

Literary Analysis Using James Joyce’s “Araby,”

A Thematic Approach

Araby
James Joyce (1882-1941)



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 neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. 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.

When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. 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. 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 gantlet 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. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. 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. 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. 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 railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

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. This happened morning after morning. 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 image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you* about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. 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. 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.

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.

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.

"And why can't you?" I asked.

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. At fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

"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! 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 asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised, and hoped it was not some Freemason affair. 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. 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.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

"Yes, boy, I know."

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. 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.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs. Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old, garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs. Mercer stood up to

go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

"I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord."

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hall door. 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. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

"The people are in bed and after their first sleep now," he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

"Can't you give him the money and let him go?"

You've kept him late enough as it is."

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten.

He said he believed in the old saying: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." He asked me where I was going and, when I told him a second time, he asked me did I know *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girded at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Café Chantant* were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

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. 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!”

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.”

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. 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. 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.

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

Using Content (Plot Analysis)

The content consists of brief but condensations of the action of the story. The content tells your reader what happens. Remember that you cannot relate all the action. Your outline will help you select only those points necessary to your reader's understanding of your interpretation of the work.

Study the summary essay below to discover its organization. Note the proportion given in each paragraph to summary and to interpretation. The introduction identifies the work and the author. Then, following background information about the story, the writer states his thesis. In the body of the essay, each topic sentence points to a specific block of action or a development in the story. The content of each paragraph is devoted to a summary of a selected block of action, and the last sentence of each paragraph evaluates and interprets the action described. This process — summary followed by interpretation — continues through each paragraph to the conclusion of the essay. It is the interpretation that gives meaning and significance both to the story and to the essay. In the essay that follows, note the use of quotations and how each aids understanding and imparts a sense of the style and manner of the work.

James Joyce's "Araby": Summary of an Epiphany

Each of the fifteen stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners* presents a flat, rather spatial portrait. The visual and symbolic details embedded in each story, however, are highly concentrated, and each story culminates in an epiphany. In Joycean terms, an epiphany is a moment when the essence of a character is revealed, when all the forces that bear on his life converge, and we can, in that instant, understand him. Each story in the collection is centered in an epiphany, and each story is concerned with some failure or deception, which results in realization and disillusionment. "Araby" follows this pattern. The meaning is revealed in a young boy's psychic journey from first love to despair and disappointment, and the theme is found in the boy's discovery of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal in life.

The story opens with a description of North Richmond Street, a "blind," "cold ... silent" street where the houses "gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces." It is a street of fixed, decaying conformity and false piety. The boy's house contains the same sense of a dead present and a lost past. The former tenant, a priest, died in the back room of the house, and his legacy — several old yellowed books, which the boy enjoys leafing through because they are old, and a bicycle pump rusting in the back yard — become symbols of the intellectual and religious vitality of the past. The boy, in the midst of such decay and spiritual paralysis, experiences the confused idealism and dreams of first love and his awakening becomes incompatible with and in ironic contrast to the staid world about him.

Every morning before school the boy lies on the floor in the front parlor peeking out through a crack in the blind of the door, watching and waiting for the girl next door to emerge from her house and walk to school. He is shy and still boyish. He follows her, walks silently past, not daring to speak, overcome with a confused sense of sensual desire and religious adoration. In his mind she is both a saint to be worshipped and a woman to be desired. His eyes are "often full of tears," and one evening he goes to the back room where the priest had died. Clasp the palms of his hands together, he murmurs, "O love! O love!" in a prayer not to God, but to the concept of love and perhaps even to the girl, his love. Walking with his aunt to shop on Saturday evenings he imagines that the girl's image accompanies him, and that he protects her in "places the most hostile to romance." In the mixed symbolism of the Christian and the Romantic or Oriental myths Joyce reveals the epiphany in the story: "These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely

through a throng of foes.” He is unable to talk to the girl. Drifting away from his schoolmates’ boyish games, the boy has fantasies in his isolation, in the ecstasy and pain of first love.

