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Fantasy into Reality

The short story "Araby" is one of the stories by James Joyce. It was published in 1914. The narrator is an unnamed boy, who is infatuated with a girl across a dead-end street in Dublin. The girl is the light in his fantasy. In his desire to please her, he decides to go to the Araby bazaar. The narrator's idealized vision of Araby is destroyed, along with his idealized vision of romance upon arriving at the bazaar. His delusions turn into disappointments as nothing in Araby matches the expectations he has in his mind. The connotations of light and darkness demonstrate the narrator's fantasy and reality.

The imagery in the story illustrates the narrator's fantasy, unrealistic idealism, and illusion in a world full of darkness, which represents the brutality of reality. The story begins in the dark when Joyce describes North Richmond Street as blind, dead, and gloomy: "The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces" (Joyce 1). The narrator uses dark references to make the narrator's reality of living in the gloomy town more vivid and realistic. The symbolic use of darkness creates the atmosphere and then transitions to light and brightness. The light is associated with Mangan's sister who gives the boy a sense of joy.

Readers see the relationship between the girl's presence to the light as soon as she appears in the story. "She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door"

(Joyce 1). The boy does not even know her name, yet he is entranced by her mystery. “The boy now views Mangan’s sister through a kind of twilight—the combined light of imagination and bodily reality—superimposing his fantasy figure upon the actual girl, to whom he has not yet even spoken” (Conrad and Osteen 70). He becomes blinded by his infatuation with the girl. Moreover, he isolates himself from his friends and loses interest in playing with them. Instead, he secretly waits in his drawing room for her to come out every morning. “The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen” (Joyce 1). The narrator’s illustration of “blindness” is metaphoric and describes both, how infatuated the boy is with the girl and how unaware Mangan’s sister is about his adoration.

Throughout the story, the darkness slowly dims the brightness and brings the understanding of epiphany to the narrator. The main scene takes place in a bazaar, where the boy’s delusions turn into disappointments. One of the interesting scenes is presented as he gets ready to leave for the market. The boy is waiting for his uncle, who happens to arrive home late. The uncle’s late arrival demonstrates how the darkening evening affects the boy’s excitement. In other words, reality wins over imagination. Upon arrival at the market, nothing matches the description the narrator has made in his mind. “Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service” (Joyce 4). His anticipation of enjoyment proves to be different from the outcome.

A couple of open stalls give the narrator hope; however, the reality seems different. As Kathryn Conrad and Mark Osteen explain in their criticism “Lighted Squares: Framing ‘Araby,’” the boy realizes his real feelings and emotions for Mangan’s sister at the bazaar. “He sees him-

self in the leering men, now realizing that Mangan's sister and his own visual fantasies have enticed him into making a futile trip" (Conrad and Osteen 72). The narrator realizes the harshness of reality as he speaks to the random lady in the market. "His timid approach to the saleswoman and her flirtatious conversation with the two men yield the famous final sentence" (Conrad and Osteen 72). The narrator understands that fulfilling his promise to the girl and shopping at the bazaar is less satisfying compared to what he expected. He leaves the bazaar with unexpected discouragement "I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark" (Joyce 5).

The narrator used both, light and darkness to demonstrate the difference between fantasy and reality. The boy's life is brightened by the existence of Mangan's sister who is the symbol of light in the darkness. He creates and lives in an illusion with all those feelings until one day it gets shattered by the realism of life at the bazaar Araby. In the end, the sense of reality is what brings the boy back into his world. The story is a good illustration of the battle between psychological and real-life realities.

Works Cited

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