

Introduction



By offering three stories each by three major authors of literary short fiction, we hope to demonstrate the diversity of the genre and also to provide you with the opportunity to study these writers in depth. James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor and Joyce Carol Oates are acknowledged masters who have produced classic examples of the form and have exerted considerable influence on other practitioners as well. The three stories by each author have been chosen according to two primary criteria: the selections are among each author's best work, and as a group they illustrate a notable versatility in each writer's handling of such fictional elements as plot, characterization, point of view, and theme.

In addition to the stories, we have provided a brief introduction and a selection of literary criticism. This material supplies an interpretive context to guide your critical thinking as you read and reread the stories; it should also help focus your preparation for class discussion and assist you with your writing assignments.

I. James Joyce (1882–1941)

The short stories James Joyce collected in his first book, *Dubliners*, are among the most celebrated and influential examples of the genre in the modern era. Along with Anton Chekhov and Ernest Hemingway, Joyce helped create a rigorous esthetic and a luminous realism for the short story form that has been admired and emulated by subsequent writers ever since.

Born in a suburb of Dublin, Ireland, the city to which his stories and novels pay a manifold, conflicted allegiance, Joyce attended a Jesuit school for three years; thanks to an improvident father, the Joyce family suffered a financial decline, and the remainder of his youth was marked by constant upheaval. After attending University College in Dublin and receiving his bachelor's degree in 1902, Joyce moved to Paris. He was to remain an expatriate for the rest of his life, eventually settling in Trieste with his wife, Nora Barnacle. He published *Dubliners* in 1914, though the stories had been written when Joyce was in his early twenties. Subsequently Joyce produced the novels that cemented his reputation as a major author of the modernist period: the highly autobiographical

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916); the towering masterpiece *Ulysses* (1922), which novelist and critic Joyce Carol Oates has called “the greatest novel in the English language”; and the difficult, experimental *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Joyce coined the term “epiphany” to mean a moment of spiritual insight or revelation in the lives of his characters, and in his short stories he sought, he said, to “write a chapter of the moral history” of his native country. He saw Dublin as the center of what he called the “paralysis” of the modern spirit in Ireland, and the *Dubliners* stories dramatize a highly various and memorable cross-section of the city’s denizens, ranging from portraits of childhood, like “Araby”; to evocations of adolescence, like “Eveline”; to depictions of adult middle-class life, as in “The Boarding House.”

Apart from their subject matter, Joyce’s stories are well known for what the author called a “scrupulous meanness” in observing the daily lives and speech of his characters. They transform the Dublin of the early twentieth century from its reality as a particular time and place into a universal and timeless evocation of the human experience.

James Joyce

Araby

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers’ School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devoit Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes under one

of which I found the late tenant’s rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sadder. The space of sky above us was the color of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odors arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan’s sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan’s steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlor watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of laborers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs’ cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you* about O’Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in

ARABY First published in 1914.

Blind: a dead-end street. *The Abbot*: an 1920 novel by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1834). *The Devoit Communicant*: a Roman Catholic tract published in 1813. *The Memoirs of Vidocq*: memoirs by a French detective, François Vidocq (1775–1857).

come-all-you: an Irish patriotic song. O’Donovan Rossa: Jeremiah O’Donovan (1813–1915), an Irish nationalist.

our native land. 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. 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. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinging upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*. I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar, she said; she would love to go.

"And why can't you?" I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

"It's well for you," she said.

"If I go," I said, "I will bring you something."

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped it was not some Freemason

Freemason: member of a highly secretive fraternal organization

affair. I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly: "Yes, boy, I know."

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlor and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humor and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs. Mercier sitting at the fire. She was an old garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs. Mercier stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

"I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord."

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hallway. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

"The people are in bed and after their first sleep now," he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

"Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is."

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. He asked me where I was going and, when I had told him a second time he asked me did I know *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. 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 a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girdled at half its height by a gallery. 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 center of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Café Chantant* were written in colored lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

"O, I never said such a thing!"

"O, but you did!"

"O, but I didn't!"

"Didn't she say that?"

"Yes, I heard her."

"O, there's a . . . fib!"

Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. 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 that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

"No, thank you."

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

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

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the setting and the way it is described in the opening paragraphs. How is the setting related to the boy's state of mind?
2. How is the boy characterized? Roughly how old is he and how would you describe his temperament and personality?
3. Analyze the role of Mangan's sister. Why is she not given a name? How does her physical description relate to the boy's state of mind?
4. Describe the role of the boy's uncle. Can he be called the antagonist? When the uncle returns home, he is talking to himself and moving awkwardly. What are these "signs" the boy says he is able to interpret?
5. How is the bazaar described? How is it different from the reader's and the boy's expectations?
6. At the bazaar, there is an inconsequential conversation between the young salesgirl and two Englishmen. Why is this dialogue important? How does the boy react to it?
7. Why does the boy decide not to buy anything for Mangan's sister? Where in the text would you locate the moment of "epiphany"?
8. Analyze the boy's feelings as described in the story's last paragraph. Are his feelings justified? How will he be changed as a result of his experience at the bazaar?

The Arab's Farewell to His Steed: a popular nineteenth-century song
 florin: a coin worth two shillings
 Café Chantant: a cafe with music