Finally the girl speaks to the boy. She asks him if he is going to Araby. He replies that if he does he will bring her a gift, and from that moment, his thoughts upon the mixed imagery of the saintly light up on her hair and the potential sensuality of “the white border of a petticoat,” the boy cannot sleep or study. The word Araby “cast an Eastern enchantment” over him, and then on the night he is to go to the bazaar his uncle neglects to return home. Neither the aunt or uncle understands the boy’s need and anguish, and thus his isolation is deepened. We begin to see that the story is not so much a story of love as it is a rendition of the world in which the boy lives.

The second part of the story depicts the boy’s inevitable disappointment and realization. In such an atmosphere of “blindness” — the aunt and uncle unaware of the boy’s anguish, the girl not conscious of the boy’s love, and the boy himself blind to the true nature of his love — the words “hostile to romance” take on ironic overtones. These overtones deepen when the boy arrives too late at the bazaar. It is closing and the hall is “in darkness.” He recognizes “a silence like that which pervades a church after a service,” but the bazaar is dirty and disappointing. Two men are “counting money on a salver” and he listens “to the fall of the coins.” A young lady, bored with him and interested in two men who are flirting with her, cheapens and destroys the boy’s sense of an “Eastern enchantment.” His love, like his quest for a gift to draw the girl to him in an unfriendly world, ends with his realizing that his love existed only in his mind. Thus the theme of the story — the discrepancy between the real and the ideal is made final in the bazaar, a place of tawdry make-believe. The epiphany in which the boy lives a dream in spite of the ugly and the worldly is brought to its inevitable conclusion: the single sensation of life disintegrates. The boy senses the falsity of his dreams and his eyes burn “with anguish and anger.”

Using Setting and Atmosphere

Remember that setting is usually a part of atmosphere and that atmosphere consists of the prevailing tone of the work and its resultant meaning or effect. Some works will not warrant an essay devoted to setting and atmosphere; others, like Joyce’s “Araby,” will be so profoundly dependent upon a particular setting that to ignore its importance will be to miss much of the meaning of the work.

Dream Versus Reality: Setting and Atmosphere in James Joyce’s “Araby”

Convinced that the Dublin of the 1900’s was a center of spiritual paralysis, James Joyce loosely but thematically tied together his stories in *Dubliners* by means of their common setting. Each of the stories consists of a portrait in which Dublin contributes in some way to the dehumanizing experience of modern life. The boy in the story “Araby” is intensely subject to the city’s dark, hopeless conformity, and his tragic yearning toward the exotic in the face of drab, ugly reality forms the center of the story.

On its simplest level, “Araby” is a story about a boy’s first love. On a deeper level, however, it is a story about the world in which he lives — a world inimical to ideals and dreams. This deeper level is introduced and developed in several scenes: the opening description of the boy’s street, his house, his relationship to his aunt and uncle, the information about the priest and his belongings, the boy’s two trips — his walks through Dublin shopping and his subsequent ride to Araby.

North Richmond Street is described metaphorically and presents the reader with his first view of the boy's world. The street is "blind"; it is a dead end, yet its inhabitants are smugly complacent; the houses reflect the attitudes of their inhabitants. The houses are "imperturbable" in the "quiet," the "cold," the "dark muddy lanes" and "dark dripping gardens." The first use of situational irony is introduced here, because anyone who is aware, who is not spiritually blinded or asleep, would feel oppressed and endangered by North Richmond Street. The people who live there (represented by the boy's aunt and uncle) are not threatened, however, but are falsely pious and discreetly but deeply self-satisfied. Their prejudice is dramatized by the aunt's hopes that Araby, the bazaar the boy wants to visit, is not some "Freemason affair," and by old Mrs. Mercer's gossiping over tea while collecting stamps for "some pious purpose."

The background or world of blindness extends from a general view of the street and its inhabitants to the boy's personal relationships. It is not a generation gap but a gap in the spirit, in empathy and conscious caring that results in the uncle's failure to arrive home in time for the boy to go to the bazaar while it is still open. The uncle has no doubt been to the local pub, negligent and indifferent to the boy's anguish and impatience. The boy waits well into the evening in the "imperturbable" house with its musty smell and old, useless objects that fill the rooms. The house, like the aunt and uncle, and like the entire neighborhood, reflects people who are well intentioned but narrow in their views and blind to higher values (even the street lamps lift a "feeble" light to the sky). The total effect of such setting is an atmosphere permeated with stagnation and isolation.

