

The Representation of the Blend of Social Realism and Pessimism in John Galsworthy's Play *Justice*

Zeba Mehdi¹, Yusuf Mehdi¹

¹Department of English, Noida Institute of Engineering and Technology, Greater Noida

Abstract

The present paper intends to highlight John Galsworthy's pessimistic style of writing while depicting social realism. The playwright belongs both Victorian and Modern eras, but his intention to bring out the social evils, projects him more as modern wherein he dedicates his life to pen down social realism in such a way that it can be helpful in transforming the modern world. Galsworthy's plays deal with societal injustice, prison reforms, and many other social ills, but at the same time it has been noticed that he is a pessimist. The present research paper aims at discussing the different human circumstances that ultimately bring out escapism and pessimism out of human beings.

Keywords: social realism; pessimism; reformation; transformation

1. Introduction

Social realism is a wide theory that has got adequate amount of appreciation. The concept flourished in the early 19th century and Henrik Ibsen is said to be its father. G. B. Shaw, John Galsworthy, Alexander Pinero, and more followed Ibsen's realistic theory and garnered name and fame. The concept entered the milieu with a bang of revolutionary thoughts. The writers were no longer depicting superficialities, but the hardcore ground realities. Realism is the foundation of social realism that inspired the writers to portray the same.

”Realism is a movement in art, which started in the mid -nineteenth century in France, and later spread to the entire world. Realism entered literature at almost the same time. Its real objective was to root out what is called fantastic and romantic in literature and art, to insert what is real”. (<http://literarydevices.net>realism>)

John Galsworthy's realism is a retaliation against the snobbish world of Victorians. He belongs to Victorian era but has aversion to its concepts and ideologies. He preferred to be a social realistic writer, depicting the prevailing ills of British society of his times. Being a sensitive man, he did not like the conditions of prison, hypocrisy in the society, societal injustice, different rules for different classes, and functional democracy. He stood against the ills and started portraying the real into reel. He was honoured with Nobel Prize for his book *Forsyte Saga*. His works have been appreciated worldwide. Galsworthy has always inspired the others and social realism gradually became a turning point in the history of mankind. D. Tucker feels:

“The emergence of social realism was coincident with the disillusionment of a populist culture that had both won the war and lost the peace. The social realistic novels of the late 1950s and 1960s

documented new forms of alienation because of growing income inequality and the effects of mass culture on class, regional and gender identities”. [1]

The present research focusses on Galsworthy’s *Justice* and intends to highlight pessimism in Galsworthy's social realism. The playwright writes to perfection, depicts societal injustices, but while doing so, he diminishes hope. The characters feel hopeless and hypnotized by their unending war. They take their struggle for survival as a stigma on their lives and impatiently end their lives.

2. Discussion

Justice is a remarkable play on the hardships in the prison faced by culprits. Galsworthy has continuously worked for prison reforms. He himself has found many loopholes in the system. His works are more about prison reforms and different rules for different classes. In this play, he picturizes typical courtroom session and the imprisonment.

The story of *Justice* revolves around Falder, who has always been a very dedicated worker, but one mistake has ruined his life till the end. Falder is an honest employee and sincerely does his work. John Galsworthy begins the play at a very light note, but after a few scenes, he makes clear that something illegal might happen soon. The very thought of Falder of deceiving his employers provide us a hint of unfavorable circumstances for both the employee and the employer. Robert Cokeson is Falder’s boss. James How and Walter How are partners with Cokeson in a law firm. They all are quite understanding employers. But Falder does not share his problems with any of them. They know about his relationship with Ruth. His falling in love with Ruth, a victim of domestic violence, pulls off the curtain of his saga. Ruth also feels for Falder and they want to run far away. Falder has been projected as a gentleman with a sensitive heart. He even accepts Ruth along with her children. Ruth often comes to him and talks about her husband’s brutality to her. One day, she comes to him terrified and says:

Ruth ‘He’s on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night.

I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you—

Falder. I have changed my digs.

Ruth. Is it ready for to-night?

Falder. I have got the tickets. Meet me 11:45 at the booking office. For God’s sake do not forget we’re man and wife! (*Justice*, 5)

Falder too is shocked to listen to Ruth and realizes that it is high time to take some action. But as luck would have it for him, he forges a cheque, gets caught and has to face a long trial at court and hardships in a prison. He himself spoils the lives of many by his single action of dishonesty. His one-month imprisonment has transformed him a lot. He is very terrorized. When once he forgets to visit the Police Station as ordered by the court, he comes across an officer, and thinking of getting imprisoned again, he jumps down to death.

