QUESTIONS

What does "Araby" symbolize to the boy, and how is the conflict of the story resolved when he goes there?

This story, a shortened version of a “Bildungsroman” (a story of a boy growing into a man), is Joyce’s entry into the subconscious but universal impulses of all men, a combination of simple Darwinian attraction to the opposite gender, coupled with the lure of the exotic, unfamiliar landscape of adventure. By naming the fair and the story “Araby”, Joyce implants the otherness and strangeness of the environment (especially compared to the familiar and artificial mise-en-scene of Dublin’s alleyways and streets where the hero follows Mangan’s sister and fantasizes about a different life). The delay because of his uncle’s drunken tardiness, and the struggles with money, are embodiments of the obstacles in the way of any boy’s pursuit of adulthood, here as so often portrayed by his longing for his "first love," Mangan’s sister. The fair is so unlike his imagination – closing, unwelcoming, frustrating – that he almost despairs of finding the perfect magic gift to win Mangan’s sister’s heart. Like the other short stories in Joyce’s canon, Araby is a portrait in miniature of large ideas. To him, Araby is the romantic, exotic somewhere where a boy’s dream of Fair women is realized. His experiences at the fair are much more like Joyce’s own reality -- and every man’s – non-romantic, frustrating, and only partially realized, if at all.

Why is Mangan's Sister not given a name?

It is rather curious that the character who is responsible for the romantic quest to the bazaar never actually has a name in this brilliant short story. Yet, if we think about the main conflict of this tale and the way in which Paul's romantic notions and illusions are contrasted with the reality of life which is forcibly imposed upon him at the end of the story, we can see that Mangan’s sister is not named because it reinforces how impractical and illusory Paul's dreams and notions were. The story makes it clear that he views this trip to the bazaar as something approaching a knight-errant's quest for his lady:

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.

Clearly, such romantic notions are reinforced by the way in which Mangan's sister is a half-drawn, undeveloped character. The boy builds so much on actually very little, and the epiphany that he experiences at the end of the tale is made all the more profound because he based so much of his dreams on a character who he knew so little about.

Who are the characters?

The main characters in the story are the narrator, his uncle, his aunt, Mangan's sister, and the dead priest, a man who used to live in a back room in the house. Even though the priest is dead, he still plays a role in the story. It is his books that the narrator reads in an effort to escape the drabness of his life on North Richmond Street. There are some minor characters,
such as the workers at the bazaar, but their role is a functionary in establishing the true nature of Araby.

Other than the narrator, the most important character in the story is Mangan's sister. She becomes the focus of the narrator's romantic fantasies and inspires his trip to the bazaar which results in his disillusionment at the story's conclusion.

How do the physical conditions where the narrator lives influence or develop his character?

James Joyce's *Araby* is collected in "Dubliners", a series of short stories that describe life in Dublin according to the experiences and perspectives of inhabitants at various stages of life. Araby takes place in near-teenage adolescence, with the narrator transitioning from a boy to a more worldly young man.

The narrator lives on North Richmond Street, which is described as a silent and sombre place. The houses "gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces" and are often quiet, dark, and marked only by the occasional lamp or kitchen light. The narrator's own home was previously inhabited by a priest, who died there, and the stillness of his old age and death still permeates the house.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the youthful vigor of the narrator and his friends. This develops their character by providing a means of comparison, and a means of tying the overall narrative of "Dubliners" together; different ages and places in life mixing together, flowing into one another. The boys and their youthfulness exist largely in spite of the dull "maturity" of the street and houses. This adds depth to the meaning of this scene and its place in the narrative; will the boys escape this vision of adulthood, or become a part of it? Is this a sign of their past, or their future? Are they simply too young to understand why things are this way? We might also question ourselves, as to whether we are reading the same meaning into the depiction as the boys are; do we agree that somber and silent houses are intimidating and unfriendly?

By the end of the story, the narrator has lost some of his youthfulness and innocence; perhaps this is the beginning of his transition to being a part of that silent, brooding backdrop. "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity -" vanity that is contrasted by the dull and uninspiring nature of North Richmond. Note that there are few descriptions of adults out and about on North Richmond - perhaps a reflection of their own lack of life and optimism. However the narrator's loss of optimism didn't come from North Richmond, but from the bazaar - implying that the street itself was not necessarily a cause, but a reflection of its inhabitants.

How does the opening paragraph of "Araby" set the tone for the story?

The opening paragraph describes the street that the narrator lives on. North Richmond Street is "blind" indicating that in its isolated world, it (personified) can't see beyond its own confines. The houses themselves are personified, giving the town a sense of its own closed off existence: which creates mystery.
The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

This initial setting of these houses with their brown, imperturbable (calm or unable to be excited) faces suggests a stagnant atmosphere. The narrator then remarks that he found books, owned by the former tenant of his own home, and his interest in literature suggests an interest in mental escape. The opening paragraph describes the setting from which he wants to escape or at least make his life there more significant.

Despite this drab description of the initial scene, the narrator does describe a playful childhood there. But his play is structured around other potential discoveries or epiphanies. He would watch Mangan's door to catch a glimpse of his sister. The narrator, in his mental escape, imagines himself as a knight performing spiritual and romantic quests for Mangan's sister. This is also why he goes to Araby to buy her something. Even in the most mundane chores, the narrator imagines he is on some quest:

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.