The second use of symbolic description — that of the dead priest and his belongings — suggests remnants of a more vital past. The bicycle pump rusting in the rain in the back yard and the old yellowed books in the back room indicate that the priest once actively engaged in real service to God and man, and further, from the titles of the books, that he was a person given to both piety and flights of imagination. But the priest is dead; his pump rusts; his books yellow. The effect is to deepen, through a sense of a dead past, the spiritual and intellectual stagnation of the present. Into this atmosphere of spiritual paralysis the boy bears, with blind hopes and romantic dreams, his encounter with first love. In the face of ugly, drab reality — "amid the curses of laborers," "jostled by drunken men and bargaining women" — he carries his aunt's parcels as she shops in the market place, imagining that he bears, not parcels, but a "chalice through a throng of foes." The "noises converged in a single sensation of life" and in a blending of Romantic and Christian symbols he transforms in his mind a perfectly ordinary girl into an enchanted princess: untouchable, promising, saintly. Setting in this scene depicts the harsh, dirty reality of life, which the boy blindly ignores. The contrast between the real and the boy's dreams is ironically drawn and clearly foreshadows the boy's inability to keep the dream, to remain blind.

The boy's final disappointment occurs as a result of his awakening to the world around him. The tawdry superficiality of the bazaar, which in his mind had been an "Oriental enchantment," strips away his blindness and leaves him alone with the realization that life and love differ from the dream. Araby, the symbolic temple of love, is profane. The bazaar is dark and empty; it thrives on the same profit motive as the market place ("two men were counting money on a salver"); love is represented as an empty, passing flirtation.

"Araby" is a story of first love; even more, it is a portrait of a world that defies the ideal and the dream. Thus, setting in this story becomes the true subject, embodying an atmosphere of spiritual paralysis against which a young boy's idealistic dreams are no match. Realizing this, the boy takes his first step into adulthood.

Using Symbolism

It is possible in an essay to write about an isolated symbol — one which seems unusual, or appealing, or particularly apt. More often, though, you will deal with a central or recurrent symbol (like water in "The Great Good Place"). If you write about an isolated symbol, your thesis should be a strong statement of the existence of the symbol in the work, and the body of your essay

should be composed of statements that actually constitute evidence of the existence of the symbol. As you develop paragraphs in the body of the essay, make clear your reasons for ascribing the symbolic significance you do, show the function of the symbol in the work, and above all, prove that awareness of the symbol enriches understanding or appreciation of the work.

The Central Symbol of the Church in Joyce's "Araby"

Joyce's short story "Araby" is filled with symbolic images of a church. It opens and closes with strong symbols, and in the body of the story, the images are shaped by the young Irish narrator's impressions of the effect the Church of Ireland has upon the people of Ireland. The boy is fiercely determined to invest in someone within this Church. The holiness he feels should be the natural state of all within it, but a succession of experiences forces him to see that his determination is in vain. At the climax of the story, when he realizes that his dreams of holiness and love are inconsistent with the actual world, his anger and anguish are directed, not toward the Church, but toward himself as "a creature driven by vanity." In addition to the images in the story that are symbolic of the Church and its effect upon the people who belong to it, there are descriptive words and phrases that add to this representational meaning.

The story opens with a description of the Dublin neighborhood where the boy lives. Strikingly suggestive of a church, the image shows the ineffectuality of the Church as a vital force in the lives of the inhabitants of the neighborhood — the faithful within the Church. North Richmond Street is composed of two rows of houses with "brown imperturbable faces" (the pews) leading down to the tall "uninhabited house" (the empty altar). The boy's own home is set in a garden the natural state of which would be like Paradise, since it contains a "central apple tree"; however, those who should have cared for it have allowed it to become desolate, and the central tree stands alone amid "a few straggling bushes." At dusk when the boy and his companions play in the street the lamps of the street lift their "feeble lanterns" to the sky of "ever-changing violet" (timid suppliants to the faraway heavens). Since the boy is the narrator, the inclusion of these symbolic images in the description of the setting shows that the boy is sensitive to the lack of spiritual beauty in his surroundings. Outside the main setting are images symbolic of those who do not belong to the Church. The boy and his companions go there at times, behind their houses, along the "dark muddy lanes," to where the "rough tribes" (the infidels) dwell. Here odors arise from "the ash pits" — those images symbolic to James Joyce of the moral decay of his nation.

