

## English 146 Approaches to literature

### Introduction

These are five separate contexts in which a text is considered. They are sometimes used in combination. See the chart. I will briefly describe each one by reference to the first story we will be studying. Review and expand your notes after reading "Araby."

#### 1 Imitative approach

Looks at the story as an imitation and interpretation of the real world from which the characters and setting are drawn. Whenever the story is set at an earlier time than our own, some knowledge of history is required. Whenever the story is set in a different location than that of the reader, some knowledge of other cultures and of geography may be required. The theme will be a comment on the people, places, and times the story represents. Also known as the historical approach.

Example: How "Araby" reveals the values and assumptions of Catholic middle-class Dublin at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 2 Literary approach

Looks at the story as a text within the body of literature. Some knowledge of the literary tradition is required. The theme will be a variation upon or a response to previous themes touched on in works of literature. Also known as the mythical or archetypal approach.

Example: "Araby" and the chivalric quest; the story is actually a failed quest story.

#### 3 Affective approach

Looks at the story as an emotional experience for the typical readership. No special knowledge required. The theme will be a function of how the story makes the reader feel. It is important to avoid the obvious with this approach.

Example: the surprising unreality romantic love in "Araby."[[what is learned: the only way to overcome alienation and unreality is to use one's senses and face reality, however unpleasant it may seem to be at first]]

#### 4 Expressive approach

Looks at the story as an aspect of the author's personal philosophy. Some knowledge of the author's life and works is required. The theme will be variation or development of a general idea which the author has explored in other works.

Sometimes called the biographical approach.

Example: a criticism of smug provincialism in "Araby"

#### 5 Formalist approach

Looks at the work in relation to the typical form of works in the genre. Some knowledge of literary form is required. The theme will be an observation about how form influences meaning. Differs from literary approach [with which it is often combined] by its focus on the internal arrangement, selection, and emphasis of the elements of the story.

Example: the apparent lack of inner conflict in "Araby"