Nurturing Catholic Community

Curriculum Connections – Grade 12 English

**Araby**

**Author: James Joyce**

Echoes 12 Oxford University Press 2002

This short story, set in north Dublin, is told in the first person by a boy who is infatuated with the older sister of one of his friends Mangan. The boys are in grade 6 or 7. Joyce paints a picture of two story brown brick houses in an alley. Here the boys live and play. The author’s own family has a flat (apartment) in one of the houses that used to belong to a priest who died. When the sister calls her brother in for the evening meal, the author watches her carefully and longingly in the sway of her dress, and her braided hair moving back and forth. He watches her secretly from his flat in the morning and follows after her brown figure when she leaves her house to go to work to the point he must break off to go to school. Even as he carries the parcels for his aunt in the market place he thinks about her so deeply and intently that his eyes fill with tears. In his thoughts he adores her, and thinks of his own body as a harp and her words and gestures as fingers running upon the wires. He is completely infatuated. When finally she speaks to him directly he is bowled over. She asks him if he is going to visit the bazaar named Araby that is coming to town. She explains that she has a prior commitment and cannot go there. In this scene Joyce frames her in evening light standing at a railing in a way that reinforces the boy’s longing. He promises to buy something for her at the bazaar when he goes there himself on the Saturday of the week. His entire life in the days following is lived in anticipation of the bazaar. But when the great day arrives, due to his uncle’s forgetfulness and lateness arriving home due to drinking, he doesn’t get to the bazaar until it is almost closed, and he pays adult fare to get in. When he approaches one of the stalls that sells porcelain vases he realizes he is out of his league; he experiences “anguish and anger.”
A Religious Culture

This story is in the short story collection by James Joyce called *Dubliners*. Though it does not have a specific religious dimension, this piece is filled with religious imagery. The author mentions that there is a Christian Brothers school nearby. A priest who has died used to be the tenant in the boy’s house. There is a copy of *The Devout Communicant* in the apartment. The priest had a reputation for “charity”. The boy guards the thoughts of the object of his infatuation in the midst of all distractions imagining that he was bearing “a chalice safely through a throng of foes.” As he continues to obsess on the object of his desire and affections something comes to his lips in “prayer and praise”. He speaks of a “confused adoration”. His aunt is worried that the bazaar is connected to a Freemason meeting. His neighbour Mrs Mercer collects used stamps for “some pious purpose”. When the boys enters the bazaar he recognizes “a silence like that which pervades a church after a service”.

The boy lives with his aunt and uncle. We are not told about his parents. It is not clear why he situates the boy without parents.

Nurturing True Desire

James Joyce captures the dynamic of illusion in life. You see a possibility. You concentrate all your hopes on that possibility. The bubble bursts and you feel humiliated and betrayed. Joyce has captured a slice of life. We can be caught in the illusion of desire. As Margaret Silf notes in *Wise Choices* “There are deep desires and there are shallow wants.” There are excellent commentaries on the complexity of desire, and getting a handle on desire in the works of John O’Donoghue, and James Martin SJ. Both authors explore how we can be captured by false desires which do not feed our souls. On the other hand when we allow ourselves the reflection and depth to explore our most worthwhile desires, we experience a happiness and peace that can be deep and lasting. In his book *Eternal Echoes - Exploring our Hunger to Belong* John O’Donoghue examines the phenomenon of desire and our need to experience communion and community. In *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* James Martin describes the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, and points to the importance of discernment as a method of making sound choices that conform us to God’s will for our lives.
Resources


Findley, Timothy. The Wars  Penguin Canada 1977


Higgins, Michael W. Thomas Merton – Faithful Visionary. Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota 2014


Rogers, Carl R. On Becoming A Person. A therapist’s view of psychotherapy. 1961


Williams, Monty, SJ. Stepping into Mystery. Four Approaches to a Spiritual Life. Novalis Publishing Inc 2012

Websites: Fiction, Media, and Non-Fiction  Oxford University Press 2002

Documents of the Second Vatican Council  https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/vatican_i_i_docs.htm

Pope Francis Encyclical on the Environment  https://laudatosi.com/watch

St John XXIII Encyclical on Peace  http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html

Texts: Hamlet, A Doll’s House, The Wars, Araby

http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/hamlet/
http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dollhouse/
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http://www.gradesaver.com/the-wars/study-guide/summary
http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dubliners/section3.rhtml