Even the house in which the youthful main character lives adds to the sense of moral decay. The former tenant, a priest (now dead), is shown to have been insensitive to the spiritual needs of his people. His legacy was a collection of books that showed his confusion of the sacred with the secular — and there is evidence that he devoted his life to gathering "money" and "furniture." He left behind no evidence of a life of spiritual influence.

Despite these discouraging surroundings, the boy is determined to find some evidence of the loveliness his idealistic dreams tell him should exist within the Church. His first love becomes the focal point of this determination. In the person of Mangan's sister, obviously somewhat older than the boy and his companions, his longings find an object of worship. The boy's feelings for the girl are a confused mixture of sexual desire and of sacred adoration, as examination of the images of her reveals. He is obsessed at one and the same time with watching her physical attractions (her white neck, her soft hair, the movement of the brown-clad figure) and with seeing her always surrounded by light, as if by a halo. He imagines that he can carry her "image" as a "chalice" through a "throng of foes" — the cursing, brawling infidels at the market to which he goes with his aunt. All other sensations of life "fade from his consciousness" and he is aware only of his adoration of the blessed "image." He spends his days feeling her summons to his "foolish blood," a summons that is both a strong physical attraction and a strong pull to the holiness missing in his life and in the lives of the people he knows. In all his

watching of her he is “thankful that he can see so little,” as men of his Church have ever been filled with holy dread to look upon the Virgin.

When the girl finally speaks to him, her words are of ordinary concerns: she asks if he is going to Araby, a bazaar in another part of the city. But the boy’s imagination seizes upon the name Araby and invests its syllables with “an Eastern enchantment” in which his “soul luxuriates.” Araby becomes a place where his soul can find the mystical beauty lacking in his own mundane Church. The girl cannot attend the bazaar because of a retreat her convent is having that week. As a consequence the boy feels a summons that has symbolic overtones of a holy crusade: he is determined to go forth to the “enchanted” place and bring back a gift worthy to lay at the feet of his adored one.

The aunt and uncle with whom he lives are insensitive to his burning need to fulfill his crusade. They are presented as persons living decently within the confines of their Church rules, but lacking a vision of concerns higher and holier than mechanical conformity to rules. They do, finally, though, provide the florin to allow him to go to Araby. Alone, he makes his way to the place of Eastern enchantment. When he arrives, he is struck by a “silence like that of a church.” This is followed by another image that calls up the image at the beginning of the story, that of the aisle leading to an altar. In this case, it is a hall leading to the booth displaying porcelain vases (chalices for the Eucharist), and flowered tea sets (the flowers on the altar). The great jars guarding the stall can be interpreted as symbols of the mysticism standing guard over the Church.

For the boy, the girl attending the stall, like Mangan’s sister, becomes an object of faith. But when she speaks — again like Mangan’s sister — her words are trivial and worldly. In a sudden flash of insight the boy sees that his faith and his passion have been blind. He sees in the “two men counting money on a salver” a symbol of the moneylenders in the temple. He allows the pennies to fall in his pocket. The lights in the hall go out; his “church” is in darkness. Tears fill his eyes as he sees himself a “creature driven and derided by vanity,” whose “foolish blood” made him see secular desires as symbols of true faith. In this moment of disillusionment he feels that he himself is at fault for being so bemused by his ideals, that he failed completely to see the world as it is. He has discovered in his Church and in love (both traditional symbols of ineffably sacred loveliness) only a shoddy imitation of true beauty. Understandably his disillusionment causes him “anguish and anger.”

Using Myth and Archetype

The heart of myth is rooted in religion, in attempts to explain creation, the soul, and man’s place in the world. A discussion of myth, therefore, must be preceded by your discovery of its presence in a work; and for your discussion to be meaningful, you must understand the origin or source of the ideas you decide to ascribe to myth. (In “Araby,” we perceive the clear presence of a reference to Christianity.)

