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“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.

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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.”**

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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

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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. 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).

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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.

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The two perceptions of these two moods of the boy are also clearly distinct. The naif 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).

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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).

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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”).

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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.

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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.

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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

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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—

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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]).

P 135 (NOTE)

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 m