This image of bearing a chalice among enemies, more explicit in Joyce than in O'Connor, as one would expect, derives from stories of early Christian martyrs in Rome, particularly the story of Tarsicius, killed by a group of pagan boys as he tried to take the Blessed Sacrament to converts hiding in catacombs. See H. George Hahn, "Tarsicius: A Hagiographical Allusion in Joyce's 'Araby,'" *Papers on Language and Literature* 27 (1991): 381–85. According to Hahn, Joyce would have known about Tarsicius from a popular novel entitled *Fabiola: or, the Church of the Catacombs*, written by an Irish cardinal. Further, under the tutelage of the Jesuits, Joyce would have written narratives on the lives of the saints, and he certainly knew Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, where Tarsicius is linked with St. Stephen, the first martyr, about whom Joyce knew a great deal and to whom he alluded in a concurrent project, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, going so far as to name the protagonist of that book Stephen. The story of Tarsicius also appeared in *Our Weekly Messenger*, a parochial elementary school publication, in the early 1950s, testimony to the staying power of the tale. My first reading of "Araby" made such an impression on me in part because I had read of Tarsicius in Philadelphia as a boy and identified with him. The legend would naturally have appealed to Joyce, who seems to have considered himself superior to his comrades in most respects.
12. Robert P. apRoberts, "'Araby' and the Palimpsest of Criticism or, Through a Glass Darkly," *Antioch Review* 26 (Winter 1966–67): 468–69.
13. Concepcion D. Dadaufalza, "The Quest of the Chalice-Bearer in James Joyce's 'Araby,'" *Dilman Review* 7 (1959): 317–25.
14. Frank O'Connor, "Writing a Story—One Man's Way," *The Listener* (23 July 1959): 139–40. Reprinted in *A Frank O'Connor Reader*, ed. Michael Steinman (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 312.

15. Quoted in Scholes and Litz, 269.
16. Ibid., 270.
17. Ibid., 273.
18. In Frank O'Connor, *A Short History of Irish Literature: A Backward Glance* (New York: Putnam, 1967), 211.
19. Hugh Kenner, *A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1983), 219.
20. "Frank O'Connor," *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), 169.
21. James D. Alexander, "Frank O'Connor's Joyce Criticism," *Journal of Irish Literature* 21 (1992): 40–53.
22. Ibid., 50.
23. Eric Solomon, "Frank O'Connor as Teacher," *Twentieth Century Literature* 36 (1990): 239–41.

Araby, James Joyce: Further Reading

CRITICISM

Atherton, J. S. "Araby." *James Joyce's Dubliners: Critical Essays*, edited by Clive Hart, pp. 39–47. New York: The Viking Press, 1969.

Discusses the ways in which "Araby" is typical of Joyce's oeuvre.

Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. "Araby." *Understanding Fiction*, pp. 414–24. East Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1943.

Brooks and Warren explicate the major themes of Joyce's "Araby."

Collins, Ben L. "'Araby' and the 'Extended Simile.'" *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Dubliners: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Peter K. Garrett, pp. 93–9. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

Originally published in 1967, finds parallels in "Araby" and Homer's The Odyssey, Dante's Commedia, and the biblical story of the Garden of Eden.

Additional coverage of Joyce's life and career is contained in the following sources published by the Gale Group: *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography, 1914–1945*; *Contemporary Authors*, Vols. 104, 126; *DISCovering Authors*; *DISCovering Authors: British*; *DISCovering Authors: Canadian*; *DISCovering Authors Modules: Most-Studied Authors, Novelists, Poets*; *DISCovering Authors 3.0*; *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vols. 10, 19, 36, 162; *Major 20th-Century Writers*, Vols. 1, 2; *Novels for Students*, Vol. 7; *Poetry Criticism*, Vol. 22; *Short Stories for Students*, Vol. 1; *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, Vols. 3, 8, 16, 35, 52; and *World Literature Criticism*.

Critical Essays: Critical Overview

Joyce had a hard time getting *Dubliners* published. Although he wrote the stories between 1904 and 1906, and some of them were published in magazines, the entire collection was not published in book form until 1914. The book was first accepted for publication by the Grant Richards publishing company in 1906, but after a long controversy and many arguments between Joyce and the editors over changes the company wanted to make to the stories, they withdrew their offer to publish.

The second company that accepted the manuscript for publication in 1909 was Maunsel and Company, a Dublin publisher. This company had second thoughts about publishing the work as well, and in 1912 they destroyed the proofs that Joyce had corrected. This left Joyce extremely bitter. Finally, in 1914, Grant Richards, the company that originally accepted the manuscript for publication again agreed to publish Joyce's work.

This troubled road to publication influenced the early reviews and criticism of *Dubliners*. According to Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz, the editors of the 1996 edition of *Dubliners* published by Viking Press, these stories were mostly dismissed by early critics as Joyce's "apprentice" work, or given a secondary place as "skillful but depressing 'slices' of Dublin life."

Dubliners was published four months after the publication of Joyce's next work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Its reception was overshadowed by excitement and attention given to both *Portrait* and early chapters of *Ulysses*, which Joyce was publishing in magazines around the same time. Many readers during this time found *Portrait*—a revealing story of a troubled young man searching for his place in life—far more interesting than the stories in *Dubliners*. For many years Joyce's problems with publishers and printers were discussed more frequently than the stories themselves.

Early reviews of *Dubliners* set the pattern for subsequent critical discussion. Many critics protested against the sordid incidents related in some of the stories and the overall pessimistic tone of the collection. These critics complained that these stories lacked a "point," and that they were merely anecdotes or sketches without any definite structure. At least two reviewers found the longer stories the least satisfactory because Joyce did not sustain a "mood" in them as he did in the shorter pieces.

The turning point in *Dubliners* criticism came in the 1940s and 1950s, when critics began to find in Joyce's work interesting and novel connections between such elements as tone, atmosphere and action. While some critics still focus on these stories as evidence of the young Joyce developing his distinctive style, or emphasize that Joyce provides a truthful, skillful depiction of life in Dublin at the turn of the century, the criticism now encompasses a wide range of interpretations and appreciation. Most critics now agree that *Dubliners* stands on its own merits as a great work by one of the most important writers of the twentieth century.

