Araby

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES JOYCE

James Joyce grew up in Rathgar, a suburb of Dublin, and studied at University College, where he began to publish literary reviews, poems, and plays. After college, he moved to Paris where he briefly studied medicine. In 1903, just one year later, Joyce's mother got sick and he moved back to Dublin to take care of her. After meeting his wife, the couple left Dublin and lived in a variety of countries including Yugoslavia and Italy, and later fled to Zurich during World War I. He only returned to Dublin four times, but many of his works remain heavily focused on the city, and on Ireland more generally. Joyce received guidance from the poet Ezra Pound, who helped him publish his first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in 1916, two years after the publication of *Dubliners*, his first book, which was a collection of 15 short stories, including "Araby." These books brought Joyce some fame as a Modernist writer, a fame that only increased after the publication of *Ulysses* (1922), which upon publication was hailed as both a masterpiece and banned in numerous countries for indecency. Joyce continued writing after Ulysses, produce the even more avant garde *Finnegans Wake* in 1939. Joyce was always a heavy drinker, and he died in 1941 from complications after having surgery on a perforated ulcer.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Araby," and all of the stories in *Dubliners*, take place in the early 20th century, a period notable in Ireland for the rise of Irish Nationalism. At the time, Ireland was under the control of Great Britain and the Nationalist movement, also known as Irish Republicanism in its more radical form, rejected British control in favor of Irish independence. Ultimately, the conflict led to fighting between the Irish and the English, and then an increasingly bloody civil war within Ireland. The period also saw tensions between various institutions that were difficult for citizens to reconcile. For instance, though the majority of Irish nationalists were Catholic, the movement was not supported by the Catholic Church, which did not agree with the use of force and often violent methods employed by more radical members of the nationalists. Joyce includes several references to these political conditions in Ireland in "Araby," the most obvious being Donovan O'Rossa, or Jeremiah O'Donovan, a Fenian Revolutionary and Member of Parliament who ended up serving a life sentence for felony-treason, and became a martyr of sorts for the Nationalist movement. The Nationalist movement often relied on songs sung in the streets or in pubs, such as the "come-all-you" mentioned in "Araby," in order to spread their message. Even as nationalism led to violence and war, nationalism and the desire for independence from Great Britain also drove a resurgence of Irish pride that inspired a cultural and linguistic revival, of which Joyce's work was one example (even as Joyce's work explores the complicated aspects of being Irish during this time).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"Araby" is a story in *Dubliners*, Joyce's first published collection of short stories that portrays the middle-class in early 20th Century Dublin. The collection contains 15 stories, of which "Araby" is the third. Together the various stories and characters represent multiple aspects of Irish and Dublin society. The stories are also all marked by epiphanies, in which a character experiences a profound realization about life or themselves. Many of the characters are also featured in Joyce's later work, Ulysses. Joyce also includes several literary references in "Araby" that could have potentially influenced the work. The character of Mangan is thought to be a reference to the nineteenth century Irish Romantic poet, James Clarence Mangan, who often wrote about unrequited love. Though no specific work by Mangan is mentioned in the text, Joyce presented a paper at the Literary and Historical Society at University College and his choice to include "Mangan" as one of the only names in the text is likely an intentional choice meant to draw a parallel between Mangan's work and Joyce's own. In the story Joyce also mentions three texts left behind by the former tenant of the narrator's house, the priest: *The Abbott* by Walter Scott is a novel that idealizes Mary, Queen of Scotts, and this is most likely included to parallel the narrator's idealization of Mangan's sister, *The Devout Communicant* could refer to any of several works but most likely serves the purpose of highlighting the strong influence of religion on the narrator. And, finally, *The Memoirs of Vidocq* is the memoir of a former criminal turned detective, notable for its sensationalist style.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Araby
- **When Written:** 1904-1906
- **Where Written:** Possibly Trieste, Italy or what is now Pula, Croatia (Joyce moved around a lot during this period of his life).
- **When Published:** 1914
- **Literary Period:** Modernist Period
- **Genre:** Short Fiction
- **Setting:** Dublin, Ireland
- **Climax:** The narrator tries to impress his crush but fails and

is confronted with the realization of his own vanity and the disappointment inherent in growing up

- **Antagonist:** the dull streets of Dublin
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Semi-autobiographical? Some critics speculate that the reason Joyce never gives the narrator in "Araby" a name is because it is actually a semi-autobiographical work. Although Joyce did not live with his aunt and uncle, his father had a drinking problem that drove their family into debt and Joyce himself actually attended the Christian Brothers' School on North Richmond Street in 1883.

Struggle with censorship. Joyce actually had a tough time publishing many of his works, most notably his novel *Ulysses*, as they were considered quite radical for the time. Joyce was criticized for including descriptions of masturbation and for defaming English royalty, among other things. *Ulysses* was published for the first time in Paris in 1922, but both the U.S. and England banned the work. In 1934, the case finally made it to the U.S. courts, where it was declared that the book was not pornographic. In 1936, Britain also lifted the ban.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Dublin, Ireland, around the beginning of the 20th century, the narrator lives on a quiet, **blind** street with several **brown** houses and the Christian Brother's school, which the narrator attends. The narrator, who is never named, is a young boy living with his aunt and uncle, likes looking through the belongings left behind by the former tenant of his house, a priest who died in the back drawing-room.