Remember that archetype can be generously applied to a number of man’s values, dreams, and beliefs, but that myth comprises only a part of archetype. Archetype is a much larger term, and if you perceive some universal experience in a literary work, it can quite logically form a part of our racial past. Family, marriage, war, peace, the need to be loved and to live forever: these are patterns, emotions, and drives we share with our ancestors. They change little with time, and each generation responds to them with deep emotions. The presence of archetype in a work gives that work added importance and an essay defining the archetype, its effect and resultant added meaning, will be of value to readers who may have responded but have not discerned why.

To write an essay using myth and archetype, determine how their presence influences and reveals the meaning of the work. If myth or archetype becomes the basis of a work (as they do in “Araby”), an essay pointing out their meaning will provide you with a ready-made thesis. Ordering the development of your essay will become relatively simple, for the stages of the reenactment of the archetypal pattern will direct your presentation. If, on the other hand, the use of myth does not form the basis of the entire work, but is only an enrichment of another pattern, your order of development will be somewhat more complex. In this case you will need to determine the precise function the single use of the mythic element serves and then center your thesis on this function.

The Lonely Quest of James Joyce’s “Araby”

Probably no other twentieth century short story has called forth more attention than Joyce’s “Araby.” Some universality of experience makes the story interesting to readers of all ages, for they respond instinctively to an experience that could have been their own. It is a part of the instinctual nature of man to long for what he feels is the lost spirituality of his world. In all ages man has believed that it is possible to search for and find a talisman, which, if brought back, will return this lost spirituality. The development of theme in “Araby” resembles the archetypal myth of the quest for a holy talisman.

In “Araby,” Joyce works from a “visionary mode of artistic creation” — a phrase used by psychiatrist Carl Jung to describe the “visionary” kind of literary creation that derives its material from “the hinterland of man’s mind that suggests the abyss of time separating us from prehuman ages, or evokes a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience, which surpasses man’s understanding and to which he is therefore in danger of succumbing.” (1) Assuredly this describes Joyce’s handling of the material of “Araby.” The quest itself and its consequences surpass the understanding of the young protagonist of the story. He can only “feel” that he undergoes the experience of the quest and naturally is confused, and at the story’s conclusion, when he fails, he is anguished and angered. His “contrasting world of light and darkness” contains both the lost spirituality and the dream of restoring it. Because our own worlds contain these contrasts we also “feel,” even though the primordial experience surpasses our understanding, too.

It is true, as a writer reminds us, that “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.” (2) In “Araby,” however, there is, in addition, an overlay of Eastern mysticism. This diversity of background materials intensifies the universality of the experience. We can turn to the language and the images of the story to see how the boy’s world is shown in terms of these diverse backgrounds.

There is little that is “light” in the corner of Dublin that forms the world of the story, little that retains its capability to evoke spirituality. North Richmond Street is “blind”; the houses stare at one another with “brown imperturbable faces.” The time is winter, with its short days and its early dusk. Only the boy and his laughing, shouting companions “glow”; they are still too young to have succumbed to the spiritual decay of the adult inhabitants of Dublin. But the boys must play in “dark muddy lanes,” in “dark dripping gardens,” near “dark odorous stables” and “ashpits.” Joyce had said of *Dubliners*, the collection of stories from which “Araby” comes, that he intended to “write a chapter in the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis.” (3) The images of the story show us that the spiritual environment of the boy is paralyzed; it is musty, dark.

Everywhere in his dark surroundings the boy seeks the “light.” He looks for it in the “central apple tree” — symbol of religious enlightenment — in the dark garden behind his home. The garden should be like Eden, but the tree is overshadowed by the desolation of the garden, and thus has become the tree of spiritual death. He looks for light in the room of his home where the former tenant, a priest, had died, but the only objects left

by the priest were books, yellowed and damp. Here, too, the quest has failed. No evidence of spiritual life remains. Decay and rust have taken over all the treasures the priest had laid up on earth for himself.

