



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

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#### **Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"**

“Araby” is a short story authored by James Joyce and part of the 1914 published work of the author entitled ‘Dubliners.’ The story mainly revolves around the time when the narrator is transitioning from childhood to adolescence. The story ensures an effective examination of the life of the individuals living in North Richmond Street that the author describes from the perspective of a child. It is mainly through the considerable mystique and imagination of the children that the author describes the awakening and awareness of the narrators. The paper thus intends to present a literary analysis of Joyce’s story by focusing on different elements that include themes, symbolism, and other literary features present in the story.

Marxist theory often serves as an intrinsic approach to literature that plays a critical role in allowing for awareness of the historical contexts. In the story, the girl and the boys are portrayed as characters that seem to focus more on ensuring maintenance of power due to their English



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

descent. At the time, English was rather an oppressive nation to Ireland. The Marxist analysis often suggest that the presence of class struggles within the literary texts. Nevertheless, the story features no evidence that indicates the presence of conflict amongst the groups of people from the different social classes except the characters within the bazaar.

Additionally, it is apparent from the story that the narrator is coming to the bazaar with notions of his romantic religious quest. Marx asserts that the ideas and thoughts of culture are often formed by the material exchanges of culture that encompasses the fact that the social and economic stuff that individuals do contribute significantly to the formation of ideas concerning themselves and their culture. Such is apparent in "Araby" on the individual level of the narrator. The thoughts of the narrator transform his engagement in the social and economic exchange. The narrator becomes cynical about his romantic/religious quest. He further depicts cynicism for the whole notion of buying and selling at the bazaar. Although "Araby" is not often cited as a Marxist story, it is apparent that the narrator is rather alienated and undergoes transformation by his experience within the marketplace. The narrator depicts rude awakening from his previous false consciousness.

The important theme depicted by Joyce in the story mainly focuses on reflecting the nature of innocence and the extent of its shattering with the inability to assume effective control of the situation that it unfolds. This is evident in the narrator's attempt towards finding ways of



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

satisfying his promise to the girl that he cares about in the story. The narrator's journey to Araby further plays a critical role in demonstrating his initiation into adolescence as he discovers the effective ways of making the efforts worthwhile for a girl (Elias, 112). The efforts explain the pain that the narrator encounters towards reaching his intended destination with only a limited amount of time left and nothing else to bring to the girl. The challenges encountered by the narrator in the process contributed significantly to the shattering of his perceptions of finding satisfaction both in seeing Mangan's sisters' happiness and his own first experience of romance. The bitter reality thus contributed significantly to the narrator's transcending from his naïve ideals to something that is rather ideal but sadly cruel.

In the describing his environs, the boy depicts a considerably dark and cold atmosphere that lacks light and joy. The exception in the portrayal of darkness depicted by the boy mainly encompasses Mangan's sister that he depicts as the source of brightness within the rather unwelcoming universe that serves as his home. The boy further describes the street where he subsisted, North Richmond Street, as "being blind" and the houses within the street as characterized by the presence of "brown imperturbable faces." (Livelybrooks, Zoe, 271 ). The boy further describes his house's rooms as being "musty from having being enclosed too long" and "littered with old useless papers" (Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 296). The descriptions play a



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

critical role in ensuring effective disclosure of the repression associated with the boy's feelings towards his environs.

Contrary to the considerably hard dark portraits of North Richmond Street, the explanations put forth by the girl tends to be characterized by ease and lightness. The girl's image tends to be illuminated and depict some level of easiness. "her figure defined by the light from a half-opened door" (Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 298) or "the light from the lamp . . . Lighting up her hair" (Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 298), and every movement that she makes even "the soft rope of her hair tossing from side to side" (Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 299). The story reveals the fact that the boy ensured the effective transformation of the girl's image in his mind into an adorable portrait worth religious zeal. The infatuation of the boy further pervade his actions, and he clings to the girl's image even in some of the places regarded most hostile to romance. "He does stare at her from his window and follow her on the street, however, often thinking of her, even in places the most hostile to romance" (Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 297). The story narrates the boy's blindness to the bleakness of his being through his consumption in the feelings towards the girl. The feelings of the boy towards the girl mainly arose from his belief that they are capable of shielding him from the oppression and ordinariness that characterize the daily life.

