

Araby



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Araby - character analysis of the protagonist The short fiction, "Araby" takes the help of a simple dream or illusionary craze of the young boy to show him the stark reality of Dublin's life that is very different from the world of his own making. In the story, James Augustine Aloysius Joyce illustrates a low-income neighbourhood of an urban city, Dublin in Ireland from the late 19th or the early 20th century. He uses this kind of a background to depict the lifestyle of the character of the boy, depicted in his story - a boy who creates an outlet for a way to escape from reality. The boy is tempted to hold on to this hopeful dream and falls for it too. "Araby" - the market place is the medium via which the boy realizes the illusion that had overpowered him. The first words spoken by the girl of his dream was also about "Araby", giving the reader the assumption that it will be a mythological place that he can escape from reality and his harsh environment. The story of "Araby" highlights the contradiction between reality and illusion through illustration of the transformation of innocence to the path of realization and disillusionment as a phenomenon that occurs in a child's boyhood. The protagonist of the story is the matured boy who had once been the innocent boy depicted in the story. The story opens with the lines "North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free" (Joyce, 538). Paradoxically, even though they were free from school, even their play did not give them the desired pleasure, for it was an equally dull world, where not even play brought any stimulant for the children. All these descriptions of dullness actually create the backdrop against which the boy takes resort to an imagination larger than life and hence encounters a surprising disillusionment. In this fiction, the author focuses on character rather than on plot to expose the ironical evidences

present in self-deception. On one hand, "Araby" is a story of a boy's search for excellence or his dream. The search is in vain but gives way to an inner self-realization and an initial step into manhood. From another facet, the story encompasses a grown up man's experience. While the boy's first hand experience relates to his meet with the first love it is also a portrayal of an unrelenting problem of human life - the incongruity between what one wishes to be or have and what destiny actually has in store for us. This opposition experienced by the boy sets up the theatrical background of a story of first love as narrated by the author who has used some consequential symbolic metaphors and irony to reveal the meaning of the story. Symbolic images portray the boy as a lonely individual who is aware of the bleakness of the surroundings - the dullness that he rejects silently to find solace in his world of fantasy. During the first reading, the story might seem to be about the love story or first crush of a young boy who craves to gain the attention of the girl, 'Mangan's sister' whom he adores in his mind - "Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side" (Joyce 539). The admiration held by the narrator is based more upon physical beauty, which seems to arouse the sense of the young boy's mind. He admires the grace and the look of the girl along with the way she moves. It is a love, which is not based upon deeper evaluation and rather on an innocent urge. The boy simply cannot get her out of his mind - "At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read." After the time when the girl speaks to him asking him to visit Araby, it is as if "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" (Joyce 540). The boy

has now grown up into a man who is already aware of the reality and talks about his childhood innocence that led him to find a strange solace in fantasizing to describe which he says, "soul luxuriated". The idea of casting an enchantment somewhat prepares the contrast image that is eventually revealed in the end to make the boy realize the truth about the world where he lived. The presence of the girl's vision had charmed and influenced him so much that the simple syllables sounds like some very special and beautiful echo from the silence of his already enchanted soul. This indicates he needs something other than the real people to appease him - even though it might be an illusion. When the boy reaches Araby with his aunt some realization about life dawns on him. He feels let down and an emptiness takes over him and he is assured that he would feel that emptiness continuously - "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (Joyce, 542). This reveals the boy's realization of the lustful greed, which made him look like a monster. The coming of age is symbolized here as the boy comes to terms with his adolescence. Therefore, one might infer that the antagonist in the story is the culture and life of Dublin, which has a significant role in shaping the boy's mind along with the other inhabitants in the city. This cajoles the innocent mind to seek shelter to a world of his own making or imagination where the boy seeks peace and happiness that the reality could not give him. In his allegorical piece of work, Joyce intends to make the reader realize the harsh life that people were forced to face in Dublin. The way the disillusionment happens and why is not very clearly mentioned. One reason could be that as he compared the girl at the bazaar to the girl he dreams of he finds them similar and nothing special about his dream and like most

other people it is merely physical attraction that actually makes him look like a greedy beast to himself. This also takes away the ray of light from him and brings him back to stark reality of emptiness and the bleak surroundings that he originally belongs. 'Disillusionment' by itself has been treated in a way that shows the reader James Joyce understanding of a child's psychology besides their need to have a pleasant environment away from the unkind reality. The elucidation occurs suddenly and disenchantment takes place not only to show the world's true face but also the boy's inner greed and inducement. Work Cited Joyce, James, "Araby", in, Literature: an introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing, New York: Pearson, 2010