How does the point of view contribute to the story's effect or meaning

In Joyce's "Araby," in typical Modernist style, the narrative voice changes. At first there is a detached third-person narrator who begins the story, describing objectively the brown drudgery of Irish life in Dublin, but with the switch to first-person narrator, the boy's feelings and visions become real for the reader, visions that lead to the epiphany with its crushing force of reality that is vicariously experienced by the reader.

Thus, there is a rejection of the brown drudgery of Dublin life that is initiated with the switch from third person detached to first person narrator. This switch in point of view suggests the instability of the narrator; his rejection of learning at school, which seems to come between him and his "desire" and his envisioning of Mangan's sister "defined by the light" furthers the unstable romanticism of his feelings and illusions. In the following passage, for instance, the narrator juxtaposes the mundane and degrading with religious images and carnal ecstasy in his mind,

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing....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, .....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. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom.

In a similar fashion, the first-person narrator raises the bazaar to the level of the exotic in his mind. As she mundanely turns her silver bracelet, the narrator perceives her as the supplicant woman of Arthurian legend when she stands behind the rail and "held one of the spikes," like the bleeding spike of the knight's Quest for his maiden, suggests critic John Friermark. After
this episode, the narrator states that he has "hardly any patience with the serious work of life."

Finally, when the narrator goes to the bazaar delayed by his wayward uncle who returns home late to give the boy any money, he is met at the entrance with the sound of voices with English accents, a harsh reminder of British domination in Ireland and reality. As he "allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket"--the narrator is brought to the mundane as the hall becomes dark and he despairs of bringing Mangan's sister anything.

Certainly, the narrator's crushing defeat by reality is felt by the reader, who commiserates with his bitter feelings of "anguish and anger" as he at last recognizes the tragic difference between his idealized visions and reality. Indeed, the use of the first-person narrator has immersed the reader into the boy's heart and his idealism so much that the return to the naturalistic level of the author's faithfulness to Irish life evokes empathy from the reader.

**Who is the narrator of the story**

**The young adolescent boy who forms an obsession with Mangan's sister.**

The narrator of Joyce's story of disillusionment and romantic disappointment is an adolescent male youth of Dublin. Influenced by Sir Walter Scott's romantic tale *Ivanhoe*, the youth fantasizes and pictures himself as the knight who seeks the holy grail. While he shops for groceries, he imagines,

... I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name [Mangan's sister] sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand.

Further, the youth hopes to take Mangan's sister to the bazaar called Araby, suggestive of an exotic place. However, the girl tells him that she is going on a religious retreat; so he promises to purchase something there for her. But, unfortunately, the boy's uncle, with whom he lives, is dilatory in returning home, having been at a pub. He flippantly apologizes; then, he mocks the intensity of the boy's feelings by asking if he knows "The Arab's Farewell to his Steed" tossing him a coin, which is always a symbol of pettiness for Joyce.

Finally, the youth arrives at the bazaar, but most of the booths are shut down, and the conversations are trivial, not exotic. Fighting back tears in a crushing moment, the youth realizes his delusions. He feels what Joyce terms *paralysis*, a frustrating awareness of his powerlessness:

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

"Araby" has only existed in his mind; it is an ideal that the youth cannot reach. With tears in his eyes, the narrator knows that he must now deal in realities.
Identify one example of irony in the story and what kind of irony it is (verbal, dramatic, situational).

There may be several kinds of irony identified in James' Joyce's short story, "Araby." Perhaps the most striking example surrounds the bazaar when the narrator arrives.

First, consider one definition of irony: it is the difference between what is expected and what actually happens. In Joyce's story, we must look for something that is anticipated in one way and finally perceived in a very different way later.

The narrator is a young man who is infatuated with the older sister of his friend Mangan. Once the narrator starts to believe that he is in love, he is obsessed by thoughts of the older girl; he secretly watches her and follows her to school—when she leaves in the morning, the narrator flies out his door to follow her, passing her only as she turns off the route he is following. He does this over and again, day after day.

One day, while her brothers are quibbling, the narrator and Mangan's sister speak. She laments the fact that she cannot attend the bazaar in town because she is going on a religious retreat. She wonders if he is going. Quickly he promises to bring her something if he does attend. When the day comes, he impatiently waits for his uncle to return home and give him money to go to the bazaar. Finally on his way, he is excited by the mystery and glamour he expects to find there. The train seems to crawl on its way, heightening his anticipation, and expressing the narrator's aching desire to arrive—especially having been delayed so long:

After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river.

At Westland Row Station, other passengers try to gain entry to the train, but they are turned away: this train is only going to the fairgrounds. This also may raise the narrator's excitement; perhaps having the "bare carriage" to himself gives him a dream-like feeling—having perceived himself earlier as a knight ("...I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes"), his journey seems to have taken on shades of a holy crusade: as he strives to "win" a token for his lady-love. He still believes this as:

In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

In the young man's mind, even the name has evoked hopes, dreams and imaginary events. However, as he enters (paying too much in his haste and desire to get inside), it is not at all what he expected:

Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly.

The narrator approaches one of the vendors that is still open. His manner has changed: he is disappointed, becoming timid, and allowing himself to be put off from his errand:
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...

The narrator declines when asked if he wishes to purchase something. The fire that had burned in him since he made the promise to Mangan's sister is gone, and he is disheartened. This is situational irony—a difference between what the narrator expected and what actually occurred. He accomplished nothing; the fair was a disappointment.

More so, there is dramatic irony: the reader is fairly certain that the narrator will not return a hero; even with a gift, Mangan's sister will not love him as he believes he loves her.