Joyce further ensures the effective use of symbolism that encompasses 'Araby' towards helping the readers in their comprehension of the story's meaning to the protagonist. A closer look



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

depicts that the idea of visiting Araby tends to be an amusing and exciting experience for the narrator. Araby serves as a representation of something that is completely different from the rather monotonous and controlling neighborhood of North Richmond Street. Instead of selecting a rather blind and quiet street, the narrator ensured the effective expansion of his horizons and focused on the acquisition of new knowledge using the things that the place has to offer (Joyce 1). Therefore, it is through this process that the boy ensures the development of an idea concerning his expectations of the place. Nevertheless, the unavoidable circumstances resulted in the boy's late arrival at the location and hence the necessity for his appreciation of what was left of it. The result of the late arrival mainly encompasses disappointment and shattering of the perceptions of the narrator concerning the place.

The depiction of darkness in the story further tends to be symbolic. The end of the story depicts the narrator's realization that he is no longer capable of doing anything in Araby. He is thus left in darkness on understanding of his lost childhood ideals. The scenario depicts the boy undergoing the transition towards adolescence on letting go of his rather childish ideas and learning to ensure acceptance of the reality that fate brings. Just as described by Maniee, and Shahriyar (201), "just like the narrator of Araby, a grown man remembering a single night with a mixture of scorn and tenderness, what we come to look back on is a sequence of these significant moments." The sentiments of the scholar depict that individuals often face such types of



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

experience wherein the rather negative experiences contribute significantly to the opening of their eyes to the reality of the world.

Although the story is mainly told from the first person perspective of its young protagonist, there is the lack of impression that the boy narrates the story. Instead, it seems that the narrator of the story is a mature man beyond the story's experience. The grown man reminisces concerning his rather youthful frustrations, desires, and hopes. Contrary to the reconstruction of the events of the story by a boy's mind, the approach to telling the story adopted by Joyce plays a critical role in facilitating the perception of the readers on the torment that the youths often experience. The experiences mainly relate to the youths when the ideas concerning both the earthly and sacred love are destroyed by the sudden unclouded view of the actual world (Liu, 421). The fact that the man, instead of the boy recounts the experience ensures the presentation of the ironic view of both the institutions and individuals that surround the boy. The ironic view is rather impossible to attain for the immature and emotionally involved mind of the boy. The views presented in the story thus depicts the fact that only the adults are capable of reminiscing the high hopes of their youthful selves and its subsequent destruction bears the potential of accounting for the ironic perspective evident in the story. Nevertheless, there is the necessity for noting that throughout the story the narrator ensures consistent maintenance of full sensitivity to his youthful anguish.



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

In the rather brief but complex story, "Araby," the author focuses on character rather than the story's plot towards revealing the ironies inherent in self-deception. At one point, the story tends to focus more on initiation, by depicting the boy's expedition for the ideal. However, the quest terminates in disappointment, but its results encompass the inner consciousness and premier step into manhood. The other level of the narration mainly includes the remembered experience of a full-grown man. The story is rather narrated in retrospect of a man that reminisces a specific moment of deep insight and meaning. The double focus evident in the story that features the first experiences of the boy and the man who has not forgotten plays a critical role towards the provision of a dramatic rendering of the story of first love narrated by an individual of a wider adult vision.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the story plays a vital role towards displaying the significant transition of the boy towards adolescence. The story further serves as a critical flashback for the narrator in his remembrance of the significant events that contributed to the shaping of his identity in life. The effective use of transitions and word choices in the story serves as a critical approach to piecing together the boy's aging and loss of innocence.



## MLA Essay Example

### Critical Analysis of James Joyce's "Araby"

Surname 1

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