

# Led by the heart

Literature



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Both, James Joyce and John Updike, who were 20th century writers, chronicled and gave extraordinary insight into the progression of human life such as we see in their short stories "Araby" and "A & P". Both these short story writers began with young immature protagonists, and steadily moved forward to ultimately show how their respective protagonists have crossed the expanse that separates childhood and adulthood.

Considering this, John Updike's "A & P" seems to be basically a contemporary retelling of James Joyce's "Araby" and therefore as would be expected, many commonalities are shared between both these stories. John Updike and James Joyce both utilized elaborate figurative language and characterization in order to communicate a common theme: showing that even though the initiation of a young man to the trials and tribulations of life could bring about failure and defeat, it however also results in an inner awareness and an introduction into manhood.

Both John Updike and James Joyce use figurative language not only to create visual effects that complement and enliven their shared theme but they also use it to convey abstract ideas and concepts that would have been very difficult or even impossible to express in literal terms, such as the ironical nature of the conflicts in both stories which sadly conclude in an ultimate failure and defeat but however results in an increased knowledge about the hardships of the world and an heightened awareness about one another's protagonists.

James Joyce in "Araby" uses situational irony and symbolic imagery in such a way that the ironical situation is complemented by the imagery and thus it

becomes an embodiment of the principle theme of the short story. The very title "Araby," starts to fulfill the imagery of romance and one-half of the irony is that it pervades the short story. To the late nineteenth-century European mind, the Arabic lands of North Africa and the Middle East symbolized exotic delights, luxurious sensuality, decadence and escapism.

So we see Joyce using the word Araby to evoke all the senses of "Eastern enchantment" (33) and this coupled with the boy's erotic desires for the girl whose "name sprang to [his] lips at moments in strange prayers and praises" (31) results in an idealistic and confused interpretation of love. Joyce continues evoking a sensory impression of love by depicting how the boy cannot sleep or study and how he has "hardly any patience with the serious work of life" (32) and in the face of love everything "seemed to [him like] child's play, ugly monotonous child's play" (32).

James Joyce emphasizes this romantic imagery in order to accentuate the boys' ironical disappointment and realization. A feeling of "blindness" (33) quickly becomes prevalent and the ironical overtones become clear and deep when the boy tardily arrives at the bazaar. The boy's quest cruelly ends as he slowly realizes with slow, tortured clarity that Araby is not at all what he imagined and the protagonist finds himself acting "as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (35).

Therefore James Joyce concludes the situational irony through a moment of self-realization. The dominant use of irony by Joyce allows him to show that despite the feelings of disillusionment and failure on the part of the protagonist, the boy seems to have made the first step towards manhood

and simultaneously understands not only himself better but also the world around him. Correspondingly, John Updike in his short story "A & P" makes use of irony and imagery in order to highlight his 'coming of age' theme.

Updike's simplistic colloquial descriptive words used by Sammy, such as "sweet broad soft-looking can" (802), "Queenie" (804) and "nubbled pink top" (804), all allow Updike not only to portray Sammy as a stereotypical teenager in terms of his behavior and attitude but also allows him to evoke a sensory impression of affection and romance. In a vague sense of idealism Sammy attempts to become an "unsuspected hero" (805) and attempts to stand up and impress the girls, who at the climax of the situational irony "keep right on going ... [and] they flicker across the lot to their car" (805).

Sammy's rash and impractical behavior only brings about his unnecessary self-sacrifice for three girls who he will never meet again and Updike concludes like Joyce with a moment of self-realization as Sammy comprehends "how hard the world was going to be to [him] hereafter" (805). Even though Updike has made it so, that the result of the situation is the opposite of what was intended or expected he has also emphasized how Sammy has gone past the disillusionment of the situation and has traversed beyond his immature teenage ways and has discovered who he truly is.

James Joyce and John Updike similarly utilize characterization in order to emphasize on the intricacies, feelings and actions of their respective boyhood protagonists in order to embody and emphasize their common theme. James Joyce characterizes his protagonist in such a way that there

are numerous competing forces in the boy's life and a major conflict between idealism and realism is observable.

This conflict adds another dimension to "Araby" and allows Joyce to make the story a portrayal of a continuing problem all through life: the incompatibility of the ideal, of the dream as one wishes it to be, with the bleakness of reality. The reader understands the pointlessness and obstinacy of the boy's quest but the boy is determined "to bear his chalice safely through a throng of foes" (32). The boy is extraordinary lovesick, and from his innocent idealism we understand that he cannot keep up with the dream. Joyce emphasizes how he must soon wake up to the demands of the world around him and react.

Therefore throughout the first half of the story, Joyce foreshadows the boy's awakening and disillusionment. At no other point in the story is characterization as brilliant as it is at the end. Joyce draws his protagonist with strokes designed to let us recognize in the "creature driven and derided by vanity" (35) a boy who is initiated into knowledge through a loss of innocence, one who does not fully realize the incompatibility between the beautiful, innocent world of the imagination and the very real world of fact.

Joyce's characterization of his protagonist and the resolution of his internal conflict show the reader the self-awareness and big step toward adulthood the boy has taken after briefly experiencing the trials and tribulations of real life. In a like manner, John Updike's characterization of Sammy not only gives the reader a lesson in adolescence but also makes Sammy of literal embodiment of the his theme. Updike too creates a very dominant internal

conflict in Sammy, between his hormone-driven adolescent urges and the need to take the leap to manhood.

Updike characterizes Sammy in the first half of "A & P" as being driven by his overriding sexual desire and hence has no problem describing in fascination of one of the girl's rear being a "sweet broad soft-looking can" (802), the alluring "bathing suits" (802) whose "straps were down" (802) and had no problem "watch[ing] them all the way" (803). However Updike's characterization of Sammy at the end is most masterful of all.

He in one sense continues to uphold Sammy's adolescent behavior when all the time his intentions is to do everything in his power to impress the girls, making sure that they would not leave without having some sort of awe-filled reverence for him. But as the girls "flicker across the lot to their car" (805) Updike begins to show Sammy's torturous progression to adulthood as he refuses to back down and risks doing stuff that his "family says [is] sad" (804) even though he doesn't "think it's so sad [him] self" (804).

Updike and Joyce's characterization of their respective protagonists and the resolution of their internal conflicts show the reader the self-awareness and the significant step toward adulthood both boys have taken after briefly experiencing the trials and tribulations of real life. Therefore in retrospect we see how James Joyce in "Araby" and John Updike in "A & P" are both able to chronicle the progression of human life from childhood and immaturity to adulthood and sensibility.

Through similar uses of irony, imagery and characterization both these brilliant writers are able to highlight and emphasize their common theme

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about how the first steps toward adulthood, maturity and self-awakening may be the result of initial failure and defeat due to one's first encounters with the cruelty and viciousness of real life. " Araby" and " A & P" therefore are both testaments to the saying " from adversity comes renewed strength. "