Essays and Criticism: Major Themes in Araby

In his early story "Araby," James Joyce prefigures many, if not all, of the themes which later became the focus of his writing. Joyce, often considered the greatest English-language novelist of the twentieth century, published few books in his lifetime. *Chamber Music*, a book of poems, appeared in 1907; *Dubliners*, a collection of short stories from which "Araby" is taken, was published in 1914; and his first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, came out in the same year. The book for which Joyce is most famous, *Ulysses*, appeared in 1922 and was quickly banned. Finally, in 1939, Joyce published *Finnegans Wake*. Notwithstanding his small output, Joyce's work has been highly influential, and many of the themes and details he uses in his work have become common currency in English literature. In "Araby," a story of a young boy's disillusionment, Joyce explores questions of nationality, religion, popular culture, art, and relationships between the sexes. None of these themes can be adequately explored in a short essay; however, a brief exposition of the most important themes of "Araby" indicates the marvelous complexity of Joyce's insight.

"Araby" is narrated by a young boy who is, like most of Joyce's characters, a native of Dublin, Ireland. Since the conflict in the story occurs primarily within the boy's consciousness, Joyce's choice of first-person narration is crucial. The protagonist, as with most of Joyce's main characters, is a sensitive boy, searching for principles with which to make sense of the chaos and banality of the world. We know immediately that

Catholicism has served as one of these principles; he attends a Christian Brothers school and at home is attracted to the library of a former tenant of his family, a priest. His identification with Catholicism is more than casual. On Saturday evenings, when the boy goes "marketing" with his aunt he sees the crowds in the market as a "throng of foes" and himself as a religious hero who "bears his chalice" through the crowd.

The narrator's dedication to Catholicism, however, does not run as deep as he might believe. In fact, he channels the emotional devotion that his religion requires towards questionable recipients. Readers learn first that the priest's library contains three books especially important to the protagonist: a romantic novel, a religious tract written by a Protestant, and the memoirs of a French police agent and master of disguise. If this priest does not maintain a sufficiently pious library, how can this boy be expected to properly practice his religion?

More importantly, the boy takes the Catholic idea of devotion to the Virgin Mary and finds a real-world substitute for the Mother of God. We learn that he is especially fascinated by the older sister of one of his schoolmates. In the narrator's first description of Mangan's sister she is lit from behind, like a saint. "[H]er figure defined by the light from the half-opened door.... Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door," the narrator tells us, presenting an image of himself as a prostrate worshipper. Furthermore, he relates that "her image accompanied [him] even in places the most hostile to romance." Although the boy explains his feelings for Mangan's sister as romantic, his confusion between her and the Virgin Mary are easily discernible: "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises of which I myself did not understand." The boy is as rapturous as if he had seen a vision of the Mother of God herself. And when the girl finally speaks to him, he cannot respond coherently: "When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer."

Joyce also makes the nonreligious, and even sexual, elements of the boy's devotion to Mangan's sister clear throughout the story. Her dress, her hair, and her "brown figure" are "always in [the narrator's] eye," and when he finally speaks to her, the same light that once made her glow like a saint now catches "the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease." The boy melds religious devotion for the Virgin with his own romantic longing, and the combined force is powerful. When Mangan's sister asks him if he will be attending Araby, a church bazaar to be held soon, he is caught by surprise: "I forgot whether I answered yes or no." She tells him she must attend a retreat and cannot attend the fair. As his eyes fix upon the silver bracelet she twists on her wrist, he resolves to go and bring her back something that could compare with that bracelet. Here, the narrator ventures dangerously close to idolatry and the pre-Christian tradition of offerings to the gods. In a punning reference to this, he relates that because of his recent distraction in class, his schoolmaster "hoped I was not beginning to idle."

The shift from the boy's initially religious longings to more worldly concerns is accentuated by images of Araby that reverberate in his mind, taking on a very unreligious cast: "The syllables of the word 'Araby' were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me." This is a very ominous sentence; the boy's religious leanings are being completely overthrown by the lure of the mysterious, and possibly sensual, bazaar. The sensuality that he wished to obliterate earlier ("All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves," he tells us when he is in the priest's room, thinking of Mangan's sister) is now the very thing that he wants to indulge. The fact that Araby suggests a non-Christian culture is also significant here, for in his dedication to Mangan's sister the boy is willing to forsake the safe and familiar world of Catholic Ireland for what he believes to be the exotic and decadent East. As he stands in the upper-story room of his house, he looks upon his old playmates from above as they play in the street, and then looks up on the house across to where Mangan and his sister live. He feels himself chosen, like Sir Galahad (a noble knight from the legend of King Arthur) and prepares himself for his quest.

After withstanding the peril of the drunken uncle and the aunt who hints he might have to "put off [his] bazaar for this night of Our Lord," the protagonist is finally ready to embark upon his quest. His excitement is

palpable as he rushes towards the festival, trying to get there before it closes. As he approaches the darkening hall, his once-clear purpose is now muddy: he "remember[s] with difficulty why [he] had come." The futility and purposelessness of his project begins to dawn upon him as he hears an English shop-girl and two young English gentlemen chatting:

"O, I never said such a thing!"

"O, but you did"

"O, but I didn't!"

"Didn't she say that?"

"Yes. I heard her."

"O, there's a... fib!"

One of the recurring themes in Joyce's stories is the "epiphany," a Greek word meaning "revelation." In one of the drafts of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus is preoccupied by epiphanies: "By epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phrase or the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments." Joyce, like his fictional counterpart Stephen, saw the epiphany as a crucial building-block of fiction, because it was the moment at which a character understands that the illusions under which he or she has been operating are false and misleading.

At this point in "Araby," the narrator experiences an epiphany. As the protagonist nears the end of his quest and is about to buy a gift for Mangan's sister, he changes his mind. As he leaves the hall where the bazaar is closing down, the narrator says: "[g]azing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger." Somehow, the overheard conversation between the English shopgirl and her friends has changed his outlook.