The narrator describes winter nights playing in the **dark** street with his friends until their bodies "glowed." Eventually Mangan's sister would come out to get Mangan, the narrator's friend, signaling the end of their playtime. It is during these brief interactions that the narrator begins to notice her physical appearance and develop a crush.

The narrator becomes infatuated with Mangan's sister and thinks about her all the time – even at the dirty, loud, Dublin market he fantasizes about her as an escape from his harsh reality. He imagines carrying her like a "chalice safely through a throng of foes." The narrator does not try to talk to her, instead preferring to relish in his daydreams. One day, though, Mangan's sister speaks with the narrator. She asks if he is planning to go to the Araby bazaar, an Eastern-themed market put on by the church. She explains that she cannot attend because her convent is having a retreat and the narrator jumps at the opportunity to impress her, promising to bring her back something if he is able to go.

The narrator begins to fantasize not only about Mangan's sister, but also about the exotic Araby market as well. Meanwhile the narrator begins to lose focus in school, and though he can feel his master growing stern with him, he cannot seem to focus on his studies.

Saturday morning the narrator reminds his uncle of his desire to attend the bazaar, but when he comes home for dinner that night his uncle still has not returned. Finally, around 9 pm his uncle returns home. He can tell from the way his uncle moves around that he has ben drinking. The narrator waits for his uncle to get halfway through his dinner before he asks for money to go to the bazaar. His uncle has forgotten, and tries to dismiss the request but his aunt encourages her husband to let the narrator go. His uncle apologizes, gives the narrator some money, and begins to recite The Arab's Farewell to his Steed.

The narrator leaves his house holding a florin (a coin) and takes a train to the bazaar, arriving just ten minutes before 10 pm, when the market closes. Inside, the bazaar is quiet, and the narrator enters timidly. He passes a stall called *Café Chantant* and begins to examine flowered tea sets and porcelain vases in a neighboring stall. He observes the young female shopkeeper flirting with two men, all of them speaking with English accents. The woman asks him if he wishes to buy anything, but he can tell that she does so only out of a sense of duty. He responds "No, thank you." The woman returns to her conversation but continues to glance over at the narrator. The market begins to close and as the narrator stands in the dark, he realizes he has foolishly allowed himself to be motivated by vanity. This epiphany fills him with "anguish and anger."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The narrator – The protagonist of the story, a young, imaginative boy who lives with his aunt and uncle. The narrator attends a Catholic school (as does essentially every other school age child in Ireland), and is surrounded more generally by the Catholic Irish world. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he thinks about and sees the world in religious terms and imagery. When the narrator develops a powerful crush on Mangan's sister, the older sister of his friend Mangan, he begins to lose interest in his former activities, such as playing with his friends or his schoolwork. The narrator experiences his crush in religious terms, stating his love for her to himself as a kind of prayer, and at the same time his love for her seems to offer an escape from an Irish world that feels drab and oppressive to the narrator. When Mangan's sister expresses interest in the Araby bazaar, that too comes to represent an exotic escape to the narrator, and he seeks to buy a gift at the bazaar to win her favor. Ultimately, though, the narrator's experience at the bazaar reveal to him the falseness of his fantasies and an epiphany

about his own vanity, and so his religious sense, romantic ideas, and budding sexuality all become tied up in an anguishing recognition of the disappointments of one's own self, of growing up, and of the world. It is also worth noting that the narrator of the story is actually a grown man, reflecting back on his childhood. For all intensive purposes the narrator and the protagonist are both the same character, although the reader never really knows how the protagonist is feeling at the time when the story takes place, only how the adult-version of the protagonist *remembers* thinking or feeling.

The narrator's uncle – The narrator's uncle is an authoritative figure who seems to incite a bit of fear in the narrator and his friends, as they routinely hide from him when they see him coming home for dinner. The text implies that he might have a drinking problem and seems to owe money to Mrs. Mercer, the pawnbroker's wife. The narrator's uncle lets the narrator down on the night of the Araby market, by returning home late and drunk and attempting to avoid giving the narrator a coin to spend at the bazaar before finally relenting.

The narrator's aunt –The aunt is the narrator's mother figure. She seems to be a very religious Catholic, worrying that the Araby bazaar is a Freemason event. She speaks using religious terms, warning the narrator that he may not be able to make it to the market on "this night of our Lord." Ultimately the narrator's aunt convinces his uncle to let him go to the bazaar, suggesting that she is perhaps more sympathetic to the narrator.

Mangan's Sister – The older sister of the narrator's friend, Mangan. The narrator has a powerful crush on her. She routinely interrupts the boys playing in the street when she comes outside to call her brother in for tea. She belongs to a convent and takes interest in the Araby bazaar, which is what sparks the narrator's interest in it. There is no indication that she is aware of the narrator's infatuation with her.

The priest – The former tenant of the narrator's house, who died in the drawing room. He is mentioned because some of his belongings still remain at the house, including three books that the narrator takes interest in: *The Abbot* (a romance novel by Sir Walter Scott), *The Devout Communicant* (a work of Catholic devotional literature), and *The Memoirs of Vidocq* (a detective's memoir). These are significant because they are odd selections for a priest's home library, and they imply that the priest indulged in religious as well as non-religious literature. It is in the room where the priest died that the narrator admits that he thinks he loves Mangan's sister in a prayer-like way. The priest mostly serves as a point of moral comparison – all of these objects imply that the priest had a life outside of the church, that he rode a bicycle (but perhaps only in secret, as the bicycle pump is hiding under a bush), and read crime and romance novels. This calls into question the reliability of the Catholic Church and implies that perhaps "priest" is just a job that ends at the end of the workday like any other.

