Nurturing Catholic Community

Curriculum Connections – Grade 12 English

Catholic View of Family

The Synod of Bishops in Rome on the subject of the Family had its first session in the fall of 2014. At the half way point of the meetings, notes were published offering a summary of considerations thus far in the program. These notes, among other things, addressed critical issues regarding liturgy, and the possibility for divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Communion. The document also offered a development on the Catholic teaching on homosexuality in that it moved away from the language of “disorder” when speaking about the topic, and did offer some praise to the value of faithful homosexual relationships, as well as pleading for absolute justice for the children of homosexual parents. It was thought that foundational to the Synod was Pope Francis invoking the virtue of mercy as one that should underline all discernment. In the final document of the first session these considerations were absent, and there was a movement back to the traditional language both in relation to divorce, remarriage and the reception of Communion, and in relation to homosexual relationships. It is noteworthy that Pope Francis directed that the final communique from the Synod should include the various reflections that were published throughout the session. The second session of the Synod is taking place in the Fall of 2015, and there has been an ongoing consultation taking place during the course of the year on several of these issues.

The texts that were chosen for review for this project could be viewed under the lens of Family: Hamlet, The Wars, A Doll’s House, Araby, Going To The Moon. Hamlet is a family revenge story of patricide and infidelity. The Wars tells the story of families caught in the mores and attitudes of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. A Doll’s House reveals a husband and wife in crisis. Araby offers a glimpse into foster family life in Dublin, Ireland. Going To The Moon reveals an instance of stable immigrant family life in Canada.

Each of the works takes for granted the reality of family as a core structure within the societies that give context to the stories. Hamlet as such is about a specific family issue. The Wars plays out its family theme in parallel with the conflict taking place in the trenches in Flanders fields because within the families involved there are deep conflicts unfolding. A Doll’s House deals head on with the issue of mutuality in marriage. In both Araby and Going To The Moon the protagonists find the promise of a better life in going outside and beyond their families...in other words, in breaking out.
In all cases the protagonists’ connection to “family” is core to their identity and these self-concepts and character formed in and through family feature prominently in the arc of their decisions. Born into a ruling family, Hamlet has a strong sense of status and worth. The death of his younger sister in a wheelchair accident for which he had some responsibility absolutely marks the attitudes and decisions of Robert Ross. Nora of the Doll’s House unwittingly allows herself to be as controlled by her husband as she once was by her father; even as she steps away to find herself, family is core to her identity. The young protagonist in Araby calls his guardians uncle and aunt, and we always wonder but never find how who his parents were and how it was that he came to be in the care of his relatives. The young protagonist in Going To The Moon would be a different person if he did not belong to a stable immigrant Italian family.

The notion of family is evolving within society. The Roman Catholic Church views mother and father as normative to the identity of family. At the same time, in its pastoral outreach the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the many varieties of family that inhabit the planet, and has a special concern that each child is cherished, served and recognized for their extraordinary dignity and value, regardless whether their family fits within traditional norms or not.

Resources


Higgins, Michael W. (Editor) *Faith and Literature Matters.* Novalis Publishing Inc 2014

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

*Echoes Fiction, Media, and Non-Fiction* Oxford University Press 2002

**Websites:**

Pope Francis Encyclical on the Environment  
[https://laudatosi.com/watch](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](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://putlocker.is/watch-a-dolls-house-online-free-putlocker.html](http://putlocker.is/watch-a-dolls-house-online-free-putlocker.html)
