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JOYCE'S 'ARABY' AND THE HISTORICAL ARABY BAZAAR, 1894

In Joyce's story 'Araby', the Araby Bazaar is presented at the end of Saturday night, when most of the stalls have been closed down, almost all the visitors have left, and only a very few bazaar-workers remain at the Royal Dublin Showgrounds (RDS). Through the eyes of the increasingly disillusioned young narrator, the largely deserted bazaar is a drab and disappointing contrast to the oriental spectacle of colour, commodities, and crowds which he had anticipated. The story's use of the bazaar to convey this sense of disappointed anticipation has perhaps been responsible for the lack of attention paid to the actual Araby Bazaar by Joycean critics. Presumably, supposing that the real event was, like its fictional recreation, small and drab, most critics have ignored the substantial archival history of the Araby Bazaar of 1894 and the similar events which took place in Dublin during that decade. Those who examine the archives, however, are likely to conclude that Joyce was basing his story very loosely indeed upon the real event.¹

The Araby Bazaar was, in reality, one of the largest public spectacles held in Dublin in the late nineteenth century. Attended by 92,052 visitors, it filled the large indoor and outdoor spaces of the RDS for over a week, with elaborate stage-set backdrops, a wide range of goods for sale, multiple restaurants, bars, firework displays, tight-rope demonstrations, and 'Princess Nala Damajante, Hindoo Serpent Charmer, with her Boa Constrictors and Pythons'.² It was staffed by over 1,400 female volunteers, who received detailed daily coverage in *The Irish Times*, and was served by special trains, as Joyce describes in his story ('Araby', p.25). The attendance figures are especially striking given that the 1891 census gave Dublin's total population (including the unincorporated suburbs) to be just 347,912 (See Plate 1).³

The Araby Bazaar, along with the other charity bazaars held in the city, became something of a Dublin institution during the middle of the 1890s. This is demonstrated by, among other indicators, the extent of the press coverage they received each year. *The Irish Times*, for example, published lengthy preview articles about each bazaar during the weeks before they opened, and almost daily reports on the proceedings after they had been launched. These

reports included detailed accounts of all the volunteers working at the bazaar, along with full descriptions of the design and layout and daily attendance-totals in addition to first-person accounts of the 'sensation' of participating in the events. *The Lady of the House*, Ireland's only ladies' journal, published even more detailed accounts of the bazaars, along with some photographs. *The Illustrograph*, a short-lived photographic magazine dedicated to improving Ireland's tourist trade, published a series of very high-quality images from the bazaars, some of which are reproduced in this article.

The 1890s bazaars were, therefore, an important part of the social history of Dublin, and they need to be better understood if their influence upon Joyce is to be fully explored. They were striking examples of an Irish popular culture during the 1890s which was already part of a modernized, international sphere of commodified leisure. The extent to which this was consciously recognized in Dublin at the time is also worth noting. In its extensive coverage of the preparations for the Araby Bazaar, *The Irish Times* published an article on the very concept of such events, tracing their origins to church 'sales of work', especially in Britain, over the preceding thirty-five to forty years. The concept, it argued, was:

borrowed from the enchanted East of tale and fable [and] the short, sweet Persian dissyllable now familiar in our ears. Recent development shows an inclination to depart from the word, and choose some specific name, like 'Araby' for instance, to comprehend, not a bazaar only, but a whole group of specific entertainments, massed together for the once in one large area. Nowhere in the United Kingdom has this been more plainly seen than here in Dublin [...]. A marked feature of the modern development of bazaars is the gigantic outlay which their inception and carrying out needs [...]. To be brief, the bazaar appeals to primary instincts – it is exciting, it is varied, it is cheap. *Long live the bazaar!*⁴ (Italics in the original).