Here at the end of the story, the various symbols Joyce employs converge. The light in which the narrator has always seen Mangan's sister now meets the darkness of the hall as the bazaar shuts down. Our narrator begins to see Mangan's sister not as the image of the Virgin, but as a mundane English shop-girl engaging in idle conversation. His quest, he now realizes, was misconceived in the first place, and he now recognizes the mistake of joining his religious fervor with his romantic passion for Mangan's sister. Although he does not say, it seems clear that the protagonist will fully reject both.

The story, like much of his work, is taken almost directly from Joyce's own life. Like the narrator of this story, Joyce lived on North Richmond Street in Dublin and attended the Christian Brothers' School. The aunt and the uncle of "Araby" bear some resemblance to Joyce's own parents. Even Araby is factual: advertisements survive that date the bazaar to May, 1894.

In Joyce's later fiction, characters almost identical to the narrator in "Araby" recur; the most prominent is Stephen Dedalus, the hero of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and one of the main characters in *Ulysses*. Both wrestle with a similar predicament—they must free themselves from the "nets" of their society, family, and religion in order to be entirely self-determined. Although many of the characters in *Dubliners* prefigure Joyce's later characters, the boy in "Araby" seems closest to being a younger version of Stephen Dedalus/James Joyce. He goes through almost the same struggle as Joyce shows Stephen fighting in *Portrait*. In the words of the critic Harry Stone, in *The Antioch Review*, "'Araby' is a portrait of the artist as a young boy."

Source: Greg Barnhisel, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

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Essays and Criticism: Araby: A Quest for Meaning

The story of a young boy journeying to Araby in hope of winning the favor of an idealized girl immediately raises echoes of the Grail Quest story-pattern. Indeed, several actions and images in "Araby" common to basic versions of the Quest suggest this theme stimulated Joyce's imagination in ordering his modern material, and of course the reader who recognizes them is tempted to look for clues. Yet even in the case of Joyce such a reader can rest assured that it is not as important to scrutinize what goes into a story as to assess what comes out.

In "Araby" a boy ignores the reality of his bleak, winter surroundings and allows the word 'araby' to suggest the exciting summer world of Romance. But, if it is a land of spices he dreams of, classical writers note that the richest part of Araby was infested with snakes. The very title of the story is the first of several images promising the apocalyptic world of romance, but containing the demonic.

In a world hostile to romance, Mangan's sister is the object of the boy's "confused adoration." By the time his lady speaks, his naive crush has led to the heroic bearing of her image like a chalice through market streets, and worship in a chapel-like room where the boy presses his hands together and murmurs "O love! O love!" Hearing she longs to go to Araby, but cannot, he promises to return with a gift if he should make the trip. Imprisoned on the other side of the railing before the house, turning the silver bracelet "round and round her wrist," the girl is the supplicant woman. The quest and marriage theme is strengthened when "she held one of the [railing] spikes, bowing her head towards me." In some versions of the Quest, the knight may marry or sleep with the maiden who carries the grail or bleeding lance. In any case, no favor is lightly given; the journey preempts his thoughts and the everyday world is denied: "I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life."

The boy's confusion is something he causes himself. The girl's brown dress suggests she may not be the true lady, and the boy's love is itself suspect. The image he conjures up includes the border of her slip; and lying on the floor, prostrating himself before her, peeking under the drawn shade, the boy is a voyeur. He is already doomed to failure because he does not have the chaste mind and body essential to the quest. This is emphasized shortly before he leaves for the bazaar. After going upstairs (a position of relative height) he receives the traditional vision, seeing "nothing but the brown figure cast by my imagination," a figure complete with the petticoat showing. Not only is the vision imagined, rather than beheld, but it is not even pure.

Finally the boy begins his journey, leaving the house to the strains of "The Arab's Farewell to his Steed." The deserted train takes the place of a horse, passing through the waste land of "ruinous houses" and crossing the body of water, a river, on its way to Araby.

Araby, the building with the "magical name," is likened to a church; this, and the attendant at the door link it to the magic castle which the knight approaches in the evening. Inside, the young boy examines vases and flowered tea-sets, grail-like containers. Approaching the two men and the woman he is deterred by their attitude and the trivia of their conversation. In the grail castle the knight's success depends on his asking the right question concerning the grail which is carried past him. The woman questions the boy: "I looked humbly at the great jars [grails] that stood like eastern guards [the cherub at the East wall of Eden?] at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured: 'No, thank you'." The wrong answer has been given and the boy asks no questions. The lights go out. When the knight does not ask the correct question in the castle it disappears and he wakes up at the edge of a cliff by the ocean, or in a manure wagon being driven through a town where people insult him because of his failure to heal the land. Here the boy realizes his journey is over and feels humiliated. His failure brings an increase in knowledge, which, continuing the story's ironic counterpoint to Romance, does not bring hope or felicity.

To press these parallels further is possible, but to do so would be to pass the point of diminishing critical returns. The problem is one of perspective which, in *Dubliners*, involves always keeping in mind the fact that the main impact of the story is on the naturalistic level, the faithfulness to the detail of Irish family life. It may be more to this level that Joyce's notion of paralysis really refers than to any other. The continual wonder is how Joyce can introduce so intricate and faithful a Quest story-pattern and yet subdue it to the naturalistic one we read at face value. The myth element enriches the story, but we are never really on the quest for the grail—we are in Dublin all the time with the psychologically accurate story of the growth of a romantic boy awakening to his sexuality, idealizing Mangan's sister and encountering frustration in the process.

Source: John Freimarck, "'Araby': A Quest for Meaning," in *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 7, no 4, Summer, 1970, pp. 366-8.

Essays and Criticism: Araby and the Writings of James Joyce

For "Araby" preserves a central episode in Joyce's life, an episode he will endlessly recapitulate. The boy in "Araby," like the youthful Joyce himself, must begin to free himself from the nets and trammels of society. That beginning involves painful farewells and disturbing dislocations. The boy must dream "no more of enchanted days." He must forego the shimmering mirage of childhood, begin to see things as they really are. But to see things as they really are is only a prelude. Far in the distance lies his appointed (but as yet unimagined) task: to encounter the reality of experience and forge the uncreated conscience of his race. The whole of that struggle, of course, is set forth in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. "Araby" is the identical struggle at an earlier stage; "Araby" is a portrait of the artist as a young boy.