Into this world of darkness appears a girl, Mangan's sister. Because of her the boy feels a surge of hope that now in her love he will find light. Even though he has "never spoken to her, except for a few casual words," her name is like a "summons to all his foolish blood." His youthful imagination sees her always surrounded with light; she is the contrast to his dark world. She becomes an image to him of all that he seeks. That image accompanies him "even in places the most hostile to romance": the market and the streets, among the "drunken men and bargaining women," amid "the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys." In this unlikely place occurs what Joyce calls an "epiphany," which to him means "a sudden spiritual manifestation," when objects or moments of inconsequential vulgarity can be transfigured to something spiritual. The boy says, "I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes." Plainly he has felt the summons to cherish the holy, the "light," in this dark world of those who are hostile to the sacred.

However, what he feels is beyond his understanding. His love for the girl is part sexual desire, part sacred adoration. He is, he says, "confused."

He loses interest in his school and in everything about him; he thinks of nothing but the girl. He can see her "dark house," "her brown-clad figure touched by lamp-light." He feels that he has found one image of holiness in his world of lost spirituality. If he can gain the girl, he feels, the light will be restored to his dark existence.

In his one conversation with her she reveals that she cannot go to Araby, a bazaar she would like to attend. She suggests that it would be "well" for him to go. He speaks impulsively: "If I go I will bring you something." His opportunity has come. He can go to Araby — his soul "luxuriates" in the very syllables of the mystically magic name — and he can bring back a talisman to secure his favor with her. The lost light of his world will be restored. Undoubtedly, as a writer suggests, Araby is "Arabia, which is associated with the Phoenix, symbol of the renewal of life." (5)

Over half the story is concerned with the delays and frustrations in his plans for his quest, and with his final journey to the "enchanted" place, where the talisman will be procured. Significantly, he must go to Araby alone. The train is deserted; when throngs of buyers try to press their way onto the train the porters move them back, saying this "is a special train for the bazaar." All who go on a quest for the high and the holy must go alone.

Arriving, he finds the bazaar nearly empty. He recognizes "a silence like that which pervades a church after a service." The church is empty; it is not attended by the faithful. Two men count money on a "silver salver." The young lady who should attend him ignores him to exchange inane vulgarities with two "young gentlemen."

Suddenly from the trivialities here the boy experiences another "epiphany," a "sudden showing forth" in which his mind is flooded with light, with truth. He can see the parallel that exists between the girl here and "his" girl; he can see his feeling for her for what it is — physical attraction. Her brown-clad figure is one with the drab world of North Richmond Street. Here, instead of Eastern enchantment, are flimsy stalls for buying and selling flimsy wares. His grail has turned out to be only flimsy tea sets covered with artificial flowers. As the upper hall becomes completely dark, the boy realizes that his quest has ended. Gazing upward, he sees the vanity of imagining he can carry a chalice through a dark throng of foes.

1. Carl G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. trans. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York, 1933), pp. 156-157.

2. William Bysshe Stein, "Joyce's 'Araby': Paradise Lost," *Perspective*, X11, No. 4 (Spring 1962), 215.

3. From *Letters of James Joyce*, Vol. II, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York, 1966), p. 134.
4. James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York, 1944), pp. 210-211.
5. Marvin Magalaner, *Time of Apprenticeship: The Fiction of Young James Joyce* (London, 1959), p. 87.

Using Point of View

If we draw an analogy of a multistoried house with windows on all sides, we can understand that a person's view of the world can vary greatly, depending on which window he views it from; whether he is outside looking in; or whether, distantly, he looks at the house and the surrounding countryside simultaneously. Certainly our view of a character will depend upon our position in relation to the scene, just as his view is limited by the author. Henry James considered the positioning of both characters and narrator crucial to fiction, and in recent years (in fact since his detailed studies of point of view) critics have considered the artist's use of point of view the central focus for interpretation. Look at the questions point of view provokes. Does the viewpoint allow for irony? Does it limit sympathy or does it evoke greater sympathy? Does it cause attitudes to be formed? What are they? Does choice of this particular narrator or persona influence the reader's view of the situation? How? Does it control imagery and symbolism?

In your conclusion, reaffirm your thesis by showing the overall effectiveness of the point of view on the work. Did the work gain much or little from its use? Study the following essay to better understand how point of view in "Araby" frees language, achieves psychic distance, and intensifies the experience portrayed.