Mrs. Mercer – The pawnbroker's widow who waits for the narrator's uncle to come home on the night of the Araby market, presumably to ask for the money he owes her. She is described as an "old, garrulous woman" who collects used postage stamps to sell to collectors to earn money, usually for a religious cause.

Young female shopkeeper – A young woman who is flirting with two men as the narrator approaches her stall at the Araby bazaar. The narrator notices that she and the men she talks to all have English accents. The woman approaches the narrator to ask him if he is planning to buy anything, but he notes that she does not sound "encouraging" and seems to speak to him only because it is her job. She brings the narrator to the realization that he is not, in fact, going to buy anything. Further, her English accent seems to communicate to the narrator that the Araby market is not, as he had fantasized, some exotic escape from his drab life in Ireland at all. And her flirting with the Englishmen seems to make him see that the silliness and vanity of his own attempt to impress Mangan's sister with a gift.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mangan – The narrator's friend from school, possibly based on the Irish romantic poet, James Clarence Mangan. He lives across the street from the narrator and often plays in the street with him and the other boys before dinner.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

COMING OF AGE

One of the central issues in James Joyce's "Araby" is growing up. The narrator, who is a grown man who uses mature language to describe his youthful experience, reflects back on his experience with the Araby market, providing small insights from an adult perspective. The fact that the story is told from an adult perspective indicates that the story is about growing up: the narrator is reflecting back on a formative time during his childhood.

The protagonist's development is reflected in his relationships with his friends. As the protagonist becomes consumed by his infatuation with Mangan's sister, he loses interest in playing with his friends as well as in school. Suddenly, the things that used to matter to him now seem less important, and he even begins to feel superior to his friends, deeming his everyday life, which now seems to stand in between him and his crush, "ugly monotonous child's play." He also begins to spend less time with

his friends and to observe them from an outsider's perspective. On the night of the Araby market, he watches them from the front window: "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 glass both literally and metaphorically separates the narrator from his friends as they play in the street.

The narrator's coming of age also becomes apparent through changes in his interactions with authority figures, in this case his aunt, uncle, and teacher. He begins to develop a more defiant personality, and grows annoyed when his aunt and uncle do not take his requests seriously. The night of the Araby market the narrator refuses to smile at his uncle's jokes in an act of subtle rebellion. He also notices that his uncle is drunk when he comes home that night, suggesting that he is no longer entirely an innocent, and can understand aspects of the adult world. His changing relationship with his teacher also shows that he is no longer afraid of disappointing figures of authority. He observes his master becoming stern with him, and yet he still is not able to take his studies seriously. The protagonist becomes slightly more rebellious as the story progresses, which shows that he is learning to think independently of the adults around him, a key factor in his coming of age.

In a typical coming of age story, the protagonist experiences pivotal events that lead him or her toward adulthood. These events are usually trying (such as experiencing war, loss, love, rape, or economic hardship) but lead to a satisfying realization or epiphany. In Araby, Joyce shows that the protagonist is growing up through his discovery of his sexuality, his sudden distance from his friends, and his increasingly rebellious attitude, however the protagonist's new knowledge and maturity bring him discontent instead of fulfillment. At the end of the story, the protagonist is left with nothing: he fails to buy something to impress Mangan's sister and he is now alienated from his friends and has lost interest in his studies. Though he was hoping to escape from his mundane life, he realizes that escape might be more difficult than. The protagonist's gained knowledge and experience, then, offer not satisfaction but instead a loss of innocence. And in this loss of innocence, the narrator becomes aware both of his previous naïveté and his religious condition as a flawed "creature." Through the narrator's experience, the story suggests more broadly that coming-of-age, while inevitable for every person, is not so much something to be looked forward to but rather a kind of tragedy: that the knowledge gained is of a dark and difficult sort, and not necessarily worth the innocence lost.

RELIGION AND CATHOLICISM

The narrator of "Araby" is surrounded by religion. He attends a Roman Catholic school and all of the people around him, just like he himself, are steeped in the Catholic religion that held sway in Ireland at the time when the story was set. Joyce does not clearly indicate how strongly the narrator believes in his faith, but Catholicism plays a large role in his upbringing and he often explains things through Catholic ideas and imagery.

Most obviously, the narrator over and over again thinks about and describes his crush, Mangan's sister, in religious terms. At one point he compares her to a "chalice" that he is protecting from a "throng of foes," a reference that seems to compare her to the Holy Grail. At other times, he literally seems to worship her: "Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand." That the narrator doesn't even understand his prayers to Mangan's sister seems to imply that he is not idolizing Mangan's sister on purpose. Instead, it seems as if his Catholic upbringing has defined the form of how he understands anything for which he feels strong emotion. Up until this point, being a child, the narrator has only ever experienced familial love and love for God (or at least an attempt to love God, one founded in the religious language he is surrounded by), which he does not know how to differentiate from romantic love. And so he thinks of romantic love in religious terms.

