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ENGL 115 Section BE1

31 March 2019

“Araby”: A Broken Bridge Between Imagination and Reality

In James Joyce’s “Araby”, the narrator showed us his story that when he was a young boy, he was fond of Mangan’s sister, but he failed to buy her a gift in Araby to show his love. Interested in the symbolic meaning of Araby, I will dig into the young boy’s love, the significance of Araby to the narrator, and the implication of scenes in Araby in this response paper. Based on my analysis, I will argue that Araby may be considered as a broken bridge between the young boy’s imaginary love and his action to turn his love into reality, which implies his failure to show his love to Mangan’s sister. Besides, the symbolic significance of Araby as a broken bond between imagination and reality implies a depressed status of Dublin at that time.

In terms of the young boy’s love, I will claim that originating from his observation on Mangan’s sister, the young boy’s love is based on imagination. When Mangan’s sister remained to call her brother to his tea, the narrator “stood by the railings looking at her”, and he saw “her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side” (Joyce). The narrator’s detailed description about Mangan’s sister shows that he looked closely at Mangan’s sister, wanting to capture every detail of her figure, so that he could have a clearer Mangan’s sister’s image in his imagination. Besides, he enjoyed observing Mangan’s sister so much that he kept her “brown figure” always in his eye on his

way to the school every morning (Joyce). Observing Mangan's sister as closely and frequently as possible enables the young boy to have a strong imagination of his love to Mangan's sister. When the young boy was alone in the "back drawing-room", he felt that he was about to slip from all his senses (Joyce). From my point of view, the young boy's senses are the ways connecting himself to the real world, and slipping from all his senses indicates that he had completely gone into his imaginary world. When he had entirely unfolded his imagination, he "pressed the palms of his hands together until they trembled, murmuring: 'O love! O love!'" many times" (Joyce), which indicates that the young boy's love burst out when he was sunk into his imagination.

Eager to turn his imaginary love into reality, the young boy needed a chance to show his love to Mangan's sister. Fortunately, a bridge connecting imagination and reality appeared when Mangan's sister first talked about Araby. Noticing Mangan's sister's disappointment of not managing to go to Araby, the young boy guaranteed to her by saying "if I go, I will bring you something" (Joyce). Though the young boy's words may seem casual to Mangan's sister, they are a solemn promise from the narrator's perspective. On the one hand, this promise is made in a direct and real conversation between Mangan's sister and the young boy instead of imagination. On the other hand, Mangan's sister's mention of Araby offered the young boy a chance to turn his love into reality by buying a gift for Mangan's sister in Araby. What's more, Araby may be considered as the strongest link between Mangan's sister and the young boy in the real world after their conversation, because Araby seems to be the only opportunity for him to show his love from the young boy's point of view. As a result, "the syllables of the word 'Araby' were called to him through the silence in which his soul luxuriated and cast an

Eastern enchantment over him” (Joyce), which indicates that Araby is as significant as the imaginary love to the young boy’s soul.

Having found the probability to turn his fancied love into reality, the young boy “held a florin tightly” in his hand when he “strode down Buckingham Street towards the station” (Joyce), which reveals his determination to keep his words even after a delay due to his uncle’s late arrival. However, I will assert that the bridge he had found is broken, which cannot help him cross the barrier between his imagination and reality. Upon the narrator’s arrival at Araby, he saw that “nearly all the stalls were closed, and the greater part of the hall was in darkness” (Joyce). The dusky scene with few stalls opened shacks the young boy’s determination, causing him to “remember with difficulty why he had come” (Joyce). When he finally found a suitable stall, the hostess of the stall responded to him “out of a sense of duty” with a discouraging tone (Joyce), which is different from Mangan’s sister’s amiable response, who “bowed her head” towards the young boy while talking with him (Joyce). The huge gap between these two women’s responses makes the young boy eventually lose his faith and realize that the bridge he had found was broken and that the bond between imagination and reality was lost.

The narrator’s failure to show his love to Mangan’s sister indicates that Araby is a broken bridge connecting imagination and reality. James Joyce characterized the young boy as a representative at that time who sought to turn his imaginary welfare into reality. However, the young boy’s failure reveals the broken bond between fancied welfare and reality, through which James Joyce wanted to show his aversion to the society in Dublin and implied his strong desire to change the depressed status of Dublin.

Works Cited

Joyce, James. "Araby." *Dubliners*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1914. *Project*

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