Such celebratory approaches to the late nineteenth-century bazaar, with its culture of spectacle and distraction, did not entirely obliterate long-standing criticism of the possible temptations to immoral conduct which it might offer to both volunteers and visitors.⁵

However, there appear to have been few, if any, concerns expressed about the possible threats to morality of the Dublin bazaars. This is in some ways surprising, given the vigour of the social purity movement in Ireland at the time – indeed, one of the doyennes of that movement, Lady Aberdeen, was herself a patron of the Araby Bazaar, an ironic connection considering that Joyce himself later considered her to have been a leading force behind the

decision not to publish *Dubliners*.⁶ However, the extent to which the bazaars represented useful or genuinely 'improving' charitable work was occasionally questioned. Even *The Irish Times* article which ended by proclaiming '*long live the bazaar!*' noted that the amounts of money raised by these events could in theory have simply been donated by the public, but that this approach to fund-raising was unlikely to succeed, given that people liked to get something in return for their charity, and the bazaar's success hinged on its ability to provide that return.

The 1890s bazaars were not the first of their kind to be held in Dublin, although their scale and spectacle outstripped previous events. The first comparable bazaar staged in the city was that organized in 1882 by the Freemasons of Ireland, to raise money for their Female Orphan School in Dublin. Ten years later the first of the 1890s bazaars was also a Freemasons' event, and took the form of the Masonic Centenary Celebration, held at the RDS in May 1892, and attended by 86,914 visitors. It is this event to which Joyce refers in the 'Araby' story when, upon the narrator asking permission to attend the bazaar, his aunt 'was surprised and hoped it was not some freemason affair' ('Araby', 23.109). The other bazaars held during the 1890s were not in fact Masonic events. They were all, like the Araby Bazaar, fund-raising fairs for Dublin hospitals.

All of the bazaars were distinguished by their organization around overarching themes – both of the Masonic Bazaars had 'old Dublin' themes, and Araby was, as its name suggests, orientalist in theme. The bazaars were designed in the form of fake 'streets', consisting of plaster and lathe stage-set buildings, with the ground-floor of each building forming individual stalls selling goods. Typically, each stall was organized, stocked, and staffed by a sub-committee involved in the bazaar's main organization. These were the roles performed by the large number of women volunteers who were the mainstay of the bazaars. In many cases, stalls were organized by regional committees, as in the instance of the Araby Bazaar, which included the Algeciras Stall, run by the Galway sub-committee (See Plate 2).

The stage-set streets of the bazaars were designed according to the theme of each bazaar, so the 1892 Masonic Bazaar streets were in the style of 'old Dublin', whereas the photographs of the Araby Bazaar's 'oriental' streets reveal buildings representing Japanese, Turkish, and Moorish houses. Individual stalls were also styled around the overall theme of each bazaar. Therefore, the Araby Bazaar contained stalls such as El Dorado (Moorish-themed), Neferati (Egyptian-themed), and Wakayama Kwankoba (Japanese-themed), each decorated with fabric hangings, and interior designs according to its style (See Plate 3).

As was typical at nineteenth-century charity bazaars, most of the stalls sold goods which were collectively referred to by shops as 'novelties'. These included decorative household items such as lampshades, rugs, hangings, and embroidered pillowcases, as well as fashion-accessories such as handkerchiefs, lace trimmings, gloves, or parasols. In the earlier nineteenth century, most of these bazaar goods would traditionally have been made by the women who later sold them at the stalls. Such goods applied the traditional upper-middle-class female skills of embroidery and 'fine sewing' to the purpose of raising funds for charity. By the 1890s, however, the hand-made goods had become relatively rare, and bazaar-organizers instead bought manufactured stall-goods in bulk from wholesalers or, in many cases, at a discounted rate from retailers who could then advertise their involvement with the bazaar.⁷ This shift to the selling of mass-produced goods at bazaars mirrored the more general increase in cheap 'luxury' items being bought in department stores in place of home-made items. However, it may also have reflected the changing tastes and expectations informing one-off 'spectacular' events such as charity bazaars. The theming of many of these events became increasingly exotic, a point particularly evident in the Araby Bazaar's 'oriental' premise. In keeping with this theme, the stall-goods it offered included Japanese trinkets and Indian fabrics, as well as clocks, lamps, and vases. Few if any of these could have been produced at home by upper-middle-class Irish girls.