At the same time, the sort of idolizing of Mangan's sister that the narrator engages in would have been seen as deeply irreligious by serious Catholics. The idolization of anything or anyone above God was considered a kind of blasphemy. When looked at in this light, it might be argued that the story exposes or at least questions the narrator's relationship with religion. The protagonist's infatuation with and distraction by Mangan's sister might suggest that he is not strongly devoted to his faith. After all, while thinking of her he begins to see his studies as childish, suggesting that he is not fully invested in his religious education. However the protagonist's regret at the end of the story could suggest a return to his religious roots. The narrator's realization that he is a "creature driven ... by vanity" is stated in religious terms, and indicates that out of individualist desire (love or infatuation) he has strayed from his true duty. The choice of the word "creature" could have religious connotations as well, in the sense of the creations of God being described as his "creatures."

At the same time, it is also possible to interpret the text as *criticizing* Catholicism and religion, as implying that the narrator's religious background may have set him up to be unsatisfied, because nothing can meet divine standards. Or, conversely, that, just as the narrator's "worship" of Mangan's sister is shown to be impossible because nothing can match his imaginative ideals, the story is implying that the same applies to religion in general – that worshipping *anything* is unreasonable and bound to end in disappointment. More broadly, the story seems to indicate that whatever the particular nature of the narrator's epiphany, he has come to recognize that what he thought was simple – including his Catholic religion – is in fact complicated and difficult to live with, promising not just

salvation but also guilt and anguish.

ESCAPISM AND THE EXOTIC

In the text both Mangan's sister and the Araby market offer an escape from the ordinary, from the dull, **brown** picture of Dublin that the narrator otherwise describes as the world he lives in. The narrator makes his boredom with everyday life very clear when he refers to his former boyhood antics as the "career of our play," making even play seem like a kind of work. Similarly, his descriptions of school paint a picture of busywork, with a "master" most concerned about whether his pupils might be "beginning to idle."

Mangan's sister offers a mental escape from this world. He thinks of her "even in places most hostile to romance," and daydreams about her rather than doing his work in school. The Araby market seems to offer the narrator a similar kind of escape—yet the market offers an escape he not only can daydream about, but one he can actually go to. In the narrator's sheltered world, the word "Araby" alone indicates something foreign to him, as it refers to an Eastern "Arabian" world that is so distant from the narrow, cloistered world of Ireland that he is used to (the story is set well before globalization would have made the rest of the world seem accessible to people living in Ireland; rather the narrator's world is one in which people who live in Ireland are unlikely to travel very far away from their home, much less ever leave the country). The narrator constantly refers to Araby as "eastern" and clearly relishes in the exotic connotation of the "magical name."

However, when the narrator actually reaches the market, he is disappointed by the reality of what he finds: "porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets" and people talking in English accents. He realizes that the Araby market is not truly exotic, not truly an escape, but rather little more than a thin veneer of exoticism lamely pasted over his own regular world. And in this realization about the Araby market, he also seems to see that his own sense of his "exotic" love for Mangan's sister was similarly just a mask, a fake "escape" rather than a real journey to a new and distant place. He also realizes that his sense that he could truly escape to these "exotic" places – both the market and love of Mangan's sister – was vanity, a mistaken belief in his own specialness, his own uniqueness. And, further, the fact that the Araby market exists at all, and that young men and women flirt within it to pass the time, suggests that even his desire for an escape from the everyday is itself common and everyday.

LOVE AND SEXUALITY

One of the central issues of "Araby" is the narrator's developing crush on Mangan's sister and the discovery of his sexuality. Joyce shows the protagonist's evolution by first describing his sheltered upbringing, and then using physical descriptions of Mangan's sister to highlight the protagonist's budding sexuality.

The protagonist lives on a "**blind**" street, a dead end that is secluded and not frequented by outsiders. Additionally, he attends an all-boys school, which suggests that he does not know many girls. That he immediately falls for his friend's somewhat older sister and thinks of his infatuation as a kind of worldliness only solidifies the sense of his lack of experience with girls. The protagonist's growing sexuality is further captured in his detailed descriptions of Mangan's sister's physical form: "Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side." Joyce here manages to capture the way that the narrator is both seeing Mangan's sister in a physical way, and yet also how this way of seeing her is so new to him as to be almost innocent. He is not thinking of sex; he may not even know what sex is. But he is aware of and appreciative of her physicality in a way that is essentially idealistic.

However, although clearly the protagonist is infatuated with Mangan's sister, Joyce gives little evidence that it is "love." The narrator thinks of Mangan's sister *only* in in a physical way, includes no details about her personality, and basically shares no dialogue with her. The narrator's relationship with Mangan's sister is just a crush from afar, and that the narrator thinks of it as a love akin to religion only makes him seem more naïve. Ultimately, as he tries and fails to buy a meaningful gift for Mangan's sister while overhearing the girl at the stall flirt with two young men, the narrator comes to the realization that he was motivated not by love but by vanity. That vanity seems to operate in two ways: First, in seeing the flirting of the girl with the boys at the stall, he sees that his sense of his own uniqueness in his feelings for Mangan's sister was incorrect, and that to see himself as being unique because of his "love" for her was therefore vanity. Second, he sees that his desire to please Mangan's sister came from his desire for her approval –not because he loved or cared about her as an individual.

