

## **UNCOMMON WRITER: A LIFE OF JOHN GALSWORTHY**

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**Paper Received On:** 25 DECEMBER 2022

**Peer Reviewed On:** 31 DECEMBER 2022

**Published On:** 01 JANUARY 2023



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### **John Galsworthy's Life:**

The English novelist and playwright John Galsworthy (1867-1933) was one of the most popular writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His works explore the transitions and contrasts between pre-and post world war I England. Born on August 14, 1867 in Kingston Hill in a wealthy family, his ancestors came from Devonshire farming stock; but at the time of his birth they had accumulated considerable property and also owned shipping business. His father, also named John Galsworthy, was an established solicitor and company director in London. He was quite charming and young Galsworthy used to idolize him. His mother, Blanche Bailey Galsworthy, was very religious and at the same time very fussy. Junior Galsworthy was the eldest son of his parents. He started his education under the tutors at home and later was admitted to a preparatory school at Bournemouth at the age of nine. From there he went to Harrow where he distinguished as an athlete. After passing out from Harrow young John Galsworthy was admitted to new college oxford. In 1889, he passed out from there with a degree in jurisprudence. In 1890, he was called to bar; but as he wanted to specialize in marine law he joined his family's shipping business and spent time travelling around the world.

Galsworthy was born at what is now known as Galsworthy House (then called Parkhurst) on Kingston Hill in Surrey, England, the son of John and Blanche Bailey (*née* Bartleet) Galsworthy. His family was prosperous and well established, with a large property in Kingston upon Thames that is now the site of three schools: Marymount International School, Rokeby Preparatory School, and Holy Cross Preparatory School. He attended Harrow

and New College, Oxford. He took a Second in Law (Jurisprudentia) at Oxford in 1889, then trained as a barrister and was called to the bar in 1890. However, he was not keen to begin practicing law and instead travelled abroad to look after the family's shipping business. During these travels, he met Joseph Conrad in 1893, then the first mate of a sailing-ship moored in the harbour of Adelaide, Australia, and the two future novelists became close friends. In 1895 Galsworthy began an affair with Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper (1864–1956), the wife of his cousin Major Arthur Galsworthy. After her divorce ten years later, they were married on 23 September 1905 and stayed together until his death in 1933. Before their marriage, they often stayed clandestinely in a farmhouse called Wingstone in the village of Manaton on Dartmoor, Devon. In 1908 Galsworthy took a long lease on part of the building, and it was their regular second home until 1923.<sup>(1)</sup>

A love affair between John Galsworthy and Ada Nemesis Pearson Cooper began in 1895. This was in spite of the fact that she was the wife of his first cousin major Arthur Galsworthy. For ten years they met clandestinely in a farmhouse in Devon. It is said that Irene in *The Forsyte Saga* was modeled after Ada. The couple got married on September 23, 1905. After Ada's divorce came through. They didn't have any children and remained together till his death in 1933. Galsworthy's father passed away in 1904. He now inherited his father's estate and became financially independent. By now, he had also realized that he was not fit for making a living out of law. He therefore, gave up his legal career and decided to devote all his time to writing.

### **Career**

*From the Four Winds*, a collection of short stories, was Galsworthy's first published work in 1897. These and several subsequent works were published under the pen name of John Sinjohn, and it was not until *The Island Pharisees* (1904) that he began publishing under his own name, probably owing to the recent death of his father. His first full-length novel, *Jocelyn*, was published in an edition of 750 under the name of John Sinjohn—he later refused to have it republished. His first play, *The Silver Box* (1906) —in which the theft of a prostitute's purse by a rich 'young man of good family' is placed beside the theft of a silver cigarette case from the rich man's father's house by 'a poor devil', with very different repercussions, though justice was clearly done in each case—became a success, and he followed it up with *The Man of Property* (1906), the first book of a Forsyte trilogy. Although he continued writing both plays and novels, it was as a playwright that he was mainly appreciated at the time. Along with those of other writers of the period, such as George

Bernard Shaw, his plays addressed the class system and other social issues, two of the best known being *Strife* (1909) and *The Skin Game* (1920).

He is now far better known for his novels, particularly *The Forsyte Saga*, his trilogy about the eponymous family and connected lives. These books, as with many of his other works, deal with social class, and upper-middle class lives in particular. Although sympathetic to his characters, he highlights their insular, snobbish, and acquisitive attitudes and their suffocating moral codes. He is viewed as one of the first writers of the Edwardian era who challenged some of the ideals of society depicted in the preceding literature of Victorian England. The depiction of a woman in an unhappy marriage furnishes another recurring theme in his work. The character of Irene in *The Forsyte Saga* is drawn from Ada Pearson, though her previous marriage was not as miserable as that of the character.

