



Psychological Study of John Galsworthy's Justice

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ABSTRACT

The English novelist and playwright John Galsworthy (1867-1933) was one of the most popular writers of the early 20th century. His work explores the transitions and contrasts between pre-and post-World War I England.

Although Galsworthy is best known for his novels, he was also a successful playwright. He constructed his drama on a legalistic basis, and the plays typically start from a social or ethical impulse and reach a resolution after different viewpoints have been expressed. Like *The Silver Box* (1906) and *Strife* (1909), *Justice* (1910) is realistic, particularly in the use of dialogue that is direct and uninflated. Part of the realism is an awareness of detail and the minute symbol. That awareness is clear in the intricate symbols of *The Forsyte Saga*; it is less successful in the drama and his later novels because it tends to be overstated.

In *Justice* Galsworthy revealed himself as something of a propagandist or, according to Joseph Conrad, "a moralist." Galsworthy selected detail and character to isolate a belief or a judgment; he said, "Selection, conscious or unconscious, is the secret of art." The protagonists in his drama and his prose fiction generally typify particular viewpoints or beliefs. Explaining his method of characterization, he wrote, "In the greatest fiction the characters, or some of them, should sum up and symbolize whole streaks of human nature in a way that our friends, however well known to us, do not.... Within their belts are cinched not only individuals but sections of mankind." He also stated that his aim was to create a fictional world that was richer than life itself.

Keywords: Transition, legalistic basis, propagandist, realism, cinched etc.

Introduction

Justice, a drama written by John Galsworthy aimed to bring reforms in the British system of Justice. The play is not just about bringing reforms in solitary confinement but about the judicial process and the broader relationship of punishment to crime.

The four-act play revolves around the protagonist William Falder, a young solicitor's clerk, who embezzled money from his firm to rescue the woman he loves from her unhappy marriage. He is handed over to the police after he confesses his forgery. The judge, in the trial then sentences him a three years penal servitude. He has been put in solitary confinement and finds himself to be a victim of the terrible system. The authorities admit that he is mentally and physically in bad shape but do nothing to help him.

He was supposed to register himself with the police authorities but he failed to do so and commits suicide as he thought that he would be put in prison again. The socio-revolutionary significance of *Justice* consists the portrayal of the inhuman system that exists between the crime and punishment awarded for the same.

If we talk about the other character of the novel, John Falder in *Justice* is not a hero in the Aristotelian or Shakespearean sense. The dramatic action of *Justice* by Galsworthy revolves around Falder. He is in the middle of our attention of sympathy and pity. He is the tragic hero and the victims of social injustice which we all resent. He is the character of a man who is in the machinery of social injustice. A young clerk of twenty three, Falder is pale, good looking soft spoken and nice. He is timid and nervous. He is in love to a married woman Ruth Honeywill. Ruth is in desperate situation, destined to live with her cruel husband. Falder gives her sincere love and tries to assuage her agonies. He gives her a dream of a new happy home with him. His love is a precious pledge and he is eager almost to build a happy home for Ruth. He is no dishonest but when he has no alternative but to forgery of cheque he sacrificed his honesty and integrity at the altar of this love for Ruth. Thus it is clear that he is even prepared to sacrifice his life for the happiness of the Ruth.

Falder, thus, unlike the hero in a classical tragedy, enjoys neither reputation nor 'prosperity'. He is in fact, weakling who passionately loves a married woman and commits an act of forgery to save her from her tyrant husband. This is certainly his 'error of judgement' and he has to suffer both physically and mentally. He ultimately commits suicide. Thus, his tragic flaw brings about him.

The identity of John Galsworthy as a playwright unfolds a different perspective of thinking. A 'perspective' that does not always follow the traditional sequence. And this raises a question about whether Galsworthy's play *Justice* has any conventional tragic hero.

In modern-day social circumstances, a conventional individual hero or villain is rare. Currently, various social forces play essential roles together in shaping human life. And so it is hard to find an individual to have much significant impact in life. Now, this trend is also visible in modern plays.

It is indeed true that Falder is the central character in the play. And the whole story revolves around his crime, punishment, and death. In a word, his act of altering a cheque sets the dramatic platform in motion in the drama.

Galsworthy believed that solitary confinement is a long slow dragging misery, whose worst moments are necessarily and utterly hidden from one's eyes. Galsworthy knew that he would get a widespread support from the people as his drama had deeply touched the people. His drama showed people the reality of a prison life. He helped people realize that celibacy and a monotonous diet were a severe punishment in itself and when combined with solitude and absolute silence made it more miserable. He believed that a person could be reformed with kindness and there was no need for solitude or silence.

Justice impacted and moved a lot of people including Winston Churchill and he was greatly influenced by the solitary confinement scene in the drama. Churchill had major legislative changes in mind and considered Galsworthy the most respected of all the people that influenced him. Churchill's intention as Home Secretary was to carry out a sweeping revision of penal policy along three main lines of advance: the improvement of prison conditions; the exclusion of petty offenders from gaol; and the reform of sentencing policy.