Galsworthy follows a lucid style to depict the prevailing system in Britain of his times. He is a very straight forward person. He depicts the real without any sugar coating. His portrayal of the

characters seems to be very natural and realistic. In many of his interviews he has discussed his intentions of depicting social realism. Barret quotes Galsworthy:

“A Drama must be shaped to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is to pose the group so as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day”. (Barret, 275)

Falder 's helplessness and sufferings have given him strength to end his life finally. No doubt, hardships can make or mar anyone's life if taken as a lesson. Falder did do wrong to his company by forging a cheque of 9 dollars, but it was not a heinous crime to punish him as a dangerous criminal. Though a crime remains a crime, it also leaves room for reform and remorse. Falder himself accepts his crime; he says:

Falder. When she left me-because I had to go to the office-I was out of my senses for fear that he would do it again and thinking what I could do. I could not work-all the morning I was like that-simply could not fix my mind on anything. I could not think at all. I seemed to keep moving. When Davis-the other clerk-gave me the cheque-he said: “it'll do you good, Will, to have a run with this. You seem half off your chump this morning”. Then when I had it in my hand-I don't know how it came, but it flashed across me that if I put the cheque there and thought there would be enough money to get her away. It came and went-I never thought of it again. (*Justice*, Act II)

Falder tries to give justification to his act of forging but in vain, crime remains a crime despite of its doer. He gets imprisonment of three years, and even after his sentence gets over, he needs to report to the police daily without any fail, or else he will have to face the consequences. Cokeson is clueless at his crime. He says:

Cokeson. (*Confidently to the jury, and as if a little surprised at being asked*)

He was a nice, pleasant spoken young man. I'd no fault to find with him—quite the contrary. It was a great surprise to me when he did a thing like that. (*Justice*, 29)

His punishment is very strict, no visitor is allowed. When Cokeson goes to meet Falder, he comes to know about Falder's worst trial phase. Governor says:

TheGovernor. I'm afraid he's not allowed a visitor yet-he's only here for his one month's separate confinement. (*Justice*, Act III, Scene I)

Falder's employers have been very kind, Cokeson wants to improve Falder's condition in the prison. He tries his best but in vain.

Cokeson. Ye-es but I'm sorry now. He has got his three years to serve. I want things to be pleasant for him.

The Chaplain. The Law hardly shares your view, I'm afraid.

Cokeson. It's the same with dogs. If you treat 'em with kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut'em up alone, it only makes; em savage. (*Justice*, Act III, Scene I)

When Falder comes out of the prison, he asks for his job back. He goes to Cokeson and says:

Falder. I just want a chance, Mr. Cokeson. I've paid for that job a thousand times and more. I have, sir. No one knows. They say I weighed more when I came out than when I went in., they could not weigh me here. Till last night I'd thought there was nothing in here at all. (*Justice*, Act IV)

The play *Justice* is scenic. It depicts circumstantial evidence for and against the main character. Falder, being a central character, provides us an insight into his thought process. But the need for forgery does not get approved. He is a hardworking, honest, loving man but with a cheap intellect. He gets involved with a married lady of two children, and without even discussing the matter with her, he forges the cheque and runs into an unending trouble. Falder seems to be a very indecisive, he does not know how to be fair in person and professional life. He often takes wrong decisions in both his field and suffers till end. After the imprisonment, he wishes to be hired in the same firm and he sends Ruth to clarify his misdeed of forging. He even requests his employers to give him another chance. Falder's actions project him as a man of opportunity. Even he seems to be ready to face the consequences of his misdeed.

Ruth. You're afraid of going, are you?

Falder. Have you got your things, and the children's?

Ruth. Had to leave them, for the fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

Falder. All that money gone for nothing. How much must you have?

Ruth. Six pounds-I could do with that, I think.

Falder. Don't give away where we're going. When I get out there, I mean to forget it all.

Ruth. If you're sorry, say so I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

Falder. We've got to go. I don't care; I'll have you. (*Justice*, Act I)

Galsworthy delineates the episodic events in Falder's life. Falder knows what he has done to get Ruth, but he thinks he does not have any other option, he is hoping against hope, and he realizes it very late. The playwright does put all the social responsibility of equality on the shoulders of the society, but at the same time, he presents a realistic picture of a man who tries to run away from reality.