### **Works**

John Galsworthy was an English novelist and play writer who won the Noble Prize for literature in 1932. In 1904 Galsworthy published his first novel under his own name. Titled 'The Island Pharisees' the story is about an unusual young man called Richard Shelton. Galsworthy considered this book to be one of his most important works. Two years later in 1906, Galsworthy published his First play *Silver Box* It depicts how different standards of justice are applied to people belonging to different classes and how theft by a rich and poor man attract different repercussion. It was much appreciated by the critics. In 1906, he also published 'Man of Property', which later included in his famous trilogy 'The Forsyte Saga'. Through this work. Galsworthy launched a scathing attack on upper middle class families, to which he himself belonged. He then continued writing a number of novels, short stories and plays.

The original PEN was founded in London in 1921 by the English novelist John Galsworthy, and it has since grown to include writers worldwide. The name PEN is an acronym standing for "poets, playwrights, editors, essayists, and novelists."<sup>(2)</sup> International PEN promotes international intellectual exchanges and goodwill among writers. It promotes freedom of expression for all writers regardless of their nationality, race, or religion, or of the political system under which they live. PEN is especially active in defending and supporting writers who are being harassed, persecuted, or oppressed by their government. The organization also bestows literary awards, sponsors translations of works written in obscure or neglected languages, holds conferences on current politico-literary topics, and publishes pamphlets and newsletters. To become a member of PEN an author must usually have

published at least two books, one of which shows considerable literary distinction. PEN is headquartered in London, and there are more than 80 PEN Centres (branch organizations) situated in a total of about 60 countries worldwide.

### **Causes**

Through his writings Galsworthy campaigned for a variety of causes, including prison reform, women's rights, and animal welfare, and also against censorship. Galsworthy was a supporter of British involvement in the First World War. In an article for *The Daily News* on 31 August 1914 Galsworthy called for war on Germany to protect Belgium. Galsworthy added "What are we going to do for Belgium — for this most gallant of little countries, ground, because of sheer loyalty, under an iron heel?"<sup>(3)</sup> During the First World War he worked in a hospital in France as an orderly, after being passed over for military service, and in 1917 turned down a knighthood, for which he was nominated by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, on the precept that a writer's reward comes simply from writing itself.

Galsworthy opposed the slaughter of animals and fought for animal rights. He was also a humanitarian and a member of the Humanitarian League. He opposed hunting and supported the League for the Prohibition of Cruel Sports.

### **honour**

Galsworthy was offered a knighthood in 1918, but he refused it. He was erroneously awarded the rank in the published list when his letter declining the honour went astray, but he was never given the accolade, and the honour was later withdrawn. In 1921 Galsworthy was elected as the first president of the PEN International literary club and was appointed to the Order of Merit in 1929. He was awarded the 1932 Nobel Prize for Literature, having been nominated that same year by Henrik Schück, a member of the Swedish Academy. He was too ill to attend the Nobel Prize presentation ceremony on 10 December 1932, and died seven weeks later. He donated the prize money from the Nobel Prize to PEN International.

### **Death**

Galsworthy lived for the final seven years of his life at Bury in West Sussex. He died from a brain tumour at his London home, Grove Lodge, Hampstead. In accordance with his will he was cremated at Woking, with his ashes then being scattered over the South Downs from an aeroplane, but there are also memorials to him in Highgate (West) Cemetery and in the cloisters of New College, Oxford, cut by Eric Gill. The popularity of his fiction waned quickly after his death, but the hugely successful black-and-white television adaptation *The Forsyte Saga* in 1967 renewed interest in his work.

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“Galsworthy’s writing was summarily influenced by his surroundings and the people who inhabited them. His childhood memories of coombe warren and the beautiful surrounding countryside influenced his portrayal of Robin Hill in the Forsyte books. There were the great many relatives in his life, and it is apparent that the extended Galsworthy clan influenced the authors character constructs in the forsyte saga and several other novels.”<sup>(4)</sup>

His meeting with Joseph Conrad gave Galsworthy the idea of becoming a writer, but the motivating force behind his writing was his wife, Ada. Her beauty and allure Galsworthy’s smitten state, and her suggestion that he write propelled Galsworthy from bored lawyer to energized writer. Moreover, her marital status in the Victorian era when marriage was truly for life, her undeniable love for Galsworthy, her beauty, and her courage in entering into an illicit relationship condemned by the society of which they were so much a part proved subject and them for much of Galsworthy’s literary output over his lifetime. He was too much influenced by his literary and historical contemporaries including Joseph Comrade.

