

"araby" by james joyce essay sample



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As humans grow they pass through various stages of development, often some stages are never reached, when a new stage is successfully reached the person has undergone some sort of initiation. James Joyce's short story "Araby" is in simple terms about initiation, it is a story about a young boy's adventure that allows him to progress from one stage to the next with the realization of his narcissistic behavior.

At first the boy is innocent, unaware of himself and the world around him. The first few paragraphs reflect this innocence. The street on which the boy lives is "blind" and "quiet" and the house at the end of the street, probably an analogy of the boy, is "detached" and "uninhabited". The house in which the boy lives, describes why he has remained innocent until this point. The priest who used to live in the house is already dead and thus it symbolizes the lack of the religious guide to the boy's experience. The air in the house is musky, there are old papers and yellowed books in one room, as well as an unkept garden, suggesting that the house was not looked after, and allowed to age on its own, much the same way the boy has. The aunt and uncle are the only family members of the boy mentioned, neither one seems to take much responsibility in raising him, especially the uncle, who seems to be a drunk. The absence of a true parental figure in the story suggests that the boy lacks some sort of mentor to give him direction in his gaining valuable experience.

The boy does have a fantasy, a symbol for his feminine side often found in his stage of development, an unattainable figure known simply as Mangan's

sister. The girl is so ideal in his eyes that he is content in simply starrng in awe of her. Mangan's sister does provide the boy with an escape at times. For example when the boy is walking through "flaring streets", the real world is almost not there and his imagination produces sensations that give him a new world one in which the thought of her leads his way. Although Mangan's sister has control of most of his free time, she is too perfect for the boy to confront and thus he does not.

A day arrives when he must face her and in this story oddly enough the girl initiates the communication. When Mangan's sister addresses him, she tells him she is unable to go to a bazaar called "Araby" and seems rather upset. The boy takes the chance to include his fantasy (the girl) in his life and offers to bring her something from the bazaar.

The boy is still innocent and dependent on others, so the boy ready to embark on his journey and incorporate his ideals to his really life, is once again let down. The boy's uncle, a possible role model having come home late (drunk) and as the boy leaves the house he is already towards the end of the closing hour of the bazaar, the window of opportunity is closing.

The time has come for him to face his innocence through experience, even if the experience is one of disappointment. To hurry along the way the boy takes a streetcar, it is deserted, suggesting the fruitlessness of his journey to the bazaar. When he finally arrives, most of the stalls are closed and he has come too late. A few adults are having meaningless, careless conversations, showing how the boy's obvious disappointment is of no concern to them or to the universe. As he comes to terms with the fact that he has no chance in

meeting his ideals, he " allows the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my (his) pocket" a sign of losing hope (since he had preciously clutched them so tightly with hope.) As the lights of the bazaar go out and the boy walks away he suddenly finds that disappointment has been an experience for him, which lend him to enlightenment, and initiation. The boy realizes how narcissistic he has been and by labeling himself " as a creature driven and decided by vanity", overcomes his own nature and thus initiates into a new stage of development.

The boy's narcissism was in trying to make his fantasy a reality, treating a simple gift as if it was the window of opportunity. When the boy became aware of how vain this method was, he awoke to the reality that it cannot be so simple, and that in the real world things don't work out, uncles get drunk and bazaars close and the universe doesn't wait. With this realization he gained self-awareness, the initiation to a new step.