In the narrator's epiphany about his love, one can also argue that Joyce is making a broader point: that what most people see as "love" in fact usually springs from vanity or the innate desire for the approval of others. Grandiose acts of love in life and literature, such as the narrator's attempted gift-buying at the Araby bazaar, are often portrayed as selfless but, like the narrator's actions, may in fact be motivated by selfish motives.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

BLINDNESS

The story uses the word "blind" to draw attention to the narrator's naiveté and isolation. He begins by describing the dead-end street where the narrator lives as "blind," with the narrator's house being a lone abandoned house at the blind end, set off from the other houses. This isolated house foreshadows the narrator's later isolation from his friends, as he loses interest in playing with them and watches them play in the street from the upstairs window. The narrator also recounts watching for Mangan's sister from the front parlor, with the blind pulled down so she cannot see him. The narrator is figuratively blinded by his infatuation with Mangan's sister. He loses sight of everything else in his life, namely his studies and his friends, because he is so busy fantasizing about her.

The word "blind" also emphasizes the anonymous nature of the characters in the text, as only two of them are given names (Mangan and Mrs. Mercer). The lack of identity and physical description of most of the characters leaves them anonymous and forces the reader to focus on the other details given in the text, most of them related to the setting. It also allows the reader to alter the narrator's identity – perhaps in him they see themselves, or James Joyce, as many critics have called this is a semi-autobiographical work.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The story uses a great deal of light and darkness in its descriptions. The story begins in the dark, with the "short days of winter" where the boys played in the "dark muddy lanes behind the houses." And then the text follows the boys back to the street where the light from windows now illuminates the area.

Darkness also comes into play in understanding the narrator's epiphany. Normally light represents enlightenment or knowledge, but at the end of the story the narrator's newfound knowledge instead coincides with darkness. As the lights are turned off at the bazaar the narrator stares up into the darkness and realizes the harsh truth about his feelings for Mangan's sister and his vain motives for coming to the market. In this case, his new knowledge is of a dark and depressing nature, as his epiphany has revealed to him the darkness in himself (his vanity) and in the larger world, which does not offer the sort of romantic escapes he had believed.

BROWN

The color brown is used repeatedly to symbolize the dullness of everyday Dublin. The houses are brown, and even Mangan's sister is described as a "brown-clad figure," perhaps indicating that it was common to dress in brown clothes. Brown is used to emphasize how unexciting and oppressive Dublin is for the narrator in every way, both visually as well as in the everyday occurrences.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Dubliners* published in 1993.

Araby Quotes

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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

These are the opening lines of the text and also where Joyce establishes the setting, including specific details such as the street and school name. Though the narrator has yet to be introduced, the opening sentences provide a lot of insight into his character. These details establish that the narrator is coming from a sheltered environment characterized by his single-sex, religious education and secluded, dead-end street. All of these factors contribute to his coming of age and the development of his sexuality as he begins to realize there is a world outside of this dead-end street.

The uninhabited house foreshadows the narrator's alienation from his friends that comes later as he comes of age first through his interest in Mangan's sister and then through his final epiphany of disillusionment about himself. The fact that it's a "blind" street perhaps indicates that the narrator is trapped in his monotonous reality or headed towards a dead-end (and implies also that Ireland itself, where the narrator is from, might operate as a kind of dead-end for the narrator), which pushes him to desire an escape (which his fascination with both Mangan's sister and the Araby Bazaar offers him). That the alley is described as "blind" also symbolizes his initial ignorance resulting from his sheltered environment, which is also what causes him to believe the feelings he has for Mangan's sister are love.

> Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. ... 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Mangan's Sister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator's description here captures how Mangan's sister offers him a mental escape from the gritty reality of Dublin. Here he daydreams about her as he accompanies his aunt on errands through the noisy, dirty Dublin market. Her image acts for him as a kind of shield, giving him access to "romance" even in places full of the unromantic, both the everyday hustle and bustle of life and the political tensions in Ireland implied by the references to O'Donovan Rossa and the "troubles." The narrator thinks himself in love with Mangan's sister, but it seems rather that he delights in the escape his infatuation with her offers to him.

> 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Mangan's Sister

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Here, for the first time, the narrator first describes Mangan's sister in religious terms. He describes her as a "chalice," which is the cup used in the Catholic ritual of the Eucharist and a symbolic reference to the Holy Grail. He goes on to compare the act of saying her name with praying, as though he is worshipping her like a divine idol.

On the one hand, the narrator's use of Catholic imagery suggests that his Catholic upbringing has provided much of the basis for how he sees the world and describes strong emotional feelings. Since this is the first time the narrator is experiencing any kind of romantic love, he is equating it with divine love because this is the only other kind of love he is familiar with, aside from familial love. On the other hand, his treatment of Mangan's sister as a kind of idol would be seen by other Catholics as a kind of heresy, as the worship of any idol other than God is strictly forbidden. The story then captures the way that the narrator's religious upbringing creates a kind of muddle for him by defining the terms in which he thinks about the world, but in then informing his interactions with that world causing him to act irreligiously. The narrator's Catholicism functions as a kind of trap for him, even if he isn't entirely aware of it.

The image of the chalice also serves to illustrate how Mangan's sister operates as an escape for the narrator from the everyday life he despises. His use of the word "foes" to describe the people around him in the market implies that he resents everyday Dublin and its people, while at the same time showing how his ideas about Mangan's sister allows him to transform his routine and monotonous everyday experience into a kind of epic romance with him as the hero.

