

BETWEEN INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE:
FROM JOYCE TO UPDIKE

ENGLISH LITERATURE is frequently concerned with the theme of innocence and with the moment when a child passes from an area of intuitive knowledge, through an encounter with pragmatic experience, into a new area of understanding concerning his place in the world. Two of these stories are closely related by situation and characters. One is James Joyce's "Araby" in *Dubliners*;¹ the other is John Updike's "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You" in *Pigeon Feathers*.² Some fifty years divide the stories; Ireland is not America; and the answers to the children are different. The theme of innocence and experience, however, is common to both, and the starting point in age, setting, and situation is the same. Each story has to do with a fair.

In brief, the story of "Araby" is of an unnamed elementary-school boy who lives in Dublin at the turn of the century. His friend and fellow-student, Mangan, lives across the street from him. Decency and imperturbability mark the lives of the adults; wonder, ecstasy, and adoration mark the life of the young boy. The object of his devotion is Mangan's sister. In the cold evenings of the short days of winter, he sees her momentarily, made radiant by the light of the street lamps. Sometimes, too, he glimpses her in the cold morning light. Always, he bears the memory of her splendour as he moves through the hostile or indifferent world that surrounds him. Her question, is he "going to *Araby*?" transforms his love to ecstasy. It would be a splendid bazaar and she would love to go but cannot, she says. He is impelled to advance the rash promise, "If I go, I will bring you something." But when the day comes he arrives late at night as the bazaar is to close, finds nothing that he can buy, and is ashamed and angry.

In "Araby", Joyce concentrates upon blindness and the epiphany of cleared-vision that comes from a painful moment of self-revelation, of quietness that exists parallel to turbulence. All the details at the opening of the story have this pattern. North Richmond Street, on which the boy lives, "being blind was a quiet street." The blind end of the street of sighted, inhabited houses faces the open end by which the boys issue to their education. Their schooling should have directed them to see the path from innocence to experi-

ence, from ignorance to wisdom. But the three-fold path of the boy, aimed at three ends, is confused.

First, there is the intellectual and moral discipline of the Christian Brothers' School. This lay order was formed in the seventeenth century in France to give elementary education and to improve the manners, morals, and devotion of the young. In the early nineteenth century similar schools were established in Ireland; and the altered manners of the children in the streets of Waterford attracted public attention and commendation.

Though innocence is concerned with devotion to an ideal and with the ethical conduct that issues from this devotion, Joyce concentrates in "Araby" on the manners-devotion, rather than on the morals-devotion axis. He dwells on the rough, young play of the school boys, as they race past odorous stalls, fight the "muddy tribes from the cottages", snatch each others' caps, tease and shout. Contrasted with this boisterous behaviour is the quietness and devotion of the young boy. Morals never enter the picture, except possibly in the undefined dull-decency of the adults.

The boy's devotion is nurtured by two sources of knowledge other than that provided by the Christian Brothers' School. Earlier, a priest has lived and died in the boy's home on North Richmond Street. Filled with charity, this priest has left his money to institutions, his furniture to his sister, and (probably without realizing his gift or its influence) some "useless" books and a ruined-Eden garden to the boy. The romantic lad is drawn to three books left in the house by the priest: *The Abbot* of Walter Scott, a romance about Mary Queen of Scots; *The Devout Communicant*; and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*, precursor of Conan Doyle's stories of crime. In other words, these are stories about falls, and about what-might-have-been.

The other source of his devotion is that of a mingling of courtly love and of religious adoration. This blend is shown in a mystic contemplation of his affection for a young girl. The imagery is very specific. He sees himself as a quest-figure holding a chalice, with prayers and praises on his lips, surrounded by a hostile world of drunkards and bargainers. Separated in spirit from these, he is at the same time linked with young shop-boys and with street singers—people who, consciously or otherwise, are moved to a litany by the sorrows of Ireland. The boy cannot understand his own expressions of adoration, the source of his tears, his mystical agony before the darkened and rain-pierced garden, the withdrawal of his senses in rapture, his response to the archaic word *Araby*. The adoration is clearly directed to the far-away-and-long-ago, to the dream of innocence worshipped in the girl, of adoration offered

to the virginal, of offering desired for the unfallen. The presence of the girl gives the challenge to capture this dream of innocence.

