James Joyce's Araby In Dubliners

James Joyce was one of the most controversial writers of his time. He was often thought of as perverse through his writings, leading to one of his most well-known books “Ulysses” to be banned in some countries. While he may very well be a bit perverse or erotic in some of his writings they had their purpose. In the short story ”Araby” we are able to see Joyce’s use of eroticism in his words as the narrator describes his first crush. This first crush of his consumes him and his mind until the end of the story where the narrator learns his first lesson of life.

In 'Araby' our main character starts off by reminiscing of his youth. This point of view provides us with an emphasis on growing up. The narrator chose a time when he was changing mentally from a child into a man as can be seen by his new obsession with Mangan’s sister. Throughout the passage the narrator describes Mangan’s sister’s physical attributes vividly in no matter what she is doing, ”Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side”(James Joyce, Dubliners, ch.1). The fact that the narrator was able to remember the girl from his childhood so vividly hints at the profound effect she had on him.

Once the narrator finally talks to Mangan’s sister, after watching from afar, he learns that more than anything, she wants to go to the mystical place known as the Araby which she isn't allowed to attend. Recognizing this as an opportunity to show his love for her, the narrator declares that he will go and bring her a gift. The narrator’s mind has already omitted all the steps required in finding love and has set out on his quest to the Araby for her. His imagination takes the best of him as he believes that once he has accomplished this she will like him back. The narrator's obsession with the girl has allowed his maturity to both rise and decline in certain aspects. While the narrator has now grown more responsible as to please the girl, he has also grown more naive for believing everything will go as he planned.

Finally, the narrator’s fantasy is destroyed. After waiting late for his uncle to show up he finally arrives and gives a half hearted excuse. This is the beginning of the end of the narrator's fantasy. While he did eventually show, the narrator never planned on anything happening other than what he believed was going to happen. The narrator then leaves to the Araby on the train with not enough money to go back if he buys a gift. While this does show dedication to the plan he set forth it also shows the extent of his unhealthy obsession with Mangan’s sister. When he gets to the Araby almost all the shops are closed with nothing he can find that suits her in his price range. While sad for the narrator, he has shown great growth throughout this story such as having a first love, going on a quest for love, and in the end failing.

This leads us to our main theme of Araby, Reality vs Fantasy. Up until the end the narrator has had fantasies of buying the perfect gift at the Araby. These fantasies prove to inaccurate when he arrives at the Araby as it seems to be a bleak shadow of the fantasy he had imagined. This is visible through the boy overhearing a conversation among the vendors, who talk in plain english accent. Expecting a fantastical place with goods from around the world, being then presented with the disappointment that is is unable to buy anything as he lacks the money, is not what he imagined at all, and still can't escape Dublin as he hears the accent of the colonizers: the English. While his imagination gave him delightful daydreams of the Araby, reality was not as generous and much harsher.

While Araby is from the recollection of the narrator and doesn't feature much dialogue between characters, the impact of secondary characters is still felt. The main secondary character is Mangan's sister who the narrator essentially stalks and spends all of his money for. Her impact on him caused him to want to form a relationship, while he is still a little naive about this it shows that he is growing up positively and faster thanks to her. The other character that has an impact on the narrator's growth is his uncle. After being told many times by the narrator that he wishes to go to the Araby the uncle comes home very late apologizing, quoting sayings like 'all work and no play makes jack a dull boy' to try and soften the boys attitude. His uncle contributes to his growth by proving to him that people are untrustworthy and are able put anguish on to others. His uncle's actions here have caused growth but negatively as the narrator now feels as though he can't trust people to keep their promises.

James Joyce's Araby, while short in terms of length is filled with detail and hidden meanings. In several pages we are able to receive a detailed view of a boys life in Dublin where meets someone who puts him on the path of adulthood. The fantasies he believes in and the people around him ultimately cause him to feel frustrated and angry with the world and the reality that goes with it.

Citations:

1. Borey, Eddie. 'Dubliners Themes'. GradeSaver, 11 November 2001 Web. 3 October 2019.
2. Borey, Eddie. 'Dubliners Araby Summary and Analysis'. GradeSaver, 11 November 2001 Web. 3 October 2019.