The autobiographical nexus of "Araby" is not confined to the struggle raging in the boy's mind, though that conflict—an epitome of Joyce's first painful effort to see—is central and controls all else. Many of the details of the story are also rooted in Joyce's life. The narrator of "Araby"—the narrator is the boy of the story now grown up—lived, like Joyce, on North Richmond Street. North Richmond Street is blind, with a detached two-story house at the blind end, and down the street, as the opening paragraph informs us, the Christian Brothers' school. Like Joyce, the boy attended this school, and again like Joyce he found it dull and stultifying. Furthermore, the boy's surrogate parents, his aunt and uncle, are a version of Joyce's parents: the aunt, with her forbearance and her unexamined piety, is like his mother; the uncle, with his irregular hours, his irresponsibility, his love of recitation, and his drunkenness, is like his father.

The title and the central action of the story are also autobiographical. From May fourteenth to nineteenth, 1894, while the Joyce family was living on North Richmond Street and Joyce was twelve, Araby came to Dublin. Araby was a bazaar, and the program of the bazaar, advertising the fair as a "Grand Oriental Fête," featured the name "Araby" in huge exotic letters, while the design as well as the detail of the program conveyed an ill-assorted blend of pseudo-Eastern romanticism and blatant commercialism. For one shilling, as the program put it, one could visit "Araby in Dublin" and at the same time aid the Jervis Street Hospital....

Other literary prototypes also contribute to "Araby." In "Araby" as in Joyce's life, Mangan is an important name. In life Mangan was one of Joyce's favorite Romantic poets, a little-known Irish poet who pretended that many of his poems were translations from the Arabic although he was totally ignorant of that language. Joyce championed him in a paper delivered as a Pateresque [Walter Pater was a nineteenth-century English essayist and critic] twenty-year-old before the Literary and Historical Society of University College, Dublin, and championed him again five years later, in a lecture at the Università Popolare in Trieste, as "the most significant poet of the modern Celtic world, and one of the most inspired singers that ever used the lyric form in any country." In "Araby" Mangan is the boy's friend, but, what is more important, Mangan's sister is the adored girl. In each lecture Joyce discussed Mangan's poetry in words which could serve as an epigraph for

the boy's mute, chivalric love for Mangan's sister and for his subsequent disillusionment and self-disdain. In the latter lecture, Joyce described the female persona that Mangan is constantly adoring:

This figure which he adores recalls the spiritual yearnings and the imaginary loves of the Middle Ages, and Mangan has placed his lady in a world full of melody, of lights and perfumes, a world that grows fatally to frame every face that the eyes of a poet have gazed on with love. There is only one chivalrous idea, only one male devotion, that lights up the faces of Vittoria Colonna, Laura, and Beatrice, just as the bitter disillusion and the self-disdain that end the chapter are one and the same.

And one of Joyce's favorite poems by Mangan—a poem whose influence recurs in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*—is "Dark Rosaleen," a love paean to a girl who represents Ireland (Dark Rosaleen is a poetic name for Ireland), physical love, and romantic adoration. In "Araby" Joyce took Mangan's idealized girl as an embodiment of the artist's, especially the Irish artist's, relationship to his beloved, and then, combining the image of the girl with other resonating literary associations, wrote his own story of dawning, worshipful love....

These and other ambiguously worded ironies had already been sounded by the three opening sentences of "Araby." Joyce begins by telling us that North Richmond Street is blind. That North Richmond Street is a dead end is a simple statement of fact; but that the street is blind, especially since this feature is given significant emphasis in the opening phrases of the story, suggests that blindness plays a role thematically. It suggests, as we later come to understand, that the boy also is blind, that he has reached a dead end in his life. Finally, we are told that the houses of North Richmond Street "conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces." These words, too, are ironic. For the boy will shortly discover that his own consciousness of a decent life within has been a mirage; the imperturbable surface of North Richmond Street (and of the boy's life) will soon be perturbed.

In these opening paragraphs Joyce touches all the themes he will later develop: self-deluding blindness, self-inflating romanticism, decayed religion, mammonism, the coming into man's inheritance, and the gulf between appearance and reality. But these paragraphs do more: they link what could have been the idiosyncratic story of the boy, his problems and distortions, to the problems and distortions of Catholicism and of Ireland as a whole. In other words, the opening paragraphs (and one or two other sections) prevent us from believing that the fault is solely in the boy and not, to some extent at least, in the world that surrounds him, and still more fundamentally, in the nature of man himself.

The boy, of course, contributes intricately to his own deception. His growing fascination for Mangan's sister is made to convey his blindness and his warring consciousness. Joyce suggests these confusions by the most artful images, symbolisms, and parallelisms. The picture of Mangan's sister which first sinks unforgettably into the boy's receptive mind is of the girl calling and waiting at her doorstep in the dusk, "her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door," while he plays in the twilight and then stands "by the railings looking at her." "Her dress," he remembered, "swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side."

This highly evocative, carefully staged, and carefully lit scene—it will recur throughout the story with slight but significant variations—gathers meaning as its many details take on definition and thematic importance. That importance was central to Joyce, and versions of the scene occur often in his writings. As his Mangan essay (1902) indicates, he had early chosen the adored female as an emblem of man's vanity, an emblem of false vision and self-delusion followed by insight and self-disdain. The female who appears in "Araby" (she appears again and again in his other writings) is such an emblem. The prototypical situation in all these appearances is of a male gazing at a female in a dim, veiled light. There are other features: the male usually looks up at the female; he often finds her standing half obscured near the top of some stairs and by a railing;

he frequently notices her hair, her skirts, and her underclothes. But though the scene varies from appearance to appearance, the consequences are always the same. The male superimposes his own idealized vision upon this shadowy figure, only to have disillusioning reality (which has been there unregarded all the time) assert itself and devastate him. Joyce found this scene—with its shifting aureola of religious adoration, sexual beckoning, and blurred vision—infinately suggestive, and he utilized it for major effect....

