

The crush: a psychoanalytical look at "araby"



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Probably no other twentieth century short story has called forth more attention than Joyce's "Araby." Some universality of experience makes the story interesting to readers of all ages, for they respond instinctively to an experience that could have been their own. The story suggests the stormy period of adolescence that we have all lived through and the reader sympathizes with the protagonist as he experiences his first crush. In his brief but complex story, James Joyce employs imagery and symbolism to reveal the blind obsession and compulsive behavior characteristic of a boy in the throes of his first crush. The nameless protagonist of "Araby" is a pre-teen boy living in Dublin, Ireland. His life is a simple one of school and play until the sister of one of his playmates enralls him. He lovingly studies her and notes how "her dress [swings] as she moves her body" and longs to touch "the soft rope of her hair" (753). These sensual images hint at the obsessive feelings to come. Soon, she is all he is capable of thinking about. The image of her accompanies him "even in places the most hostile to romance": the market and the streets, among the "drunken men and bargaining women," amid "the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys" (754). His fixation on her is absolute. He imagines that his feelings for her are a "chalice" and that he "bore it safely through a throng of foes" (754). His feelings are so immediate and profound that he states that his "eyes were often full of tears" and he could not tell why. As his obsession progresses, he finds that he is unable to speak to her and that even her name provokes an adrenaline rush: "her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood" (754). He loses interest in school, as he cannot cease his obsessive thoughts of her: "her image came between me and the page I strove to read." By night, he shuts himself in a room and gives himself over

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to the vision of her so completely that he feels he is about to pass out. To keep from losing consciousness, it is the thought of her he calls upon as he murmurs " O love! O love!" over and over (754). These images as well as the sensuous descriptions of the girl show that he is clearly obsessed with her. This obsession fosters behavior from the boy that can only be called compulsive. The boy admits to lying on the floor in the front parlor every morning " watching her door" (753). When she appears on the doorstep, his compulsive behavior is validated at the sight of her, which makes his " heart leap" (753). He follows her to school each morning and he feels at ease only because he has " kept her brown figure always in [his] eye" (753). In one instance, his compulsion to watch and follow her every morning is thwarted by his uncle. Because his uncle happens to be in the hall where he normally waits for the girl to appear, he is unable to carry out his compulsion. This throws off the habitual order of his day and he leaves " the house in bad humour" with a doubtful heart. That evening, instead of playing with his friends, he stands at the window and stares at her house. In the fashion characteristic of one who is obsessed, he loses track of time in his compulsive thoughts of her. He says, " I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination" (755). Though he is obsessed with the girl and is compelled to watch her and think of her at all times, what he feels for her is beyond his understanding. His love for the girl is part sexual desire, part sacred adoration. He is, he says, " confused" (754). The protagonist is blind to the fact that his strong feelings are nothing more than the obsessive thoughts that accompany a crush. Throughout the story, the author makes use of blind imagery that is symbolic of the boy's self-deception. From the very first paragraph, the author hints at <https://assignbuster.com/the-crush-a-psychoanalytical-look-at-araby/>

the boy's blindness. The road he lives on is blind, with a "blind end" and the street where he plays is a "dark muddy lane" by "dark dripping gardens" and "dark odorous stables" (753). The time of year also adds to the sense of the darkness of closed eyes since during winter "dusk fell before we had eaten our dinners" (753). Archetypically, in order for the boy to prove his love for the girl, he must go on a quest. The boy, in his only conversation with the object of his affection, impulsively offers to go to Araby, the bazaar that she wishes she could visit. He promises to bring her something and is convinced that this token will validate his feelings for her and that she will be impressed by the gesture. Upon arrival at Araby he finds the bazaar nearly empty. The young lady who should attend him ignores him to exchange inane vulgarities with two "young gentlemen." Suddenly from the trivialities here the boy experiences an "epiphany," a "sudden showing forth" in which his mind is flooded with light, with truth. He can see the parallel that exists between the girl here and "his" girl; he can see that all of his obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions have brought him to this empty bazaar, at ten o'clock at night and he realizes his feeling for her for what it is: physical attraction. The boy is struck by the triviality of his feelings. He realizes that he was blinded to this insignificance by his obsessive-compulsive behavior. Through his epiphany, he is able to mature and move past his first crush with the knowledge that it was only through journeying into the dark that he was finally able to see the light.