Justice is about seeking it and running after it at the same time. Galsworthy has used justice in sarcastic way, it comes with several notifications. Society is usually held responsible for promoting injustices, but the fact is slightly twisted in a way that injustice can be done to one who falls in that trap. Social reformers have always encouraged equality, honesty, while a man does totally the opposite and mourns over the issues that are not his hands. The fact remains unchangeable that if you cross your threshold; you are responsible for your own deeds. It is impossible to come out of a system, once you are caught in it, will be out only after it is finally done. Falder takes a wrong path and tries to play a victim, which is wrong. His action of forging a cheque proves his criminal mindset. Though he has always been an honest man, yet one of his actions has left him nowhere. Galsworthy projects the reality in the simplest way. Falder's attitude towards life shows his escapist behavior. He tries to escape from the situations in different ways, and when he feels difficult in doing so, he surrenders that he does in the end.

Falder in *Justice* has mostly been projected as a victim of societal ills, who has been wrongly tried in the court and has faced many hardships because of his imprisonment. But if Falder is critically appreciated, he may turn out to be an opportunist and a pessimist who does not have any vision and mission. He commits a crime of forging a cheque of 9 pounds to 90 pounds, and it cannot be done casually without any criminal intentions. Even the wealthiest person has right to save his property.

It can never be misused by his employees. Falder has only thought of his helplessness rather than thinking of honesty and dignity.

Galsworthy ends the play with a sorry note of Cokeson. He says, "No one will touch him now! Never again! He is safe with gentle Jesus!" (*Justice*, 109)

The play starts with ambitions, hopes, and desires for a better life, continues with bearing of pains and adjustments, and at last ends up with tragic surrender to fate. Galsworthy has wonderfully blended his social realistic play with pessimism. Falder has been facing different faces of society, and finally he puts everything on hold forever. He is a pessimist who fails to bring his life on track. He himself is responsible for his pitiable condition. He has not realized that crime never pays.

John Galsworthy blends social realism and pessimism in his play *Justice* where a hardworking man falls into the trap of ambitions and crime. The playwright has always opposed the British law and order during his times, but it has been noticed that transition from Victorian era to Modern era has already brought insecurities, sensitivities, and hopelessness. Falder in *Justice* tries to make over his crime by starting his life once again with a ray of hope but loses his self-control after seeing a policeman around him and jumps down to death. His suicide brings into light his indecisive, immature, and insensitive behaviour towards life. Since the very beginning of his plays, he could have changed his fate but in vain. He followed the easiest path of committing a crime, hoping for a better future. He has been a man of contradictions, whenever he finds him in trouble, he prefers the wrong path. He remains a pessimist throughout the play. Falder does not try to share his problems with anyone, predicting them of no use for him. Even, he does not consult Ruth about his plan of forgery. He is overconfident of managing the things in his own. His decisions have brought only troubles for him and others. Galsworthy cleverly puts forth societal ills. Schalit Leon says:

Galsworthy is as relentlessly realistic in almost all his plays, as in his novels, and short stories. He shows us things visualized through his temperament, not as many people would prefer to see them. An incorruptible lover of truth, he attempts to shape all his plots and problems with the greatest impartiality, allowing both sides to air their opinions and throwing light on their ideas in all possible ways. For him, the task lies in the unrolling of the problem, not in its solution. The unrolling of the problem should serve to make us think and reflect, to make us realise, to awaken our interest in what is hitherto unknown to us or viewed in a wrong light (Leon, 219-220).

The play's sequential evidence depicts two different worlds through Falder and Ruth. Falder has created his own world of self-esteem and self-righteousness. He hardly discusses his problems with others, most of the serious problems have been handled by him on his own, and the result is pathetic. Ruth projects another world of hope and commitment. She is optimistic of her good fortune with Falder but could not know that she hopes against hope. Galsworthy describes justice in several ways, it is denied by each character through his objectionable actions. A literal meaning of justice is 'the quality of being just' (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/justice>). This quality of justice is not meant to be the exclusive concern of the court, but all the citizens of all the respected nations should abide by it. The concept of justice is confined to the legal term. Falder does not do justice to his work. He is moved by Ruth's pitiable condition and tries to help her by doing injustice to his employers.

Justice remains buried deep, and it is never likely to happen. Ruth is not an exception; she too is immoral and a fugitive who tries to run away from the existing situation and puts all her burden on Falder. She does not even complain against her husband's brutality to police but finds solace in the arms of Falder. Had she been a just character, she would not have indirectly forced Falder to indulge in unfair practice.