Araby—the very word connotes the nature of the boy's confusion. It is a word redolent of the lush East, of distant lands, Levantine riches, romantic entertainments, mysterious magic, "Grand Oriental Fêtes." The boy immerses himself in this incense-filled dream world. He tells us that "the syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me." That enchantment, or to put it another way, Near Eastern imagery (usually in conjunction with female opulence or romantic wish fulfillment), always excited Joyce. It reappears strongly in *Ulysses* in a highly intricate counterpoint, which is sometimes serious (Molly's Moorish attributes) and sometimes mocking (Bloom's dream of a Messianic Near Eastern oasis). But the boy in "Araby" always interprets these associations, no matter how disparate or how ambiguous they are, in one way: as correlatives of a baroquely beatific way of living. Yet the real, brick-and-mortar Araby in the boy's life is a bazaar, a market, a place where money and goods are exchanged. The boy is blind to this reality lurking beneath his enchanted dream. To the boy, his lady's silver bracelet is only part of her Eastern finery; his journey to a bazaar to buy her an offering is part of a romantic quest. But from this point on in the story the masquerading pretenses of the boy—and of his church, his land, his rules, and his love—are rapidly underlined and brought into a conjunction which will pierce his perfect dream world and put an end to "enchanted days...."

Joyce has succeeded, here, in taking the raw, rather humdrum, unpromising facts of his own life and transforming them into abiding patterns of beauty and illumination. He has taken a universal experience—a more or less ordinary experience of insight, disillusionment, and growth—and given it an extraordinary application and import. The experience becomes a criticism of a nation, a religion, a civilization, a way of existing; it becomes a grappling hook with which we can scale our own well-guarded citadels of self-delusion. Joyce does all this in six or seven pages. He manages this feat by endowing the simple phrases and actions of "Araby" with multiple meanings that deepen and enlarge what he is saying.

The image of Mangan's sister is a case in point. Joyce takes this shadowy image, this dark scene which fascinated and obsessed him and which he returned to again and again, and shapes it to his purposes. He projects this image so carefully, touches it so delicately and skillfully with directive associations and connotations, that it conveys simultaneously, in one simple seamless whole, all the warring meanings he wishes it to hold—all the warring meanings it held for him. The pose of the harlot is also the pose of the Virgin; the revered Lady of Romance (kin to Vittoria Colonna, Laura, Beatrice, Levana, Dark Rosaleen, and the beloved of any artist) is also Ireland and at the same time a vulgar English shopgirl. One need not belabor the point. These meanings are conveyed not merely by the juxtapositions and evocations of the chief images—of Mangan's dark sister and the English shopgirl, for example—but by the reiterated patterns, allusions, and actions which bind the whole work together: the dead priest's charitableness, Mrs. Mercer's used stamps, the fall of money on the salver; Araby, Eastern enchantment, the knightly quest for a chivalric token; the swaying dress, the veiled senses, the prayerful murmur, "*O love! O love!*" Scarcely a line, an evocation, an object—the central apple tree, the heretical book of devotions by Abednego Seller, "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed," the blind street—but adds its harmony to the whole and extends and clarifies the story's meaning.

Source: Harry Stone, "'Araby' and the Writings of James Joyce," in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. XXV, no. 3, Fall, 1965, pp. 375-445.

Stone is an educator, editor, and Charles Dickens scholar.

Teaching Guide

Teaching Guide: Introduction

So you're going to teach "Araby." Whether it's your first or hundredth time, this classic text has been a mainstay of English classrooms for generations. While it has its challenges—cryptic references, innuendo, narrative flow—teaching this text to your class will be rewarding for you and your students. It will give them unique insight into the world of Dublin that James Joyce knew, rendered with telling details and psychological subtlety that show how, as Joyce says, "In the particular is contained the universal." This guide highlights the text's most salient aspects to keep in mind before you begin teaching.

Note: This content is available to Teacher Subscribers in a convenient, formatted pdf.

Facts at a Glance

- **Publication Date:** 1914
- **Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level:** 6
- **Approximate Word Count:** 2,350
- **Author:** James Joyce
- **Country of Origin:** Ireland
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Literary Period:** Early Modernism
- **Conflict:** Person vs. Society
- **Narration:** First-Person
- **Literary Devices:** Realism, Symbolism, Epiphany
- **Setting:** Dublin, Ireland, 1894
- **Mood:** Reflective, Poignant

Texts That Go Well With "Araby"

"A&P," by John Updike. In "A&P," Updike has updated Joyce's bazaar to a grocery store and the young protagonist has gained a few years; still, the stories share a swirl of human desire and cold mercantilism. The more tangible nature of "A&P"'s epiphany can give older students a relatable point from which to examine themes of self-realization in literature.

***A Doll's House*,** by Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen's work so impressed young Joyce that he learned Norwegian just so he could send a fan letter to the great playwright. Ibsen and Joyce are both considered realists, but it's interesting to see how significantly their versions of realism differ, and to figure out where Ibsen's influence shows up in Joyce's work.

"Good Country People," by Flannery O'Connor. Joyce and O'Connor were misfits in contrasting ways—he was an atheist in a staunchly Catholic society, she a Catholic in a world where religious practice (predominantly Protestant) often had the gravity of a carnival sideshow. O'Connor's story looks at the topics of romance and disillusionment from a very different perspective than "Araby."

"The Garden Party," by Katherine Mansfield. Like "Araby," Mansfield's 1922 story is a modernist quest narrative, appropriating a familiar mythical structure to describe her protagonist's coming of age. Other

modernist techniques shared with Joyce include rich imagery and fluid movement through space and time. The centering of a female protagonist and a less gain-oriented quest can offer students another perspective on the stories' shared themes.

Ivanhoe, by Sir Walter Scott. While it is *The Abbot* that Joyce explicitly references as a source for his protagonist's chivalric dreams, *Ivanhoe* is more popular with modern readers and draws from a more familiar semi-historic narrative, that of King Richard's return to a benighted England following the Crusades. The novel's explicit delineation of good and evil and its celebration of romantic chivalry shows exactly what Joyce was reacting to by creating the ambiguous moral and emotional setting of "Araby."

Other stories from *Dubliners*. The collection was intended to create a composite portrait of Dublin, and there is a lot of resonance among the stories. Reading "Eveline," which follows directly after "Araby," will give students the perspective of a female protagonist, slightly older than the narrator of "Araby," as she has her own epiphany. "Counterparts" shows a part of Dublin that's probably similar to where the "Araby" narrator's uncle is while the boy is waiting for him to return home. It concludes with another, more brutal end of childhood innocence.