His folly is clear to the boy even before the raw and pitiless day, the fatal Saturday of the close of the fair, arrives. He realizes that he has "hardly any patience with the serious work of life." His uncle is irritable, irritating, forgetful, shallow, trivial, and uncomprehending. His aunt is imperturbable and uninvolved. He himself feels isolated and lost. The "foes" have become his own flesh. Delay, ruin, mark Dublin, its train, its streets, its hall of the bazaar.

Darkness has fallen. There is no cheap entrance to *Araby*, and he must spend one of his two shillings to enter. From the fare he has kept only three coins, amounting to eight pence. The atmosphere in the bazaar speaks, not of luxury and of enchantment, but of the baseness associated with money-changers in a temple. The indifferent young lady at the stall he approaches seems moved by duty, yet her foreign, English voice speaks only of a "fib". The silence of the almost empty hall reminds him of a church after a service. *Araby* is no holy, mystical, or sanctified place.

So the boy sees himself derided by his own folly; he suffers in himself, in anguish and anger. He has understood clear-sightedly the activity that he wished to carry out, and the object whom he wished to adore, and to whom he would offer his gift. But his turbulent heart has not found brightness or peace. He is too young to resolve how manners (activity in the world) should spring from the moral-devotion axis, and how innocence can not survive in a world that understands this superficially. The failure is of a too-romantic background that fuses a Byronic with a religious devotion, and then cannot connect this devotion to an actual person in an actual situation in time. Shame is the outcome of an incapacity to separate delusive from realizable expectations, to distinguish between vision and mirage. The boy for whom *Araby* was "a magic name" has seen the magic dissolve when the place where he imagined dreams could be bought turns out to be a squalid actuality. Self-hatred replaces love, as he sees himself "a creature driven and derided by vanity."

Updike's "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You" is concerned with the world as a fair. Bunyan, Wordsworth, Thackeray, and Joyce have all spoken, each in his own fashion, about Vanity Fair. Each of these five writers is concerned with the way that what could be wise, serene, and good is divided and dissipated in areas of activity that all too often are marked by

folly, confusion, and malice. Love and peace disappear where ignorance, rather than innocence, prevails.

In "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You", Ben, a young boy, ten years old, goes to the fair. This is not a local fair but a carnival run by strangers and held in a vacant lot, littered with mud and straw, behind the old ice-house. As Updike says, "Gather your pennies" is the urgent command of the fair. The last hour of daylight is fading before the coming of the artificial glitter of the night. Poverty, slowness, and sadness of parents have held this boy back. This carnival calls the romantic to run to it. Here is a world of the false glitter of the tinselled wheel of fortune; of dazzling lights; of spangled show-girls who sing from the sugared depths of despair the agony of their rejected love, "You Are My Sunshine / Please don't *take* my sunshine away"; of fat ladies who sell plaster Virgins; of thin men in huge trousers making vulgar jokes. And, dominating it all for the boy, is a thick-set man with tattooed arms who cries, "Hey, uh winneh. Hey, uh winneh, evvybody wins." The story runs around the injustice that the boy feels has been dealt him when he loses forty cents at the wheel of fortune and is given, in pity, thirty cents back, and told never to return.

As in "Araby", the boy in "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You" is first aware of a sense of urgency. His fear is that he will be left behind while everyone else goes to the fair. His needs are clear to him: to be exalted, to find sweetness, to find light. Where, when, and how to get them, and how to distinguish the true from the false, is his problem. Where the story of "Araby" is one of single-minded innocence seeking to pay homage to an ideal, this story of Updike's is one that concerns a break that has already begun. In young Ben's consciousness, innocence has discovered duality, and the process of truth found in paradox has to be worked out. Updike's is a far more complex story than Joyce's. As Updike says in *Rabbit, Run*, it takes "the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox."³

