

James Joyce "Araby"

The story centers on a young boy who lives in Dublin, Ireland. Joyce believed that Dublin was a paralyzed city—a city of inaction, no progress. The first three paragraphs demonstrate this through the use of images: blind street; quiet; uninhabited; detached; brown imperturbable faces; musty air; waste room littered; old useless papers; wild garden; straggling bushes; rusty bicycle-pump; winter; somber; violet sky; feeble lanterns; cold air; echoes; silent street; dark muddy lanes; dark dripping gardens; dark odorous stables; shadow. In sum, dark and deathly images encompass the opening of the story.

Then, Mangan's sister enters and suddenly light comes in. As the young boy looked at her, "her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side." The young boy watches her and rushes outside to pass her simply to see her for he "never [had] spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood."

The young boy's infatuation with Mangan's sister is amplified as "her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance." As he walks through the marketplace with his aunt, he imagines himself a knight in shining armor who "bore [his] chalice safely through a throng of foes." The young boy is obsessed: "my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires."

One night he even dreams of speaking with her as he prays pressing "the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: 'O love! O love!'" many times." He tells her that he will go to Araby and bring her something.

Araby connotes an exotic place, magical, "an Eastern enchantment." He can't wait until Saturday when he can go to Araby. Because his uncle had forgotten that the young boy wanted to go to the bazaar, the young boy leaves late and arrives to Araby ten minutes to ten. Interestingly, the young boy then declares that he can't remember why he had gone to Araby. After having been rebuked by a young salesgirl, the magical marketplace is now in complete darkness. The young boy realizes that going to the bazaar was a mistake.

The story illustrates how setting functions to create conflict. The young boy lives in a dark, gloomy, lifeless environment. Then Mangan's sister enters, and she lights up his world. His infatuation is clear. Joyce uses angelic images to portray this young lady—an ideal woman for the young boy. She is his escape from the dreariness of his environment. However, she was only an image, an escape. The setting moves from dark to light back to darkness. The young boy, in effect, becomes aware of his reality "summons to all my foolish blood."