

Mes level, "araby" is
a story about



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

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 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 overtea 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 bi-cycle 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