Galsworthy while depicting social realism, portrays a characteristic trait that results in disaster only. Pessimistic ideology does not let one succeed in life. Falder has lost the prisoner ethics. He realizes his strength and courage have split apart. His efforts to get his job again, prove his honesty, though in vain, that finally shatter him. The playwright weaves a story to make out the importance of one's zealotry to strive in odds. The favorable circumstances do not last for long. Social realism is not only about external ills, but also about the eradication of internal weaknesses simultaneously. Falder loses self-control and puts prison ethics at bay. If somehow one gets into any trouble, one tries to come out of it patiently. Every time it is not possible to sail against the current. Falder has already gone through the trial, and he is supposed to fulfil all the set norms by the court. The world faces transitions very often, and new ideologies, rules, and regulations are set for the society, and now it is responsibility of its citizens to abide by the defined rules. Those who fail to do so face legal and social trials. Theories are criticized and it takes a good amount of time to transform the world. Galsworthy's efforts to depict social realism has done wonders in the history of Britain. Many prison reforms were introduced, and situation changed to a good extent. The playwright technically highlights the pessimistic factor in the ruining of lives. Pessimism, negativity, and terror attack humanity. Galsworthy has brilliantly depicted social realism with pessimism as it is quite natural to be a pessimist after facing societal injustice. Social realism and pessimism go together and can even result in the destruction of many. Galsworthy's play *Justice* is, in fact, emphasizes this fact of life.

Galsworthy follows a neutral tone to depict even the worst reality. He has always been a calm and sincere writer. His realistic works have had a great impact on the minds of the people. Winston Churchill, a home secretary, who became a great influential personality of Britain, saw Galsworthy's play *Justice* and was extremely surprised to know what exactly was going on. He then introduced many changes in prisons. Jeremy Havardi details what Churchill did after seeing the play:

"Churchill also reduced the amount of time that prisoners could spend in solitary confinement at the beginning of their sentences. A period of up to nine months was reduced to one month for most of the prisoners and three months for recidivists (repeat offenders). Churchill was spurred on in this decision by John Galsworthy's play *Justice*, in which the central protagonist who was imprisoned, humiliated, and eventually destroyed by his experience of solitary confinement. Finally, he insisted on the provision of concerts and lectures within prisons and improved the help given to prisoners after their release" (Havardi, 92-93).

3. Conclusion

Galsworthy as a social realistic writer has justified his job that has brought about several changes. The playwright touches the psychological aspect of the victim, because of which he loses hope and

faith. Galsworthy's characters are not strong enough to face the consequences of their own deeds, and they fall flat before the circumstances. His efforts have helped the people to learn from the mistakes of his characters. His works throw a search light on the ground realities of society, and at the same time project the weaker traits of human beings that result in suicide. The writer cleverly depicts the deteriorating conditions of society in human terms. The characters are not strong enough to face the adversities. Galsworthy's plays act as eye openers for the modern generation where introspection is highly needed.

4. Limitations

The present paper has dealt with the social realism along with pessimism. The content of the paper has been very relevant to the title and no distraction has been made. John Galsworthy weaves a realistic story with a blend of negativity that has been spread by the societal injustice. The rise in pessimism projects the failure of human psyche in dealing with the tough situations. The paper has discussed the effect of too much pressure on unprotected individuals.

References

- [1]. Galsworthy, J. (2014). *Galsworthy Five Plays: Strife; Justice; The Eldest Son; The Skin Game; Loyalties*. A&C Black.
- [2]. Barret, H. Clart. (1925). *A Study of Modern Drama*. New York & London: D. Appleton and Company.
- [3]. Durey, J. F. (2020). Vivisection through the eyes of Wilkie Collins, HG Wells and John Galsworthy. *Medical Humanities*.
- [4]. Halchuk, O. (2020). "Apple Blossoms" and "The Apple Tree": Two Perspectives Typological and Ideological Similarities in Short Stories by Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky and John Galsworthy. *Respectus Philologicus*, (38 (43)), 150-162.
- [5]. Havardi, J. (2010). *The Greatest Briton: Essays on Winston Churchill's Life and Political Philosophy*. Shephard-Walwyn.
- [6]. Heaney, M. (2020). Staging the Delinquent, Edwardian Theatre, and The Hooligan. *New Theatre Quarterly*.
- [7]. Hossain, M. A. (2015). Social Realistic Projections of Galsworthy's Strife. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(4), 53.
- [8]. Leon, Schalit. (1929). *John Galsworthy A Survey*. London: The Windmill Press, Kingswood, Surrey.
- [9]. Patil, N. D. (2012). Social realism in the selected plays of John Galsworthy and PK Atre.
- [10]. Tucker, David. (Ed.) (2011). *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*. Palgrave: Macmillan.