

# [Mes level, "araby” is a story about](https://assignbuster.com/mes-level-araby-is-a-story-about/)

mes Joyce’s “ Araby” Convinced that the Dublin of the 1900’s was a center of spiri-tual paralysis, James Joyce loosely but thematically tied together hisstories in Dubliners by means of their common setting. Each of thestories consists of a portrait in which Dublin contributes in some wayto the dehumanizing experience of modem 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, uglyreality 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 helives-a world inimical to ideals and dreams.

This deeper level is in-troduced and developed in several scenes: the opening description ofthe boy’s street, his house, his relationship to his aunt and uncle, theinformation about the priest and his belongings, the boy’s two trips-his walks through Dublin shopping and his subsequent ride toAraby. North Richmond Street is described metaphorically and presentsthe 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 housesreflect the attitudes of their inhabitants. The houses are “ imperturba-ble” in the “ quiet,” the “ cold,” the “ dark muddy lanes” and “ darkdripping gardens.” The first use of situational irony is introducedhere, because anyone who is aware, who is not spiritually blinded orasleep, would feel oppressed and endangered by North RichmondStreet. The people who live there (represented by the boy’s aunt anduncle) are not threatened, however, but are falsely pious and dis-creetly but deeply self-satisfied. Their prejudice is dramatized by theaunt’s hopes that Araby, the bazaar the boy wants to visit, is not14some Freemason affair,” and by old Mrs. Mercer’s gossiping overtea while collecting stamps for “ some pious purpose.

“ The background or world of blindness extends from a generalview of the street and its inhabitants to the boy’s personal relation-ships. 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 homein time for the boy to go to the bazaar while it is still open. Theuncle has no doubt been to the local pub, negligent and indifferent tothe boy’s anguish and impatience. The boy waits well into the eveningin the “ imperturbable” house with its musty smell and old, uselessobjects that fill the rooms. The house, like the aunt and uncle, andlike the entire neighborhood, reflects people who are well-intentionedbut 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 settingis 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 bi-cycle pump rusting in the rain in the back yard and the old yellowedbooks in the back room indicate that the priest once actively engaged in real service to God and man, and further, from the titles of thebooks, that he was a person given to both piety and flights of imagi-nation.

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, withblind hopes and romantic dreams, his encounter with first love. In theface of ugly, drab reality-“ amid the curses of laborers,” “ jostled bydrunken men and bargaining women”-he carries his aunt’s parcelsas she shops in the market place, imagining that he bears, not parcels, but a “ chalice through a throng of foes.” The “ noises converged in asingle sensation of life” and in a blending of Romantic and Christiansymbols he transforms in his mind a perfectly ordinary girl into anenchanted princess: untouchable, promising, saintly. Setting in thisscene depicts the harsh, dirty reality of life which the boy blindly ig-nores. The contrast between the real and the boy’s dreams is ironi-cally drawn and clearly foreshadows the boy’s inability to keep thedream, to remain blind.

The boy’s final disappointment occurs as a result of his awaken-ing to the world around him. The tawdry superficiality of the