If charity bazaars, by the 1890s, no longer functioned as showcases for their female volunteers' needlework skills, the 'lady-stallholders' nevertheless continued to be one of the bazaars' central attractions. Indeed, the publicity and extensive press coverage for all of the bazaars held at the RDS focused upon the female volunteers to a striking degree. Detailed lists of each stall's volunteers were published in *The Irish Times*, for example, giving their names and addresses. Reports from the bazaars placed a great deal of emphasis upon descriptions of the volunteers, and it appears to have been the sight of them at work which provided one of the deepest impressions upon journalistic visitors, as emphasized by their centrality to published photographs and drawings of the bazaars (See Plate 4).

The most obvious reason for this emphasis upon the women volunteers was their elaborate and often exotic costuming. These costumes, along with the architectural designs of the stalls, were the principal vehicles of each bazaar's central theme. Typically, each stall's team of female workers wore matching costumes designed to complement that stall's particular theme. At the Araby Bazaar, this of course involved a large number of the women wearing costumes which were 'oriental' in style. The definitions of 'oriental' used by participants in the Bazaar were both broad and often geographically vague. Individual stall themes ranged from Japan to North Africa and

Moorish Spain, and their workers' costumes were usually a highly selective interpretation of the traditional costumes of their chosen region. The Wakayama Kwankoba Stall, for example, was staffed by volunteers with 'kimono' costumes and Japanese parasols, while the young women working at the Neferati Stall wore a highly stylized Ancient-Egyptian costume (See Plates 5 and 6).

It is easier, of course, to determine the identities and social background of those who organized the bazaars than of those who attended. The senior patrons and organizers of the bazaars were all members of the Ascendancy aristocracy, along with some honorary patrons from British and even European royalty.⁸ The social identities of the large numbers of bazaar workers, including the legions of 'lady-stallholders' are slightly harder to ascertain, despite the publication of their names and addresses. Clearly, they were all middle- or upper-middle-class women, mostly living in Dublin, although a significant number of stalls each year were also organized and run by women of similar social backgrounds from the country. In Joyce's 'Araby', the bazaar-girls and their customers whose conversation the narrator overhears are described as having 'English accents' ('Araby', 25.193-4). In reality, however, the volunteers at the Araby Bazaar were Irish. This is either another example of Joyce's creative adaptation of the real bazaar, or is possibly intended as an indication that these upper-middle-class Irish voices sounded English to the lower-middle-class narrator's inexperienced ear.

The female volunteers were young women who would not have expected to work for their living. Instead their aspirations would have been centred upon marriage and home-making, most probably in the established Dublin suburbs such as Rathmines, Ranelagh, and Clontarf. Indeed, their participation in the bazaars appears to have been closely linked to their participation in the middle-class marriage market of the city. Their fathers and potential suitors (who, it might be assumed, attended the bazaars) would have been business-men, solicitors, and white-collar public servants. The majority of such families would still have been Protestant, but most likely would also have included members of the growing numbers of the Catholic middle classes moving to the suburbs.

Numbers alone imply that the bazaars were a cross-denominational and cross-class event within the life of the city. With as many as 92,000 visitors to Araby, and no less than 80,000 attending each of the other four RDS bazaars, it is inevitable that the majority of those visitors were Catholic. The demographics of the visitors can only be deduced, but there are substantial clues within the evidence available. The most important of these are the admission prices and extra charges published for the bazaars. Joyce places considerable emphasis upon the costs of the bazaar in the 'Araby' story, as the

narrator worries about obtaining the funds to attend, overpays his entrance fee because he cannot find the cheaper turnstile, and repeatedly turns his coins over in his hand as he becomes disillusioned with the event and realizes that he will not purchase a gift for Mangan's sister ('Araby', 24-6). It is striking, given how drastically Joyce reworked the real bazaar for its representation in his story, that the prices he quotes are, in fact, accurate. The admission-price for Araby, like the other bazaars, was two shillings for the day of the opening ceremony and one shilling per day thereafter, with a season ticket for the week costing four shillings. Children under twelve were admitted for half-price. At most of the bazaars, certain entertainments cost extra. At Araby, entrance to the Paddock where the firework displays took place was sixpence extra, with seats in the Grand Stand costing either sixpence or one shilling each.⁹ No prices for the goods on sale at the stalls are recorded, but the lists of those goods, ranging from embroidered laundry bags to Turkish carpets, suggest that there would have been a wide range of prices. The volunteer-run cafés and restaurants were a significant part of the bazaars, and these too would have incurred extra expenditure for visitors. The only known prices of these are from the Kosmos Bazaar of 1893, which offered two shilling lunches and three shilling *table d'hôte* dinners.¹⁰