The Ironic Narrator of James Joyce's "Araby"

Although James Joyce's story "Araby" is told from the first person viewpoint of its young protagonist, we do not receive the impression that a boy tells the story. Instead, the narrator seems to be a man matured well beyond the experience of the story. The mature man reminisces about his youthful hopes, desires, and frustrations. More than if a boy's mind had reconstructed the events of the story for us, this particular way of telling the story enables us to perceive clearly the torment youth experiences when ideals, concerning both sacred and earthly love, are destroyed by a suddenly unclouded view of the actual world. Because the man, rather than the boy, recounts the experience, an ironic view can be presented of the institutions and persons surrounding the boy. This ironic view would be impossible for the immature, emotionally involved mind of the boy himself. Only an adult looking back at the high hopes of "foolish blood" and its resultant destruction could account for the ironic viewpoint. Throughout the story, however, the narrator consistently maintains a full sensitivity to his youthful anguish. From first to last we sense the reality to him of his earlier idealistic dream of beauty.

The opening paragraph, setting the scene, prepares us for the view we receive of the conflict between the loveliness of the ideal and the drabness of the actual. Descriptive words show the narrator's consciousness of the boy's response to beauty and the response of the neighborhood people, who are blind to beauty: North Richmond Street is "blind"; its houses, inhabited by "decent" people, stare unseeingly at one another — and all this is under a sky of "ever-changing violet," in a setting of gardens marred by the "odours of ashpits" and "dark odorous stables." The boy's own house, which had formerly been inhabited by a priest, is placed in a garden like that of Eden. It is a place of potential holiness, shown to us in the irony of the garden's barrenness and the priest's worldliness: the garden has now only a "central apple tree" and a "few straggling bushes"; the priest

had died and left behind him evidence of his preoccupation with secular literature and with collecting money and furniture.

Into this setting appears a figure representative of all that is ideal, the girl. The narrator shows us in a subtly ironic manner that in his youthful adoration of Mangan's sister she is, confusedly, the embodiment of all his boyish dreams of the beauty of physical desire and, at the same time, the embodiment of his adoration of all that is holy. In his dark environment Mangan's sister stands out, a figure always shown outlined by light, with the power to set aflame in him a zeal to conquer the uncaring and the unholy. Her image, constantly with him, makes him feel as though he bears a holy "chalice" through a "throng of foes" — the Saturday evening throng of drunken men, bargaining women, cursing laborers, and all the others who have no conception of the mystical beauty his young mind has created in this world of material ugliness.

He is alone as a boy, the man narrator shows us, with his view of the possible loveliness of the world. Even the aunt and uncle with whom he lives are callous to his burning need to go to the bazaar, which looms in his imagination as a place of mystical Eastern enchantment, to purchase a gift worthy of his loved one. Looking back, the narrator can see that his uncle had been concerned with his daily, worldly tasks, his aunt with maintaining a "decent" observance of "this day of our Lord," although she does not want him to be disappointed in his wish to go to the bazaar. From the vantage point of maturity the narrator can realize that the aunt and the uncle perhaps once possessed an awareness of the romantic, an awareness that has since been clouded by the drabness of North Richmond Street.

Like Stephen Dedalus of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the boy, then, must seek for the high, the inviolate, by himself. And, also like Stephen, he finds instead the world. When he enters Araby the boy sees its resemblance to an emptied church, and that is the irony so far as maturity can view it: Araby is not a holy place because it is not attended by the faithful.

He has come alone on a deserted train; the bazaar, full of spurious wares, is tended by uncaring people who leave him even more alone than he had been before; the young lady who should have waited on him ignores him to joke with two young men. The young lady's inane remarks to the young men have a ring in the memory of the mature narrator reminiscent of his adored one's remarks. Both are concerned with the material, the crass.

The narrator can, with his backward look, supply us with two apprehensions: one, the fully remembered, and thus fully felt, anguish of a too sudden realization of the disparity between a youthful dream of the mystic beauty of the world and his actual world; and two, the irony implicit in a view that can see the dream itself as a "vanity." [The narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also a mature adult, looking back on innocence]

From Innocence to Knowledge: Character in James Joyce's "Araby"

In his brief but complex story, "Araby," James Joyce concentrates on character rather than on plot to reveal the ironies inherent in self-deception. On one level "Araby" is a story of initiation, of a boy's quest for the ideal. The quest ends in failure but results in an inner awareness and a first step into manhood. On another level the story consists of a grown man's remembered experience, for the story is told in retrospect by a man who looks back to a particular moment of intense meaning and insight. As such, the boy's experience is not restricted to youth's encounter with first love. Rather, it is a portrayal of a continuing problem all through life: the incompatibility of the ideal, of the dream as one wishes it to be, with the bleakness of reality. This double focus — the boy who first experiences, and the man who has not forgotten — provides for the dramatic rendering of

a story of first love told by a narrator who, with his wider, adult vision, can employ the sophisticated use of irony and symbolic imagery necessary to reveal the story's meaning.