Teaching Guide: Key Plot Points

Introduction of the narrator and his infatuation (on North Richmond Street, in a lower middle class Dublin neighborhood): The story takes the form of a reminiscence by an unnamed first-person narrator. It begins with a general description of his daily life as a pre-adolescent boy living with his aunt and uncle. He describes his home, his after-school play in the streets with friends, and his infatuation with the girl who lives across the way, identified only as "Mangan's sister." The story's first specific event occurs when the girl speaks to him for the first time. She asks if he is going to Araby, a "splendid bazaar" that she can't attend because she's taking part in a religious retreat. He replies that if he goes, he will bring her back a gift.

Anticipation of Araby (at the narrator's school and home): After their conversation, the narrator becomes obsessed with Araby. He gets his aunt's permission to attend, and in the intervening days he can think of little else. When the evening of the bazaar finally arrives, he has to wait until his uncle returns home for dinner in order to get the money he needs to attend. The uncle is late; from all indications he's spent the evening at the pub. By the time the narrator finally departs, there's an air of desperation about his journey.

Disillusionment at Araby (at the bazaar): After an agonizing train ride, the narrator arrives at Araby as it's closing for the night. A few stalls remain open, and he approaches one of them. He overhears the young female sales clerk exchanging banal, flirtatious chatter with two young men. When she asks the narrator in a cursory manner if he wants to buy anything, he answers "no." He's crestfallen: "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity," he says, "and my eyes burned with anguish and anger."

Teaching Guide: History of the Text

Publication History: "Araby" is the third of 15 short stories in *Dubliners*, Joyce's first book. The collection had a difficult journey to print. The initial manuscript of 12 stories, including "Araby," was accepted by the London publisher Grant Richards in 1905, when Joyce was only 23 years of age, but publication was canceled after the printer refused to set several of the stories because of scandalous content. In 1909, circumstances repeated: a Dublin publisher accepted the manuscript but then withdrew it from publication following protests about the content from the printer. Finally, in 1914 Grant Richards had a change of heart and came out with the book, now expanded to 15 stories.

Realism Drawn from Experience: The alarm of the printers and caution of the publishers were a response to the stories' focus on **literary realism**—a movement that had taken hold in the mid- to late-19th century, and that the young Joyce particularly admired in the work of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Joyce wanted to portray life as he saw it lived day-to-day by the residents of Dublin, and what he saw was unsettling. *Dubliners* contains frank, dispassionate portrayals of poverty, tedium, hypocrisy, cruelty, disillusionment, sexism, bigotry, and alcoholism. Although there's little in "Araby" that's likely to shock or offend readers, signs of Dublin's degenerate state lurk beneath the surface.

- Joyce's realism draws heavily on personal experience, and he explicitly identified *Dubliners*' first three stories, of which "Araby" is the third, as "stories of [his] childhood." Details from his life add nuance and a sense of authenticity to "Araby." It's interesting to know, for instance, that the Joyce family lived for a time in the 1890s on North Richmond Street, where most of the story is set. Joyce briefly attended the Christian Brothers' School mentioned in the opening sentence, and the narrator's uncle is widely believed to have been based on his father. The Araby bazaar of the story was an actual event that took place in May of 1894, when Joyce was twelve—a clue to the likely age of the narrator when the story's events occur.

Teaching Guide: Significant Allusions

Like all of *Dubliners* (and all of Joyce's work), "Araby" is filled with allusions. Some are biblical or literary, but the most crucial ones—the ones that students need to understand in order to make sense of the story—refer to contemporary Irish culture. One of Joyce's missions was to illustrate how the forces of society influence and confine Dubliners' lives, and one of the ways he did this was by peppering his stories with passing references to these forces, in effect showing that they were so pervasive as to be taken for granted. His contemporaries would have understood such references without a second thought, but they can pose a challenge for present-day readers and students.

Allusions to Religion: The Catholic Church was a major force in the daily lives of Dubliners. Its prominence comes through in a number of allusions in the story:

- The narrator's home, previously occupied by a Catholic priest, contains a garden with an apple tree. In the biblical book of Genesis, the first humans, Adam and Eve, live in **the Garden of Eden**. They both eat from the Tree of Knowledge, the fruit of which is commonly depicted as an apple, and then lose their innocence and are cast out of the garden. This early allusion foreshadows the events of the narrator's tale.
- The narrator uses **religious terms and imagery** to describe his love for Mangan's sister. When he walks through rabble-filled Dublin streets, he carries the thought of her in his mind, saying "I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes." "Chalice" is an allusion to the cup used in the Christian act of communion, and by extension to the Holy Grail used by Jesus Christ. He goes on to describe how the girl's name comes to him "in strange prayers," and how, thinking of her, "I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled," as if in prayer. This use of religious imagery elevates his feelings for the girl to the level of spiritual idolatry—which ultimately heightens his sense of disillusionment at the end of the story. It also shows that what the boy knows about passion at this point in his life has come to him through religion. When he feels the first yearnings of romantic love, the vocabulary of the Catholic Church is the language most readily available to describe it.
- Mangan's sister can't go to the Araby bazaar because **"there was a retreat that week in her convent."** The convent is where she goes to school—one example of how the Catholic Church and education were inextricably linked in Ireland at the time. Such retreats were multi-day events during which students withdrew from daily life to focus on spiritual matters. (They remain a common practice at Catholic schools today.) The fact that the retreat keeps her from going to the bazaar

functions as a symbol of how religious and worldly desires conflict and intertwine in the culture of Dublin.

- When the narrator asks his aunt if he can go to Araby, she says she hopes it's not "some Freemason affair." **The Freemasons** are a centuries-old—semi-secret male social organization that traditionally bolsters members' business interests while espousing Protestant values. They exclude Catholics, and Catholics have frequently suspected them of actively working to undermine the Church. By alluding to the Freemasons here, Joyce provides another example of how religious concerns are woven into every aspect of Irish life. The aunt's first thought when she hears about Araby is the concern that it might be an event put on by an enemy of her religion.

