

## Soliloquies in Joyce's Araby

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### ABSTRACT

*Soliloquy* at its most basic level refers to the act of talking to oneself, and more specifically denotes the solo utterance of an actor in a drama or story. It is a poem, discourse, or utterance of a character in a drama that has the form of a monologue or gives the illusion of being a series of unspoken reflections. Being a popular literary device it is often used in drama or story to reveal the innermost thoughts of a character. It is a great technique used to convey the progress of action of the story, by means of expressing a character's thoughts about a certain character or past, present, or upcoming event, while talking to himself without acknowledging the presence of any other person. In *Araby*, soliloquies are used not only to convey the development of the story to the audience, but also to provide an opportunity to see inside the mind of the boy, an unnamed narrator. Right from the beginning till the end the story is presented through various soliloquies which reveal the inner psyche of the narrator.

**Keywords:** Soliloquy, discourse, technique, development, inner psyche and narrator

### INTRODUCTION

In 'Araby', the protagonist is an unnamed narrator. The narrator is an adolescent boy who lives with his aunt and uncle in Dublin. The narrator is heavily influenced by his religious upbringing, by the dominant culture of Roman Catholicism in Dublin, and by his education at the Christian Brothers' School. As a result, the boy confuses sexual attraction for love when he experiences his first crush on his friend Mangan's sister. The narrator's description of the girl casts her in an almost spiritual light: 'She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door.' The image of Mangan's sister in this passage is reminiscent of religious iconography; Mangan's sister is aglow and lighted from behind, a common rendering of the Virgin Mary in art and statuary. The narrator does, however, take particular note of her body. 'Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side'. The narrator believes that he loves the girl, and he becomes obsessed with Mangan's sister. He thinks about her constantly. Even as he carries his aunt's packages in the Dublin marketplace, he thinks of the girl. In a manner of speaking to himself the narrator made a soliloquy when he says 'I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes'. He watches her in secret

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,' the narrator confesses. The protagonist's development of character is reflected in his relationships with his friends. As the protagonist becomes consumed by his infatuation with Mangan's sister, he loses interest in playing with his friends as well as in school. Suddenly, the things that used to matter to him now seem less important, and he even begins to feel superior to his friends, deeming his everyday life, which now seems to stand in between him and his crush, "ugly monotonous child's play." He also begins to spend less time with his friends and to observe them from an outsider's perspective. On the night of the Araby market, he watches them from the front window: "Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived." The glass both literally and metaphorically separates the narrator from his friends as they play in the street.

In *Araby*, Joyce shows that the protagonist is growing up through his discovery of his sexuality, his sudden distance from his friends, and his increasingly rebellious attitude, however the protagonist's new knowledge and maturity bring him discontent instead of fulfillment. He, however, feels quite confused about the kind of feeling she evokes in him. It is a "confused adoration," as he calls it. This state of 'confused adoration' has a resemblance with that of Eliot's *Prufrock*. In his *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot presents Prufrock as a person who is confused about his feelings. He is conscious but of nothing. The heart of the narrator in *Araby* is torn between the carnal desire just awakened by an attractive girl and a religious desire to make his love sacred. Alternatively, the overflow of his libido is so powerful that he feels embarrassed, not knowing how to control it. Accordingly, the whole narrative of "Araby" turns out to be a clinical report on the ongoing conflict in the heart of the narrator, a conflict between desire and repression, a tension between reality and idealism. The following soliloquy shows the exact description of the boy who has just fallen in love:

"My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration."

The boy is troubled at the awakening of his hetero- sexuality, which cannot always be quenched by romantic displacement. When confronted with a similar agony of adolescence - a "riot of blood"- Stephen in *Portrait* bravely plunges himself into the embrace of a Dublin whore, which leads to a routine visit to Night town later in *Ulysses*, but the narrator of "Araby" is supposedly younger than Stephen. If he cannot find any other outlet for his sexuality, it is natural that he should resort to masturbation. So, he hides himself in the most remote place in the house to satisfy his desire. The boy masturbates his sexual desires through a soliloquy where he says-

"One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that was about to slip from them, I

pressed the palms of my hand together until they trembled, murmuring: O love! O love! many times.”