> 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Mangan's Sister

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

The light leads the reader through the narrator's line of sight as he notices details of Mangan's sister's appearance, highlighting her physical characteristics one by one. The light finally rests on the hem of her petticoat, which seems to be peeking out unintentionally, but is highly suggestive. Unlike the end of the story where the narrator's new knowledge is accompanied by darkness, here light actually does symbolize the narrator's knowledge as it guides his gaze. His sudden notice of all of these intricate details–her

hair, her neck and her petticoat–shows that he is becoming aware of his sexual attraction, and sexuality in general, so he has gained knowledge about himself as well as about the world.

However, these observations also highlight the superficial nature of his attraction to Mangan's sister. The narrator is reveling in these physical details rather than attempting to get to know Mangan's sister outside of her appearance. This parallels his later realization that his powerful feelings for Mangan's sister are actually just common feelings of attraction, not love.

> 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Even the word "Araby" itself excites the narrator with its exotic sound. He begins to fantasize about the "Eastern" escape the bazaar could provide. Given that the narrator has grown up on a dead-end street and in a sheltered environment, this is probably his first encounter with the prospect of anything vaguely "Eastern" and that makes it even more exciting for him. The word "enchantment" implies that he feels he is being drawn to the idea of Araby as though he is being manipulated by magic. It is as though Araby has some kind of divine power over him. The use of the word "soul" also implies there is a spiritual element to how he feels about the Araby bazaar as well, and that the narrator is perhaps combining his excitement for the bazaar with his religious background, and equating Araby with a spiritual experience.

> I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. ... 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Now that the narrator has the potential to escape from his monotonous reality, even if that escape is just in the form of a daydream, he cannot focus on the activities of his everyday life. The fact that he is no longer motivated by his schoolmaster's approval, and does not seem to be afraid of angering him, shows that he is beginning to see himself as more of an adult, which is part of the process of growing up. The fact that he is growing up is also reflected by his newfound sense of superiority. Suddenly everything that had been important before, namely school and play, seem dull and meaningless. At the same time, the narrator's changing interests contribute to the narrator's ensuing alienation from his friends, since they no longer share the same interests and he chooses to fantasize about Mangan's sister as they continue to play in the street together.

At the same time, it's important to remember that the narrator of the story is not the protagonist as a child, but rather the protagonist as an adult, looking back on his childhood. And so when he describes his schoolwork as "the serious work of life" as now seeming like "child's play," the narrator captures more than just the fact that he is "growing up" and leaving childish things behind. Rather, the narrator captures the idea that the boy he was in the story *feels* that he is growing up, and that the therefore thinks of his former pursuits as being childish, but with the implication that those pursuits in fact are the "serious work of life." Put more bluntly, the narrator is describing himself as a young boy who *thinks* he is growing up, but in fact is mistaken.

> 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Mangan's Sister

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

The windowpane acts as a literal and metaphorical barrier between the narrator and his friends, signifying that he has become alienated from them. He is completely disinterested in playing with them, and after he notices their presence without much remark, he immediately turns his gaze to Mangan's sister's house. The words "weakened" and "indistinct" further highlight this disconnect between him and his friends since they no longer understand each other on a personal level, just as he realizes he cannot really hear or understand their cries from the street.

The symbol of darkness appears as he looks at Mangan's sister's "dark house." Here, darkness most likely symbolizes ignorance, foreshadowing his bleak realization that the feelings he has for her are, in fact, common, not part of the great sophisticated romance he imagined.

❝ 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.

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Young female shopkeeper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator has come to the Araby market to try to buy something for Mangan's sister, but now faced with the market itself he loses his excitement. The market itself, which he had expected to bathe him in a kind of "Eastern enchantment," to give him an escape from his everyday world, is in fact filled with everyday things like "porcelain cases and flowered tea sets." That the people in the market don't have exotic accents or backgrounds, but in fact are English reinforces the sense that the Araby market is just a sham meant to attract suckers just like the narrator who are looking for the exotic. Further, that the people in the market have English accents would be even more important during that period in Ireland, when England ruled Ireland. The Araby market, then, seems like a trick played on the Irish, and the narrator, by the English who rule them, and so his own gullibility would feel even worse.

In addition, the shopkeeper's flirting with the two young gentlemen also pierces the narrator's romantic illusions. He had imagined his romantic feelings for Mangan's sister to be unique and special, but in these flirting young adults he sees that it is nothing special at all, it's just typical attraction. Further, the way these people casually flirt implies not just that the narrator's own feelings for Mangan's sister are commonplace, but that his romantic conception of love is just as unrealistic as was his romantic vision of what the Araby market would be. The ideas that had made him feel both grown up and given him a sense of escape from his everyday world are revealed to him as empty.

❝ 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...

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker), Young female shopkeeper

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

This interaction with the shopkeeper fills the narrator with a sense of self-doubt, since he perceives that her attentiveness is only part of her job and she is doubtful that the narrator is actually going to make a purchase. His self-awareness and transition toward identifying as an adult is called into question by the shopkeeper, who clearly still sees him as a child wasting her time.

His comparison of the jars to "Eastern guards" shows how out of place and intimidated he feels at the bazaar, but it also serves again to highlight that the narrator is hoping to find an escape at the bazaar. However, once the shopkeeper crushes his confidence, he realizes that the market is not what he thought it was. Once again the symbol of darkness comes in, symbolizing the cultural ignorance that inspired the choice of the name "Araby" for a market that is filled with tea sets and English accents, masquerading as an Eastern bazaar.