Allusions to External Cultural Influences: Joyce's "Araby" also uses allusion to show the influences on Ireland of outside cultures. These take two polar-opposite forms. On one hand, the governing control of England over Ireland, which would remain in effect until Irish independence in 1922, is Dublin's defining political issue at the time of the story. On the other, fantasies of exotic foreign lands serve as an antidote to the tedium of daily life—including the ever-present sense of repression and humiliation brought on by English rule.

- The key allusion of this kind is **the Araby bazaar** itself. The bazaar's name is intended to capitalize on the commonly held, fanciful vision of the East as a place of exoticism, mystery, and romance. Describing his anticipation of the event, the narrator says "The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me." This is, to say the least, precisely the effect the event organizers would have been hoping for.
- When the narrator enters the event hall, the first stall he notices is labeled *Cafe Chantant*, French for "singing cafe." It's noteworthy that this place is a middle ground between the fantasy of Araby and the reality of Dublin—the French name is still fanciful and foreign, but it's closer to home and less cloaked in mystery.
- The stall the narrator approaches is occupied by a young woman and two young men with English accents. Their **Englishness** is crucial—it marks a crashing end to the narrator's romantic illusions. The banality of their flirtatious chatter shows him that his own romantic vision of Mangan's sister is just a fantasy. The cursory way the young woman addresses him ("The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty") is symbolic of the disinterested, condescending attitude of England toward Ireland.

Teaching Guide: Teaching Approaches

Theme of Epiphany: Joyce said that one of his literary aims was to portray what he called (borrowing from religious language) epiphanies: moments of revelation, often brought on by commonplace occurrences, that transform an individual, giving a deeper, truer understanding of life. A popular critical approach to *Dubliners* is to see it as a collection of epiphanies, and "Araby" lends itself to that line of interpretation particularly well. The narrator's experience at the bazaar leaves him a different person than he was before.

- **For discussion:** How exactly has the narrator been transformed by his experience? In the final sentence of the story he says, "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger." Is that reaction what students expected? Is this really an epiphany, and if so, in what way has the narrator gained a truer understanding of life?
- **For discussion:** Why did Joyce place so much importance on epiphanies? Are they really a common feature of life? Do all people have them?

Theme of First Love: "Araby" is, at its most fundamental level, the story of a boy on the cusp of adolescence experiencing his first romantic feelings. Plainly put, he has a crush on the girl who lives across the street. The

theme is one of the most familiar in literature, but the details of the story firmly anchor it to a specific time and place.

- **For discussion:** Joyce is famous for saying, “In the particular is contained the universal.” How well does that statement apply to this story? Which aspects of it are universal and which aren’t? Do all first crushes end in some sort of disillusionment? Why or why not?

Theme of the End of Childhood: Joyce structured *Dubliners* so that the stories when read together take readers through the stages of life, from childhood to adolescence to maturity. “Araby” is the last of the childhood stories, and its conclusion marks one of life’s most monumental milestones: the end of childhood, and with it the end of innocence. That’s a lot of significance to place on one disappointing event, but Joyce makes it clear that what may seem like a trivial experience to an outsider is monumental to the narrator.

- **For discussion:** How will the narrator’s experience at Araby affect the way he feels about Mangan’s sister? How is he likely to behave toward her the next time he sees her?

Theme of Religious Hypocrisy: At the time Joyce was writing *Dubliners*, the Catholic Church was deeply ingrained into most facets of Irish life. Born a Catholic himself, Joyce eventually claimed to “make open war upon [the church] by what I write and say and do.” He detested the degree of control the church had over individuals and their choices, and he depicted the hypocrisy he saw there in many of his works. In “Araby,” explicit depictions are subtle—the “charity” of the dead priest, the uncle’s drunkenness on “this night of Our Lord”—but themes showing the detachment of religion’s aspirations from Dublin’s lived reality are pervasive.

- **For discussion:** Consider the description of the former tenant’s life of the narrator’s house, the priest. He is described as charitable, but to what extent does the class agree that these actions represent true charity?
- **For discussion:** Facilitate a classroom discussion on hypocrisy. To what extent do students agree with such positions as “Do as I say, not as I do”? Does being hypocritical alter or harm the message of the hypocrite?

Theme of the Repressive Forces of Society: Throughout the story there are indications of how the lives of the characters are controlled by the forces of society. The children at play in the first scene try to hide when they’re called to dinner, but inevitably they must bow to adult demands and go in. Mangan’s sister wants to attend the Araby bazaar, but she has to go to a religious retreat instead. At school, the narrator grows frustrated by the demands of his studies, which seem trivial compared to his passionate desire to please his love. The boy has permission to go to Araby, but his plans go awry when he has to wait for his uncle, the head of the household, to return home and give him money.

- **For discussion:** Based on the story, what do Joyce’s views appear to be about the impact social forces have on his characters?
- **For discussion:** In the story, social forces are often shown to be in conflict with individual desires. Is one better than the other? Are there instances where a character is better off for having to conform to the demands of society, or worse off for not doing so?

Tricky Issues to Address While Teaching

Cryptic References to Irish Culture of the Time: The story is filled with passing references to aspects of daily life in Dublin that will be unfamiliar to most students. Why do the families in the story have tea at a time

when you'd expect them to be having dinner? What are "the troubles in our native land"? Why does Mangan's sister go to a convent? Why does the narrator's aunt dislike the Freemasons? Those are just a few of the questions the story raises. There's a lot to unpack here.

- **What to do:** It helps to work with an annotated text that clarifies some of more obscure references. Annotation, though, isn't likely to be enough to make students feel at home in Joyce's world. You can have them research Irish culture of the time before they read the story, or assign them to figure out the answers to their questions after they've read. You can also simply explain the references in class. (Refer to the "Significant Allusions" section of this guide.)

Employment of Sexual Imagery: While the epiphany of "Araby" can be framed in the context of the clash between romanticism and commercialism, it is also the case that Joyce semi-explicitly describes his narrator's "awakening" as a sexual one. While the narrator himself does not understand where his feelings are coming from and conflates them with feelings of religious devotion, readers may notice his conflation and be confused, either by the force of the narrator's religion or by the story's unconventional framing of this aspect of young love.