He is so wrapped up in his amorous affair that he, we find, cannot concentrate on his schoolwork. He regards his duty of study as trivial, as a child's play to which he no longer feels attracted. Even the serious work of life has become, it seems to him, an obstacle set between him and his desire. If we follow the conventional metaphor of mother earth as a feminine signifier, the sexual implications that lie hidden in the passage can hardly be missed. The passage strongly invites us to elucidate the politics of the adolescent body. The "incessant needles of water playing in sodden beds" express strongly the state of sexual consummation he has reached while listening through a "broken" window to the rain dropping upon the earth. A dark interior not only suffocates the voice of conscience, but guarantees him acute sensational pleasure, because all of the other sensory receptacles are closed. Feeling a poignant sensation of pleasure, he feels totally exhausted, feeling the outside world "distantly." It can be likened to the momentary "swooning" (P 187) Stephen experiences at the sight of a "wading-girl" in Portrait. Remarkably, he intentionally tries to repress the reality of his sexual pleasure. He feels "thankful" not for the bodily sensation but for the absence of censorship, because he could see so little. The moment of pleasure being over, the voice of repression raises its head. He would not admit to himself the fact of sexual awakening. Hence his desperate efforts to repress his just awakened phallic consciousness. At the end of the passage, we catch such an ambivalent confession that while his senses seem to desire to "veil" themselves, he is about to slip from them. It is undeniable that this "veiling process" is closely related to the priest, a representative of the super-ego, who died in "the back drawing room" where the boy masturbates his desire. Shortly thereafter, he again expresses his sensual desire for the girl in an unabated manner: "my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires." This scene is the culmination of the boy's increasingly romantic idealization of Mangan's sister.

One day, the long-cherished moment comes. Mangan's sister at last speaks to him. The boy is overjoyed, and his romantic mind is stirred to the depth. Really, when the girl, though casually, asks him whether he is going to Araby, a splendid bazaar that is coming to town, he gets so confused and excited that he cannot say anything as any eager lover often does. The boy superbly articulates his feelings:

“When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*. I forgot whether I answered yes or no.”<sup>16</sup>

Here the boy is in a complete state of dilemma, an important aspect of the character of the narrator. His dilemma has a resemblance with that of Shakespeare's Hamlet where he was also in a dilemma and it is explicit when he made a soliloquy "to be, or not to be? that is the question—" Uncertain, reluctant prince Hamlet was literally unable to do anything but merely wait "to catch the conscience of the king" to complete his supposed plan.

However, the internal battles begin to affect the days and nights leading up to the physical quest to buy a gift from Araby to draw her to him. He wishes to annihilate the tedious intervening days. He is anxiously waiting for Saturday evening when he will go to Araby, his dreamland, to gratify his romantic cravings he has been nurturing in his bosom in the midst of the stifling condition of the Dublin city. His imagination dwells so continuously on the girl that he cannot

mind his lesson. He can only see her image. In this situation, he describes his mental condition in the following words:

“At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read.”<sup>19</sup> Lastly when the boy went to Araby, a splendid bazaar as he thought, he finds himself as ‘a creature driven and derided by vanity’. *This Araby devours his all fancies and yearnings. He experiences a shattering epiphany, his boyish fantasies are dashed by the grim realities of life in Dublin and consequently he develops a new perspective on life.*

## CONCLUSION

The discussion mentioned above shows that soliloquies reveal the inner workings of the narrator in Joyce’s Araby . It supplies the essential progress of the action of the story and provides an opportunity to inside the mind of the narrator. Towards the end of the story, the boy suddenly realizes that how stupid he has been and how illusory all of his hopes and thoughts were. Paralleled by the turning off the lights at the bazaar the light of his romantic illusions is now firmly switched off leaving him to face the darkness of reality alone. The following soliloquy brings the best of his inner state of mind when he says –

“Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.”

Thus, Araby within the limited scope of a short story not only brings out the mysterious working of a love-smitten adolescent heart *through the soliloquies but also suggests the universal pursuit of an ideal and waiting with throbbing heart for its fulfillment that never comes.*

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