The surviving evidence of the entrance prices of the Araby Bazaar, along with its attendance figures, staging costs, and eventual profits, indicates that its audience was drawn from a wide cross-section of the Dublin population. Given that the stalls, cafés, and even the more expensive entertainments such as the Paddock's firework display, were all reported to be heavily crowded with visitors and doing a brisk trade suggests that a considerable number of visitors were spending substantially more than the one shilling entrance fee. At the same time, the size of the total attendance figures also means that many of those visiting must have spent little more than their entrance fee. This conclusion is reinforced by a comment in *The Dublin Evening Telegraph*, previewing the Araby Bazaar, which asserted:

Seeing that by spending the Monday at Ballsbridge even the working man can contribute his shilling to the Jervis Street Hospital and at the same time thoroughly enjoy himself there will no doubt be a tremendous assemblage.¹¹

The varied social and economic backgrounds of those attending the Araby Bazaar betoken a widespread cultural appeal that was, primarily, connected to the bazaars' self-conscious connections to late nineteenth-century modernity and commodity culture. The oriental and exotic themes of the bazaar decorations, goods, and costumes, as well as the clear emphasis upon

spectacle, luxury, and public display, act as indicators of an urban middle class in Ireland which felt itself to be part of a broader late-nineteenth-century culture. This broader culture included, of course, consumption and commodification, and it is clear from the evidence of the bazaars alone that Dublin's population was deeply immersed in it.

NOTES:

1. See Heyward Ehrlich, "'Araby' in Context: The 'Splendid Bazaar,' Irish Orientalism, and James Clarence Mangan', in James Joyce, *Dubliners: A Norton Critical Edition*, pp.261-83. In this essay, Ehrlich describes the actual Araby Bazaar in some detail, as well as discussing the connections between Joyce's use of the name 'Mangan' in 'Araby' and the orientalism of James Clarence Mangan's poetry.
2. See *Araby in Dublin: Official Catalogue, Grand Oriental Fete, May 14 to 19 1894 in Aid of Jervis Street Hospital*, for details of the bazaar's events, as well as *The Irish Times* and *The Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 14–19 May 1894.
3. Mary E. Daly, *Dublin the Deposed Capital: A Social and Economic History 1860-1914* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1985) p.3.
4. *The Irish Times*, 14 May 1894, p.5.
5. See Gary R. Dyer, 'The "Vanity Fair" of Nineteenth Century England: Commerce, Women and the East in the Ladies' Bazaar', *Nineteenth Century Literature* 46.2 (1991), 196-222. Dyer gives a detailed account of the moral concerns about charity bazaars raised over many decades, especially regarding the behaviour of volunteer 'bazaar girls'.
6. Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.14.
7. See *The Irish Times*, 9 May 1894, p.4, which includes an advertisement for Pim Brothers Department Store, South Great George's Street, announcing that due to the demand created by the Araby Bazaar, its 'Liberty Department' had now received extra stocks of 'eastern carpets, Japanese screens and Oriental knick-knacks'.
8. *The Lady of the House*, January 1894, p.9, gives a complete list of the aristocratic patrons of the Araby Bazaar.
9. *The Lady of the House*, May 1894, p.9.
10. *The Lady of the House*, May 1893, p.19.
11. *The Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 9 May 1894, p.3.