The boy's character is indirectly suggested in the opening scenes of the story. He has grown up in the backwash of a dying city. Symbolic images show him to be an individual who is sensitive to the fact that his city's vitality has ebbed and left a residue of empty piety, the faintest echoes of romance, and only symbolic memories of an active concern for God and fellow men. Although the young boy cannot apprehend it intellectually, he feels that the street, the town, and Ireland itself have become ingrown, self-satisfied, and unimaginative. It is a world of spiritual stagnation, and as a result, the boy's outlook is severely limited. He is ignorant and therefore innocent. Lonely, imaginative, and isolated, he lacks the understanding necessary for evaluation and perspective. He is at first as blind as his world, but Joyce prepares us for his eventual perceptive awakening by tempering his blindness with an unconscious rejection of the spiritual stagnation of his world.

The boy's manner of thought is also made clear in the opening scenes. Religion controls the lives of the inhabitants of North Richmond Street, but it is a dying religion and receives only lip service. The boy, however, entering the new experience of first love, finds his vocabulary within the experiences of his religious training and the romantic novels he has read. The result is an idealistic and confused interpretation of love based on quasi-religious terms and the imagery of romance. This convergence of two great myths, the Christian with its symbols of hope and sacrifice and the Oriental or romantic with its fragile symbols of heroism and escape, merge to form in his mind an illusory world of mystical and ideal beauty. This convergence, which creates an epiphany for the boy as he accompanies his aunt through the market place, lets us experience with sudden illumination the texture and content of his mind. We see the futility and stubbornness of his quest. But despite all the evidence of the dead house on a dead street in a dying city the boy determines to bear his "chalice safely through a throng of foes." He is blindly interpreting the world in the images of his dreams: shop boys selling pigs' cheeks cry out in "shrillitanies"; Mangan's sister is saintly; her name evokes in him "strange prayers and praises." The boy is extraordinarily lovesick, and from his innocent idealism and stubbornness, he realized that he cannot keep the dream. He must wake to the demands of the world around him and react. Thus the first half of the story foreshadows (as the man later realizes) the boy's awakening and disillusionment.

The account of the boy's futile quest emphasizes both his lonely idealism and his ability to achieve the perspectives he now has. The quest ends when he arrives at the bazaar and realizes with slow, tortured clarity that Araby is not at all what he imagined. It is tawdry and dark and thrives on the profit motive and the eternal lure its name evokes in men. The boy realizes that he has placed all his love and hope in a world that does not exist except in his imagination. He feels angry and betrayed and realizes his self-deception. He feels he is "a creature driven and derided by vanity" and the vanity is his own.

The man, remembering this startling experience from his boyhood, recalls the moment he realized that living the dream was lost as a possibility. That sense of loss is intensified, for its dimension grows as we realize that the desire to live the dream will continue through adulthood.

At no other point in the story is characterization as brilliant as at the end. Joyce draws his protagonist with strokes designed to let us recognize in "the creature driven and derided by vanity" both a boy who is initiated into knowledge through a loss of innocence and a man who fully realizes the incompatibility between the beautiful and innocent world of the imagination and the very real world of fact. In "Araby," Joyce uses character to embody the theme of his story.

Read the story “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury

1. Using the “thematic” approach from your lesson on “Araby”, decide on a topic you would like to focus on. It could be war, nature, technology, mankind’s place in the world, religion, or something you found in the story that you would like to discuss further.

2. Write an essay based on your theme. Be sure to organize it the way the “Araby” essays were organized. Present your thesis and discuss the parts of the story that led you to choose that topic, being sure to use quotes from the story to support your assumptions.