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

Related Characters: The narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

As the lights in the bazaar go out, the narrator is flooded with the knowledge that he has been foolishly motivated by vanity. This is the grand realization, or disillusionment, that comes from his coming of age. Finally he understands that the powerful feelings he had for Mangan's sister are actually rather ordinary, and that his desire to please her with a gift from the bazaar came from a deeper desire for her approval, rather than a selfless act of generosity or love. The narrator realizes that his means of escaping his reality, both his fascination with Araby and his feelings for Mangan's sister, are both unsatisfying and superficial, are products of his vanity rather than of nobility or any other ideal.

As the narrator comes to this realization the hall is flooded with darkness, contrary to the expected light, which typically symbolizes new knowledge or an epiphany. The darkness highlights the grim nature of the narrator's new knowledge. Joyce's subversion of the symbol of darkness suggests that new knowledge does not always bring happiness or satisfaction, that coming-of-age is not an emergence into a bright world of possibility but rather a realization of one's own failures and the limitations of the world.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ARABY

The story takes place in late 19th/early 20th-century Dublin, on North Richmond Street, a **blind** (dead-end) street on which stand several **brown** houses and the Christian Brother's school, a Catholic school for boys. The street is quiet, except when school ends and the boys play in the street until dinner. At the end of the street is an empty house, offset from the others by its own square plot of land.

These details establish that the narrator is living in a sheltered environment with heavy religious influences. The symbol of blindness serves to foreshadow the narrator's ignorance that comes with his infatuation with Mangan's sister, and the color brown is used to emphasize the dullness of everyday Dublin.

The former tenant of this, the narrator's house, was a priest who died in the back drawing room, but left some of his belongings behind. The narrator enjoys leafing through the yellow pages of the books left behind by the priest: *The Abbot*, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. In the back garden near the apple tree, the narrator also once found the priest's rusty bicycle pump under a bush. The narrator supposes the priest was a charitable man, noting that he left his money to institutions and his furniture to his sister after he died.

Joyce gives these details about the priest in order to provide a subtle commentary on the Catholic church. By listing his books, two of which are non-religious, Joyce shows that the priest was a person like any other who took interest in subjects other than religion. The bicycle pump that the narrator finds beneath a bush as though it had been hidden there suggests that maybe the priest had a private life in which he partook in secular activities, such as biking.

The boys usually meet in the street to play before dinner, even during winter when it has already become **dark** by then. They play outside in the cold until their bodies "glow," exploring everywhere from the muddy lanes behind the houses and back into the street, which, along with the "areas" – sunken enclosures providing access to the basements of the houses – is now illuminated with light from the kitchen windows. When they see the narrator's uncle coming home, they hide from him in the shadows.

The narrator establishes the habitual play that he soon grows tired of. The boys hide from the narrator's uncle, suggesting that he is widely feared, or perhaps just very strict. The symbols of light and dark are introduced. In their innocent nights of play, the boys "glow," presumably with carefree happiness. This contrasts starkly with the narrator's later epiphany, which takes place in complete darkness.

Every night Mangan's sister comes outside to call him inside for tea. Mangan, one of the narrator's friends, usually teases her while the narrator looks on. The narrator begins to notice her physical characteristics, such as the way her dress moves and the "soft rope of her hair." Every morning, he watches her door from a slit in the **blinds** in his front parlor, waiting for her to leave so he can walk behind her on the way to school. Just before they part ways, he always speeds up and passes her.

The narrator is developing a crush on Mangan's sister as he begins to notice more physical details. However, he is clearly still a child in how he deals with his newfound attraction. He never attempts to talk to her, but instead walks to school behind her and then speeds up to catch her attention. The symbol of blindness appears again as the narrator watches for her through the blinds, perhaps indicating that he is "blind" to everything except her.

The narrator begins to fantasize about Mangan's sister constantly—even as he walks through the noisy, dirty Dublin market with his aunt, passing street-singers singing about Donovan O'Rossa, a Fenian revolutionary. He imagines carrying the thought of Mangan's sister like a "chalice safely through a throng of foes." Even just her name begins to conjure up "strange prayers and praises," which confuse even the narrator himself. Often he finds himself full of emotion and on the brink of tears for no apparent reason. Despite all of this, he does not make any plans to talk to her, but instead remains wrapped up in his fantasies.

Mangan's sister becomes the narrator's mental escape from his everyday life and in this case, an escape from the gritty Dublin market. The narrator begins to associate Mangan's sister with religious imagery, such as the "chalice," and his emotions become stronger and even more confusing. It seems as though he is worshipping her, even though if unintentionally so.

One rainy night, the narrator goes into the back drawing room where the priest died and lets his emotions take over. He presses his palms together as if in prayer and repeats "O Love" continually in the **dark**.

The narrator presses his hands together in a prayer that seems almost like heresy, since he is praying to someone other than God in a room where a priest has died. He also uses the word "love" as though he is finally giving a name to his feelings.