- **What to do:** Acknowledge the innuendo directly if your class is capable of sustaining a discussion on puberty and sexuality. Focus on how the narrator's physical desire for Mangan's sister is complicated by his religious education and the ways he expresses this desire. What does this have to say about his education? About his transitioning from childhood to adulthood?

The Topic of First Love May Hit Too Close to Home: The narrator of the story is likely to be a few years younger than your students, but the symptoms of his infatuation with Mangan's sister—his dizzying sense of longing, his stifling shyness—are likely to strike a familiar chord with some of them. The result could be embarrassment or childish behavior.

- **What to do:** Classroom management strategies need to be tailored to the individuals involved, but in general it's a good idea to keep conversations from becoming too personal. Asking, "Does this sound realistic to you?" may elicit a better response than, "Have you felt the same way the narrator feels?"

Alternative Approaches to Teaching "Araby"

While the main ideas, character development, and discussion questions above are typically the focal points of units involving "Araby," the following suggestions represent alternative readings that may enrich your students' experience and understanding of the story.

- **Focus on the significance of the narrator's house.** For such a short story, "Araby" spends a lot of time describing the house where the narrator lives, and the time he spends in it by himself. The second paragraph of the story is devoted to the back drawing room and the house's former tenant, a priest, who died there. One rainy evening the narrator has a near-ecstatic experience in this room as he contemplates his love for Mangan's sister. Before school he spies on her from the front parlor. On the night of the Araby bazaar, as he's waiting for his uncle, he retreats upstairs and goes singing from room to room. Joyce clearly thinks the house is an important, possibly symbolic place for his protagonist. See what theories students can come up with as to why this is so.
- **Focus on the visual nature of the story.** Throughout *Dubliners* Joyce pays great attention to visual details, as though he's trying to draw portraits and cityscapes with his words. In "Araby" descriptions of children playing in the streets at dusk, of crowds at the market, and, especially, of Mangan's sister

bathed in light, are like pictures hanging in a gallery. To emphasize the importance of the visual details, have students draw actual pictures based on the story's descriptions. If this idea takes hold, have them make a comic strip of the story.

- **Focus on the perspective of Mangan's sister.** Readers know all about how the narrator of "Araby" sees the world, but what about the object of his affection, Mangan's sister? Can students draw any conclusions about her based on the few details they know? This is a richer area of focus if your class is reading other stories in *Dubliners*. What do the lives of the female characters in later stories indicate about the potential paths that Mangan's sister's life might take?

Teaching Guide: Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. A recurring theme in many of the stories in *Dubliners* is a longing for escape expressed through fantasies of flight to some place Eastern and exotic. What place represents the unknown to you? Research this place and discuss whether it is truly exotic and mysterious or just different.
2. Catholicism figures prominently in much of Joyce's work. Compare the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland at the turn of the century and today. Would the themes of religious confusion and doubt in "Araby" create controversy in modern-day Ireland?
3. Discuss the three books that are left by the previous occupant of the narrator's house: "*The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*." What does each represent in the story?
4. Compare and contrast Joyce's portrayal of Irish life with that of a contemporary writer, such as Roddy Doyle in *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*.
5. Discuss "Araby" in relation to the other stories in *Dubliners*. In particular, consider its position in the overall structure of the collection and the subjects and themes it explores.
6. What is signified in the story by "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed," the poem that the narrator's inebriated uncle begins to recite to his wife as the boy leaves for the bazaar?

Teaching Guide: Topics for Discussion

1. Identify and discuss the numerous religious symbols in the story.
2. The narrator of "Araby" moves from innocence to experience through his epiphany. What has he learned by the end of the story?
3. What is the significance of the English accents that the boy overhears at the bazaar?
4. Joyce once said that in *Dubliners* he intended "to write a chapter of the moral history" of Ireland, because Dublin seemed to him to be at the "centre of paralysis." What do you think he meant by that? If you were to write a chapter of the moral history of your country, which city would you choose to be at the center? Why?
5. Discuss Joyce's use of a first-person narrative in "Araby." Does the narrator reveal in any way how much time has passed since the incident related in the story?
6. Examine the scene in which the narrator describes accompanying his aunt to the market. How does this brief passage further enhance the themes in the story?

Teaching Guide: Topics for Further Study

Joyce once said that in *Dubliners* he intended "to write a chapter of the moral history of" Ireland, because Dublin seemed to him to be at the "centre of paralysis." What do you think he meant by that? If you were to write a chapter of the moral history of your country, which city would you choose to be at the center? Why?

A recurring theme in many of the stories in *Dubliners* is a longing for escape expressed through fantasies of flight to someplace Eastern and exotic. What place represents the unknown to you? Research this place and discuss whether it is truly exotic and mysterious or just different.

Catholicism figures prominently in much of Joyce's work. Compare the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland at the turn of the century and today. Would the themes of religious confusion and doubt in "Araby" create controversy in modern-day Ireland?

Teaching Guide: What Do I Read Next?

Dubliners is the complete collection of 15 short stories by James Joyce, all loosely connected as each one describes people living in Dublin, Ireland, at the turn of the century.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. This first novel by Joyce describes the early life of Stephen Dedalus, a sensitive, intelligent young man struggling to understand life and his role in it.

Ireland: A Terrible Beauty (1975). A collection of photographs by Jill Uris, accompanied by text written by her husband, author Leon Uris. This book not only gives an overview of the history of the Emerald Isle, but also shows off the beauty of the island in many exquisite photographs.

Ireland: Art into History (1994). This book, edited by Brian P. Kennedy and Raymond Gillespie, traces the history of Ireland through its art, from prehistoric times to the present. It presents both art and history, without being too academic.

The Common Chord: Stories and Tales (1947), by Frank O'Connor, is a collection of short stories from this famous Irish writer. Written from the point of view of a young boy, O'Connor's stories are funny, truthful, and many times touched with an edge of sadness.

The Commitments (1988) and *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (1993), both by Irishman Roddy Doyle, are novels set in contemporary working-class Ireland. *The Commitments* describes the efforts of Jimmy Rabbitte to start a band which covers American soul songs of the 1960s by such greats as Otis Redding and Sam Cooke. *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* gives the reader a look at life through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy in modern-day Ireland.