The urgency of the rush to reach the world is the impulse that Wordsworth and Updike both fear. The consciousness of the immediacy of time, in relation to the individual, already marks the end of innocence. The quotation from Kafka's "A Report to an Academy", which Updike prefixes to *Pigeon Feathers*, speaks of how men can return at first, through memory, to eternity; but, as they are spurred on in a forced career, they feel more comfortable in the world, and the return to timelessness becomes more difficult for them. Ben still stands at the edge of this knowledge. When he first encounters "the stare of heartbreaking brown blankness" of the man at the wheel of fortune, he is

aware that the man "seems to elucidate with paralyzing clarity Ben's state: his dungarees, his fifty cents, his ten years, his position in space, and above the particulars the immense tinted pity, the waste, of being at one little place instead of everywhere, at any time." Ben wants to be where everything is dominated by fortune and chance. He has the "plenty" of fifty cents. He comes in wonder. He demands exaltation. But, though he sees the balloon about to take off and the Ferris wheel to lift from the earth, he does not choose these false forms of exaltation. Ben may have been a "comic prop" to teachers and older boys, but assuredly he knew—as the boy in "Araby" did—that utter giving was the road to freedom, joy, and exaltation. To Updike, as we find elsewhere in *Pigeon Feathers*, stone, coins, and abstractions are equally opposed to the realm of the heart.⁴ The truth about exaltation lies in affection.

Ben's second need for knowledge lies, then, in the affirmation of truth concerning sweetness. The people at the booths have small power over him. There are no real gypsies, there is no real magic. Popcorn, merry-go-rounds, soft-balls, and plaster Marys can be rejected. But his coin must be shattered into smaller coins if he is to enter the world of the fair. He buys, for ten cents, a mass of pink furry candy-floss—sticky sweetness that can enter his body—and feels the richer with three coins change.

It was at the moment of holding three coins—sixpence and two pennies—in his pocket that the boy in "Araby" suddenly discovered his inadequacy and poverty. Here the two stories part once more. Updike's boy has triple wealth. And immediately he is granted triple sweetness in the figures of three girls, in white-spangled cowboy costumes, who offer for nothing their song of love. The girls sing: "The other *night* dear, as I lay *sleeping*, I dreamt I *held* you in my *arms*." He is enthralled by the "unbearable rising sugar of the chorus that makes his scalp so tight he fears his head will burst from sweet fullness." The candy-floss and the song may have a treacherous sweetness about them, but he knows instinctively that the treachery really lies in the patter of the huge-trousered skeleton telling dirty jokes to nice fat ladies. These last, who looked so safe and pleasant, were symbolic of the treacherous mud and straw under his feet.

In the two tests of urgency and of desire for sweetness Ben has been tried and has not failed. He knows the false from the true.

But in the area of light, of illumination, could the child carry radiance from the past that would illumine clearly what was gain and what was loss? Could "place" open in memory to show that the world is dominated by the

truth of fate and the truth of giving? The crucial test comes when he walks over to the wheel of fortune, willing to offer his all at the shrine of chance.

The boy's sense of urgency and longing for sweetness have brought him to the fair, at the age of ten. Ten cents of his half-dollar has gone for floss. The rest of his money he loses, playing the lucky "7" on the wheel. He never changes his fidelity to this number, nor his faith in this game of chance. The tinselled wheel is to him a "moon-faced god". The tattooed man at the stall is "humanity clouding the space between them that should be unobstructed." "Humanity" is marked on his tattooed arm with the early symbols of the catacombs, with signs known to Christian martyrs: the fish representing Christ, the anchor of faith, the word PEACE that was the greeting of members of the Christian community. Ben can sense the puzzlement of the man who spins the wheel, but he still feels impelled to lose or to gain, to give his devotion to the god of chance and change.

Ben is confident that he understands everything: that men are joyful when they lose the coin of the fair, when they give and give everything to the world. He has seen boys win, and then walk away as though they had heard a dirty joke. He knows that love and sex are not the same. He thinks he knows, too, that giving yourself wholly to the world is different from taking from the world. He is not old enough to have learned that the god of chance does not give peace, and he is too immature to recognize the symbols of the God who is linked with peace.

And then the tattooed man shatters Ben's complacency. He demands to know how old Ben is and whether his father is rich. The third verse of the song of the fair, "You Are My Sunshine"⁵ (though not given in the story) provides the clue to what is happening. This verse runs:

You told me once, dear, you really loved me,
And no one else could come between.
But now you've left me and love another.
You have shattered all my dreams.

