The Themes Of Araby By James Joyce

One of the key central themes that James Joyce presents in Araby is coming of age, particularly about a young boy taking his first steps into becoming a man. Not necessarily through by gaining a deeper voice or taking more financial responsibility but by developing his first crush. In the story of Araby, the main character is massively in love with one of his friend's sisters. Since this is a passion that he has never felt before, the character comes to term with a lot of internal intoxication which comes with the quivering of gaining your first love. Throughout the story, the narrator becomes obsessed with the girl to where she is all that he thinks about. He can't think about school during the day or even about his friends when he is around them. It's only that special, dreamy girl which means anything to him. This type of coming of age can be seen as relatable to readers as everyone can remember their first crush and how it changed them deeply. In this case, men can relate to going through the phrase of "girls are yucky" to eventually being attracted to females. However, for as much as first love can show the best of a person, it can also show the worst of a person. Throughout the story of Araby, the young boy starts his process of slowly becoming a man by discovering the true meaning of love and what it can cost them.

The narrator describes this girl has being the most perfect angelic goddess one could possibly imagine. The narrator's description of the girl cast here in an almost spiritual light, "She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door." This particular image can be seen as something similar to traditional religious iconography. With the way that the narrator showcases Mangan's sister as glowing as a bright, beautiful light from behind, this can be as resembling Virgin Mary herself, mother of Jesus, which showcases the most perfect woman that any man could ever dream off. The narrator doesn't just take notice of her lighting beauty but also of her body as well, showcasing the boy's first ever feel of lust and sexual attraction. The way he describes it, "Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side." This was the narrator's first steps in learning a man's affection for a woman. This is where he mistakes sexual and physical attraction for love. From taking notice of a beautiful young girl and feeling his own sexual turmoil within himself, he is slowly starting to enter that stage towards adulthood with his fondness over this girl.

The narrator believe that he loves this girl, so much so that he becomes obsessed with her. He thinks about her constantly and she is always in his head. Even as he carried his aunt's packages in the Dublin marketplace, he still thinks of the girl. "I imagined that I bore my chalice safety through a throng of foes," he said when reflecting on her. He doesn't just think about her, but he starts to spy on her from his house across the street from hers. "The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books, and followed her." Although some readers may find it creepy for a young boy to follow a girl to where that could even be consider stalking, it's to show how much this girl means to the boy. He even becomes frustrated at first that he cannot find himself brave enough to talk to her, to tell her how he truly feels. "I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration." This girl means so much to our main character. So much so that he is wanting to win her heart by buying her a special gift that may just in fact make their love everlasting. The narrator is so blinded by live with the girl that he can't see all the potential

outcomes and consequences that may occur from this. Which in turn pinpoints how one's first love can blind someone and possibly bring out more of an adult in them in ways that they may not expect or want.

As the story goes on, it becomes apparent that the narrator's love for the girl starts to affect the relationships he has with others. Throughout his interactions with his authority figures such as his uncle and teacher, he begins to become more aggressive and develop a more defiant personality. So much so that he becomes infuriated when his uncle does not take his requests in his more uncooperative form seriously. At the night of the Araby market, the narrator refuses to laugh at his uncle's jokes in an act of subtle rebellion. When he becomes noticed to his uncle being drunk when he came home at night, this suggests that he no longer is in that innocent child mindset and starts to become more accustomed to the aspects of the "adult world". His changing relationship with his teacher also shows that he no longer is afraid of becoming a disappointment to his authority figures. Even though his teacher becomes more and more tough of him as his grades began to decline, he still can't take his studies seriously. There are also his friends which he can't pay attention to when they are around him, especially the friend who has the sister he has a crush on. The only thing that is on his mind with his friends is yet again, the girl, which lead to the narrator being separated from his friends as they are no longer as important to him as before. Due to the narrator being in this love phrase, it starts to show the more independent side to him, especially with his relationships with the adults in his life.

However, when one becomes blinded with love and ignores any possible casualties that may come with it, that's when the worst part of yourself may come to fruition. It's at that point to where the flaws for feeling love can no longer be kept under control because of how it affects the people around you as well as yourself. In a typical coming of age story, it sees the protagonist going through an organic change which guides them to adulthood that ultimately contains challenging events for them to overcome but still leads to a satisfying conclusion. That isn't necessarily the case with the narrator in Araby. Throughout the story, Joyce goes into great length in showcasing the step-by-step process of the young boy learning to grow up by gaining warmth and fondness towards his opposite gender. From discovering his sexuality to keeping sudden distance from his friends to his increasingly rebellious attitude towards his friends and adult figures, this bring the protagonist which not so much fulfillment but more distain.

At the end of the story, the protagonist is left with nothing. He fails to impress the girl he has fallen in love with by buying her a gift, he has becoming alienated with his friends and relatives, and has lost interest in his studies. The gained knowledge and experience that the main character possessed throughout the story did not offer him satisfaction but more of a loss in innocence. He was no longer that innocence young boy he once was and has now becoming to be a more mature, rebellious adult that he shouldn't have been at such a young age. And with this loss of innocence within himself, the narrator starts to become aware of that flawed mindset that one can possess when one allows that mindset to become consumed with nothing more than obsessive attraction over one living being. Through the narrator's experience, the story suggests that one going through their coming of age phase is not so much something revolutionary but more of a tragedy.

With the way the story ends, this can definitely be seen as something brave and risky. As most coming of age stories end with the happiest and satisfying note possible showcasing the great things that can come from feeling first love, Araby does the exact opposite and showcases how

the mere feeling of first love can lead to tragedy and loss of innocence within one’s self. Instead of having the main character succeed by the end, he failed. He failed his family, friends, teachers, and most importantly, failed the girl that he was madly in love with it. This shows how not only Araby is about growing up and feeling love and affection but also the failure that can come will all of those things.

What makes the ending more devastating isn’t just that the narrator failed, but that he accepts it. Because he failed the challenge, he positioned upon himself with reaching the Arby Bazzar and buying the girl he loves a special gift, he does nothing to hide it but only consumes it within himself. With the final line of the story, “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger”, this concludes that the narrator knows that he is beyond saving from his blinded, toxic mindset and now sees the true peril of becoming an adult. What’s most fascinating about this ending is how it ends on this dour note without telling readers what will befall for the narrator and the girl. Similar to many modernist stories, it is very open-ended although, like the street that the narrator lives in, it appears to have reached its dead end when all is said and done.

The thing that stands out about the theme of coming age, love, and innocence isn’t so much about the greatness that comes with it but the badness of it. With Araby, Joyce showcases that the feeling of first love can be bad for someone. By being blinded by such an emotion, it can lead to your own personal downfall from becoming an innocent, little gentlemen to a more bitter, angsty man that demands to be taking more seriously. It argues that maybe one shouldn’t become so accustomed with their crush that it comes at the cost of those around you that already love you for what you are. That maybe one shouldn’t grow up too fast to where they don’t have to take on the biggest pressures of an adult to where they lose the innocence within themselves and others. That maybe the feeling of love can be bad for someone. That love may lead to not many successes but constant failures. Despite all the amazing things that can come with love, it should never come of the loss of not just your family, friends, or the one person you love but also yourself.