Galsworthy, in *Justice* concentrates upon the practices of punishment in a British prison where lawbreakers, minor or serious, are held punitively. He underlines that this penal system reliant on imprisonment is far from achieving the aims of punishment because, first, for the detainees who bear up under loss of family, loss of control, lack of stimulation, and isolation together with the removal of liberty, detention is a formidable experience, and prison is a place of mental and physical degradation; second, though prison established as a crime control device forces offenders into conformity to eliminate wrongdoing and thus to protect society, following their release, by reason of their newly acquired identity as criminals, former inmates cannot reintegrate with society and therefore plunge deeper and deeper into crime instead of leading law-abiding lives. Their repeated criminality designates that the attempts at their reformation are all wasted, and that prison is an imperfect penal institution which, with its manifestly harsh but ineffectual methods of dealing with crime, falls short of serving the public. While trying to correct offenders, paradoxically enough, it strengthens and increases criminality, in the end giving harm to the society and the offender himself.

Galsworthy's dramas have five distinguishing characteristics. First among these is his evident sincerity. He wanted to show life steadily and as a whole avoiding all artifice, sentimentality, and straining after effect. He was faithful and conscientious in representing reality whether what he wrote pleased his audience or not. This was a full reaction against Victorianism. A second marked characteristic is his sympathy. He had the capacity to identify himself with the experiences of others; he is a typical representative of modern humanitarianism. His emotional nature led him to charity, sympathy and toleration. Third is his great impartiality. He always showed both sides of the question. Hamilton believes that his "Olympian neutrality" hurt his plays, because audience wants to be partisan. Another characteristic is his 'prevailing irony'. He constantly reminded us that even after the spirit of fairness and impartiality has been exercised to the utmost, there is a disconcerting twist in things which cannot be wholly accounted for or eliminated. Lastly, in all of his plays is a feeling of pity and indignation. The spirit of compassion combined with hot anger may be termed the most important of Galsworthy's characteristics although it is the least obtrusive. The plays are an indictment of the whole fabric of modern civilization, and at the same time, a passionate appeal for understanding sympathy with the innocent victims of the social system. Galsworthy wanted justice in all things; but he wanted a justice tempered with charity.

Critics have seen the weakness of Falder as the weakness of the play, both as a tragedy and a piece of propaganda. But, as far as the propagandist aspect of the play is concerned Galsworthy shows that a period in solitary confinement has dangerous results, not only on a weak and unstable character like Falder, but on tough old lags, like Moaney, Clifton and O'Cleary, all of whom are described in some detail. Each has his own way of attempting to deal with his period in solitary.

It is made clear throughout the play that it is the 'process of Justice' which destroys Falder, not the malpractice of the individuals involved in it. James How, in insisting on prosecution, puts forward the rational view that a known forger cannot remain an employee of a respectable firm of solicitors, nor can a man who has given in to temptation be let loose on an unsuspecting world where he might well commit a similar crime if put under emotional pressure. James is willing to reinstate Falder when he has 'paid his debt to society', and he protects him against police pressure. The Prosecuting Counsel with some justification exposes the flaws in the Defence's plea of temporary insanity. The staffs of the Prison, the Governor, the Doctor, the Chaplain and the Warden are humane enough within their acknowledged responsibilities.

One of the most blatant prejudices is related to the moral, rather than the legal, question of the relationships between men and women. What Cokeson terms 'extenuating circumstances' (Falder's love of Ruth and his desire to remove her from her husband's brutality), James How calls 'dissolute habits'. The Judge in his cross-examination of Ruth is, at the very least, disapproving of her attitude to her husband. The subtext of the last question is clearly admonitory. His moral rigidity is further demonstrated in his speech prior to passing sentence, 'She is a married woman, and the fact is patent that you committed this crime with a view to furthering an immoral design.' The Governor refuses Ruth access to Falder, because she is not his wife and the renunciation of Ruth is a condition of Falder's reinstatement as a clerk in James How's office. In the eyes of James and of Cokeson, her having lived as a 'kept woman' debars her from remarriage. The relationship between Falder and Ruth is 'pure' in that it has never been consummated, and the love each bears for the other gives stature to both, yet it is one of the main reasons for the harshness of the sentence. Ruth is as much a victim of the mechanistic aspects of Justice as Falder.

Conclusion

Galsworthy was a firm believer that encouraging mental and moral development through expanded educational facilities was the most effective way to reform a criminal. He suggested many ways such as copybooks being allowed in the Berlin prison and allowing more communication with family and friends outside to bring about reforms in the prisoners. He also suggested that prisoners' aid Oxford University Calendar 1895, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895, 262 societies should be linked up into prisoner's labour exchange so that the prisoners could be employed and wouldn't have to turn to crimes again.

Justice' was instrumental in bringing about a change in the law relating to solitary confinement in prisons. Galsworthy had for a long time been committed to penal reform, and in particular he sought to curtail the length of time prisoners spent in solitary confinement. The harsh indictment of law despite the social circumstance, sensitive, and vulnerable status of the protagonist is presented as a flaw of the legal system.

References

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