When Mangan's sister finally speaks to the narrator, it is to ask if he is planning to go to the Araby bazaar. He is completely caught off-guard, and as he recounts the events, the narrator does not even remember if he said yes or no. She tells him she is unable to attend because she has a retreat for her convent, and he seizes what seems like an opportunity to impress her, promising to bring her back something if he goes to the bazaar. While this conversation is happening the other boys are fighting over their caps. The narrator notices the way the **light** catches Mangan's sister's neck, her hair, her hand, and finally the white hem of her petticoat sticking out from under her dress.

This scene takes place while the other boys are fighting over their caps, which emphasizes the narrator's alienation from his friends. The Araby bazaar is introduced here, as well as the narrator's perceived opportunity to win over Mangan's sister. The light is used to highlight Mangan's sister's body as the narrator sees her in a new, more physical way, and perhaps also to symbolize his sexual awakening.

The narrator now begins to fantasize not only about Mangan's sister, but about the Araby bazaar as well. He is fascinated with the exotic Eastern nature of the market, and even the word, Araby, seems foreign and exciting to him. He asks his aunt if he can attend the market and she is skeptical at first, asking if it is a Freemason affair, but assenting when he says it isn't. Meanwhile, the narrator cannot focus in school and his master begins to notice and becomes stern with him. The narrator starts to feel like school and everyday life are "ugly monotonous child's play."

The narrator starts to fantasize about the exotic Araby market, using it as a mental escape, but also hoping it provides a physical escape from his everyday life, even if only for a night. He begins to see himself as superior to his peers, who are occupied with seemingly less important activities, such as school. This is a significant indication that he is coming of age, and it also contributes to why he feels alienated from his friends.

On Saturday morning, the narrator reminds his uncle that he wishes to attend the Araby bazaar that night. He leaves for school in a bad mood, already anticipating future disappointment. When he returns for dinner that night his uncle is not home yet. The narrator anxiously paces the house. From an upstairs window he sees his friends playing in the street and then looks over at Mangan's sister's house, seeing her "**brown**-clad figure" in his mind.

The narrator is already anticipating that something will go wrong, even after his uncle reassures him, and this perhaps indicates that the narrator is aware that he has unrealistic expectations for the bazaar—but he still can't help clinging to them. As he is restlessly pacing, he catches a glimpse of his friends playing in the street, but all he can think of is Mangan's sister.

When the narrator goes back downstairs, Mrs. Mercer, the pawnbroker's widow, is there. They wait for the narrator's uncle to arrive for over an hour and Mrs. Mercer leaves, saying she cannot wait any longer. The narrator's aunt suggests that he may not be able to attend the bazaar. At 9 pm, the narrator hears his uncle's key in the door, and can tell from the way his uncle is moving that he has been drinking. The narrator waits until his uncle is halfway through his dinner before asking for money to go to the market. His uncle admits he had forgotten about the market, but when he tries to brush it off by saying it is late, the narrator is not amused. The narrator's aunt encourages his uncle to let him go and finally his uncle agrees. As the narrator leaves, his uncle begins reciting the poem *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*.

The narrator's impatience shows that he still has his childlike tendencies, but at the same time he is also aware of some of the more adult issues that his uncle is dealing with, such as debt and alcoholism. Mrs. Mercer's presence suggests that his uncle may be in debt, and his late return and stumbling in the hallway suggest that he is drunk. These are both issues that the narrator is becoming more aware of as he loses his innocence and gains knowledge about the adult world.

The narrator walks to the train station and boards the empty third-class section of the train. After a delay, the train finally leaves, passing run-down houses before pulling up to the makeshift platform. The narrator notices that it is ten minutes before 10 pm, when the market is supposed to close. Unable to find a sixpenny entrance, he quickly enters through a more expensive entrance to get into the market before it closes. As he timidly enters the bazaar, the narrator notices that nearly all of the stalls are closed, and compares the silence to that of a church after the service has ended. He walks toward the few stalls that remain open; one of them displays the name *Café Chantant* written in colored lamps. He continues on to a stall that is selling porcelain vases and flowered tea sets. He observes the female shopkeeper of the stall flirting with two men, all of them speaking with English accents.

Joyce subtly highlights the poverty of Dublin by mentioning the run-down houses and also including that the narrator is in the third-class compartment of the train. The narrator uses religion as a point of comparison in describing the silence in the bazaar like that of a church after service, showing how he regards the Araby market with similar admiration and awe that he regards Mangan's sister, and can only describe them using religious references. However, inside the bazaar his awe disappears, as he encounters a stall with a French name, and porcelain vases and flowered tea sets (very un-exotic things). The narrator's realization that people flirt to pass the time, even at the bazaar, makes his feelings for Mangan's sister seem commonplace.

The shopkeeper asks the narrator if he's going to buy anything, but seems to only be asking because it is her job. The narrator responds "No, thank you," and the shopkeeper returns to her conversation, glancing back from time to time to keep an eye on the narrator. As the narrator leaves the stall he hears someone announce that the **lights** are going off, and as he is left in **darkness**, he realizes how foolish he has been, how he has let vanity **blind** him. He is filled with "anguish and anger" as his eyes sting with tears of disappointment.

The narrator quickly loses confidence as he realizes that the shopkeeper does not take him seriously, and he also realizes that both the bazaar and his feelings for Mangan's sister are something more common than what he had built them up to be. The narrator has an epiphany as he is plunged into darkness, realizing that his feelings were not actually love, that his desires and the market itself were not special or exotic at all, and that he was motivated by vanity and the desire for approval.

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