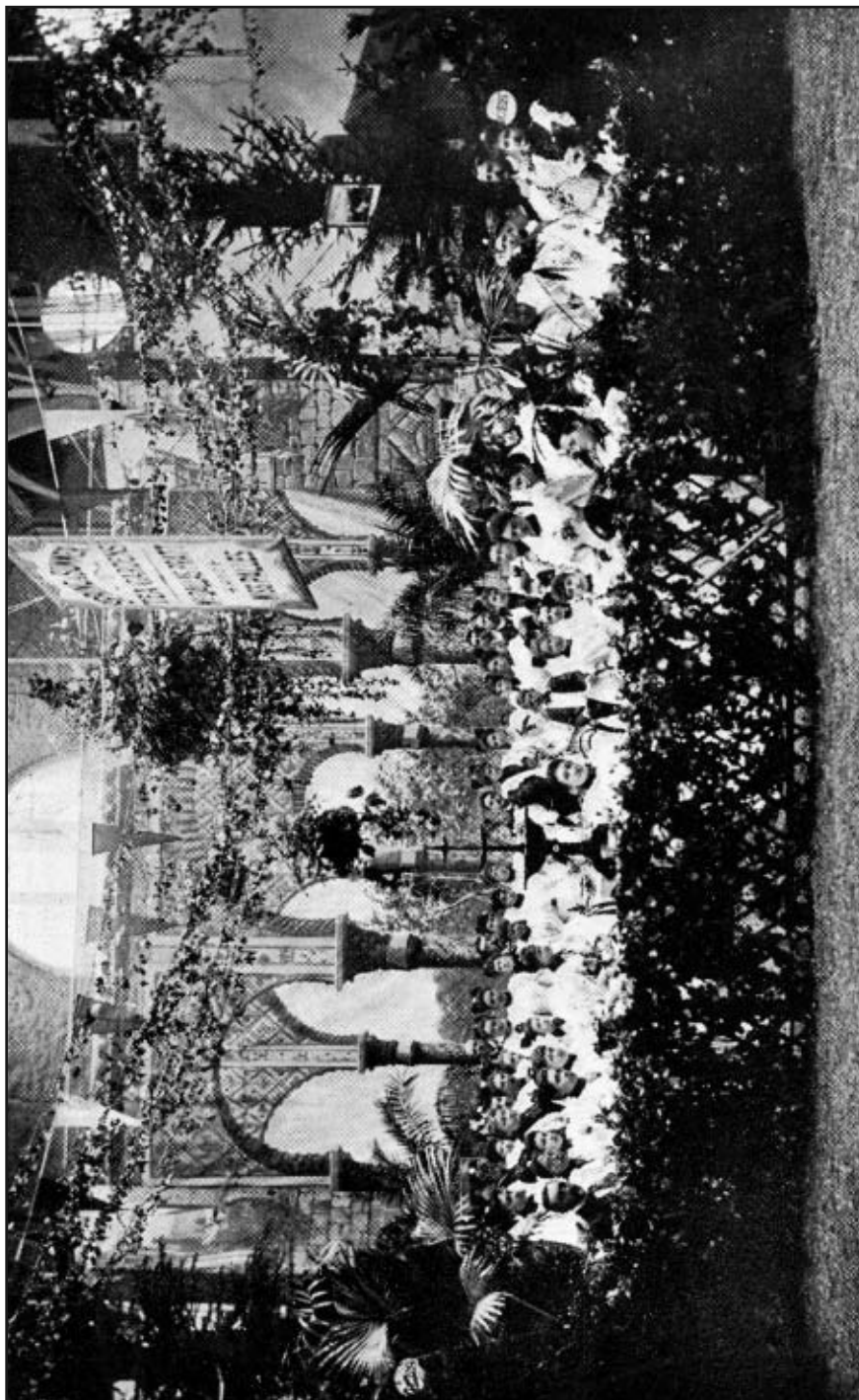


Plate 1: 'Araby' – Spring and Summer Tea Gardens (Mrs. Dallas Pratt and Miss Palles)

From Photo by Chancellor, Dublin



Plate 2: 'Araby.' – Algeciras (The Galway Stall).

From Photo by Chancellor, Dublin



Plate 3: *The Kingstown Stall.*



Plate 4: 'Araby.'



Plate 5: "Araby" – Mrs. Jas. Talbot Power's Stall.

From Photo by Chancellor, Dublin



Plate 6: "Araby" – "Nefertari" – The Misses Plunkett Kenny.

From Photo by Chancellor, Dublin