Ben has been keenly aware that humanity has come between his would-be love (the world) and his would-be god (fortune). And now marked humanity forces on the boy six nickels, withholding one lucky-seventh coin delicately held between thumb and finger for Ben to see. Then the stall-man slips the retained nickel into his pouch, revealing as he does so the word PEACE on his arm, and orders the boy never to come back to the game of chance.

The luck is in the loss. The boy has been faithful to "7"; seven shall

be faithful to him. But Ben understands nothing of this. He thinks only of how he came to the stall with forty cents to give to fortune. His gift has been refused, and "they", under cover of pity, have cheated him and sent him away with just thirty cents in his pocket. His world that will not let him love it to his ruin, humanity that insists on being concerned with Ben's "position in space", are adorned with his tears as he moves to leave the fair.

The shame that Ben cannot bear is to be brought back to the poverty and sadness of his state in space and time. Ben's position in time is this. He has realized that his parents have given him, as his sum to go to the fair, one nickel for each year of his life. In holding back one nickel, the man at the stall makes Ben pay for the year of his knowledge. The expenditure seems to Ben to be nothing but "waste" and bitterness, the injustice of being able to have candy-floss for ten cents but nothing for the dime that was not returned. To him at the moment "the lost dime seems a tiny hole through which everything in existence is draining."

Given in terms of "You Are My Sunshine", Ben's position in space and time is worked out in the pattern of literal and symbolic darkness-and-light of the fair-ground, of dream-and-awakening. The first verse of the song tells us:

The other night, dear, as I lay sleeping,
I dreamed I held you in my arms.
Then I awoke, dear, I was mistaken.
And I hung my head and cried.

This first verse of the song of the fair is the conclusion of the story. "When I awoke, dear, I was mistaken / And I hung my head and cried." The knowledge is of the boy's relation to the world and of his heart-break when he discovers that it does not give itself to be loved utterly. Updike ends his story with the words "Thus the world, like a bitter coquette, spurns our attempts to give ourselves to her wholly." The boy has sought his sunshine in the night-glitter of the fair and in devotion to the moon-god wheel of fortune, though not totally unaware that the promise of the god of the world, "Hey, uh winneh. Hey, uh winneh, evvybody wins," is resting on a treacherous base of mud and straw. He awakens from his dream in the darkness of disappointment. Yet the hole through which everything has drained away, the small dime, brings the light of revelation. The revelation concerns the paradoxical knowledge that the world is dominated by a sense of loss that brings freedom and joy; that the world is dominated by a sense of gain that does not necessarily send a

person away glad, but does give him a swagger of power; that the world is dominated by the truth of fate, which may be one of falseness; that radiance is found in tears; and that peace may come from what it held back.

So, for a boy in "Araby", the uncomplicated truth is that there is no money that can buy dreams or buy worthy offerings to an object of devotion. His ignorance is made wise, to his own shame, because he is young enough and vain enough to think it possible. But, for the boy in "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You", the area of experience of the world is widened as his money pours down a narrowing circular hole. He has to learn the as yet unrecognized truth that it takes the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox.

Updike reminds us of Kafka's warning how, as the world fits man and man fits the world, the opening in the distance through which he came from eternity grows so small that with all his strength he cannot force his way back, except at the cost of his very skin. But, at this moment, Ben's position in space and time is not of his choosing. His love for the world he sees as a giving of all that he has that belongs to the world. The man at the stall has forced the mature truth on the immature boy: fortune's lie, "hey, uh winneh, evvybody wins," is not necessarily false. The paradoxical reality is that gain is loss and loss is gain, for those who can endure the shattering of dreams and the taking away of sweetness and fullness. Permanently marked on humanity's arm is the shorthand symbol of "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives. . . ."⁶

NOTES

1. James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York: Compass Books Edition, The Viking Press, 1959).
2. John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1963).
3. John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1961), p. 237.
4. John Updike, "Wife-Wooing", in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories*, p. 114.
5. Updike disregards the second of the three verses of this song, which makes a threat of consequences if love is not kept in faith. For the full text of the poem I am indebted to two of my students, Carol Dales and Pat Dunn, who found it in the CBC Music Library, Winnipeg.
6. St. John's Gospel, 14:27.
7. The first and third verses of "You Are My Sunshine", by J. Davis and C. Mitchell, are quoted by permission of the copyright owner, Peer International (Canada) Ltd.