

Foundations of literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Foundations of Literature Prof. One of the great things about stories is that they show there are universal themes found in all cultures. Stories and poems bring us together and lead us to embrace our common humanity. I think that this is a good and useful point, but I wonder if there are some things about different cultures that literature can't communicate. In some cultures there are words for things that there aren't in our language. Some cultures have many different words for the same sort of thing with many different aspects. It seems to be that literature can show us very broad universal themes, but it might have trouble showing what we have in common in a nitty-gritty kind of way. Nevertheless, in order for a story to work it must have some basic elements. It must have a plot—or a narrative in which things happen and unfold. It must have characters—people and actors who do things and with whom the reader can relate. It must have a setting—in other words a place where the action happens. And it must have a point of view—a perspective from which the story unfolds. Without these things, the story would be of little interest to anyone.

In order to develop the plot of a story, a solid narrative is most important. Things must happen, characters must act. Otherwise the plot doesn't exist. A plot is a compilation of events, usually leading towards some sort of climax. A good example of all of this is James Joyce's story "Araby" is similar to many of the other stories in the collection *Dubliners* in that romantic ardour or feeling is influenced by the profound Roman Catholicism, which is a staple of Irish life. Many other stories feature narratives about love and religion in which both are often thwarted. The worship of "holy" figures, dead and alive, colours the lives of the living in Joyce's stories, no matter how much they might try to blot them out. Plot, narrative, characters and setting are

evident throughout the story.

Araby is the story of a sensitive boy who worships a friend's sister from afar. He spends so much time thinking about her that he effectively idealizes her, much as a more religious person might idealize the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ. He imposes unrealistic expectations on the girl and his relationship with her and hopes that she will redeem or save him from the occasional drabness of his life.

The overall message of the story is that religion creates unrealistic expectations of the world and costs much more than it is worth. Even if the narrator were able to go Araby and bring back the girl a gift, it seems very unlikely she would then feel the same way about him as he feels about her. In a very real sense, much of the narrator's feeling exists only in his head and is not related to the world. In the case of romantic love there is hopefully some reciprocity. Joyce seems to be saying, that in the case of religion there isn't any reciprocity. As the final words of the story relate, " I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (Joyce, 72).

Without knowing these literary terms it would be very difficult to understand the story. The literary elements are very important to make the story communicable.

Works consulted

Joyce, James. (1971) *Dubliners*. London: Penguin.