### **The Forsyte Chronicles**

- 1 The salvation of a Forsyle (1900)
- 2 On Forsyle Change (1930) (re-published 1986 as “Uncollected Forsyte”
- 3 Danae (1905-06) in forsytes, Pencyces, and other (1935)
- 4 The man of Property (1906) First book of The Forsyte Saga (1922)
- 5 The country House (1907)
- 6 “Indian Summer of a Forsyte” (1918) first interlude of The forsyte saga in five Tales (1918)
- 7 In chancery (1920) – second book of The Forsyte saga
- 8 Awakening (1920)
- 9 To Let (1921)
- 10 The White Monkey (1924)

- 11 The Silver Spoon (1926)
- 12 A Silent Wooing (1926)
- 13 Passer – By (1927)
- 14 Swan Song (1928)
- 15 Four Forsyte stories (1929)  
“A sad Affair” “Dog at Timothy’s”  
The Hondekoeter” and f” midsummer madness”
- 16 Maid in Waiting (1931)
- 17 Flower Wilderness (1932)
- 18 One more River Coriginally over the River (1933)<sup>(5)</sup>

### **Plays**

- The Silver Box – (1906)
- Strife – (1909)
- Joy – (1909)
- Justice – (1910)
- The Little Dream. (1911)
- The Pigeon – (1912)
- The Eldest Son – (1912)
- The Fugitive- (1913)
- The Little man – (1915)
- A Bit O’ Live – (1915)
- The Foundation – (1920)
- The Skin Game – (1920)
- A Family man – (1922)
- Loyalties – (1922)
- Windows - (1922)
- Escape – (1926)
- Punch and Go – (1935)

### **ESSAYS:**

Quality: - 1912, the Inn of Tranquility 1912, Addresses in America-1912, Two Essays on Conrad – 1930

### **Collections:**

The Manton Edition – 1923-26 (30 Vols.)

The Grove Edition – 1927-34 (27 Vols.)

### **Features of Galsworthy's Writing:**

John Galsworthy as a Noble Laureate English novelist and playwright had been known worldwide for his exceptionally vivid and critical style of writings. His quintessential trait has been the criticism and a sympathetic portrayal of upper middle class Britons but in doing so he never missed the humanist footing and wit in shaping his characters and plots. The patrician John Galsworthy much like his unequalled masterpiece *The Forsyte Saga* displays all these elements with ultimate depth lucidity and vividness. Reading John Galsworthy is a revealing experience, but reading *The patrician* can be more revealing about the harmony melancholy and critical depth author can achieve with his fluid and powerful writing style.

As an author of an array of acclaimed literary works, Galsworthy in his lifetime gained an astounding readership that even his crudest critics would hardly disagree with his. As a novelist and a dramatist Galsworthy deals with the vital problems and issues in the social cultural, religious and industrial life of the times without any partisanship though his sympathies break out from time to time. His famous novel *The Forsyte, the man of property* through two generations and in its large canvas it includes many facets of life and many facets of characters. In his pictures and analysis of life and characters he has brought a keen and searching observation, and ironical humour, sharp sensibility and a polished and urban style to bear upon his subject. *Forsyte saga* is one of the best – sellers among modern English fiction.

The impulse that guided him in the selection of subjects for his plays is perhaps best explained in his own words : “The sociological character of my plays arises from the fact that I do not divorce creation from life; that, living and moving, feeling and seeing amongst real life, I find myself moved now and then-not deliberately and consciously-to present to myself the types, the ideas, and juxtapositions of life that impinge on my consciousness, and clarify all in the form of a picture.”<sup>(6)</sup>

### **John Galsworthy as a ‘Playwright’:**

As a novelist and a dramatist and Galsworthy deals with the vital problems and issues in the social cultural, religious and industrial life of the times without any partisanship though his sympathies break out from time to time. In the dramas Galsworthy adopts the same naturalistic technique in the tradition of Jones and Pinero. He was too, a great artist to deal with problems from the stand point of a partisan and to offer any solution of his own. He

dissects them with an impartial and detached attitude, presents both sides of the cases without passion or prejudice. The solution of the problem is not 'obtruded' but only hinted at. In this respect Galsworthy differs from Shaw, who is primarily a propagandist. As Chesterton has observed – "show cannot really divide his mind and let the two parts speak independently. If we want to see a fair artistic balance between two opposite views, We must go to Ibsen or Galsworthy"<sup>(7)</sup> Shaw writes as if firing a machine gun at his readers, Galsworthy as if speaking with an equal in a cultivated prose style. "He looked upon the masses of humanity as mostly victims of their own ignorance and folly and was content to reflect a social problem which we must somehow endure, because there is not solution It must however be noted that Shaw and Galsworthy are different in their artistic forms."<sup>(8)</sup> Galsworthy is a tragedian, while Shaw is a Comedian. Galsworthy creates tragic pity out of the clinical presentation of the problems of modern men and women. Shaw is serious in his social and philosophical themes, but he presents them in a light-hearted manner with humor, wit and fun. Shaw is a great humorist and his art lies in presenting the ugly facts of life in the sugar coated pills of fun and laughter. He is a greater thinker than Galsworthy and he is again a greater joker. Shaw is a more powerful personality and influence in the twentieth century English Literature.

As a dramatist craftsman Galsworthy is superior to all other contemporaries and is a contrast to Shaw. "The man of property (1906) began the novel sequence known as *The forsyte saga* by which Galsworthy is chiefly remembered; others in the same series are "Indian summer of a forsyte" 1918, in five Tales) , In chancery (1920) Awakening (1920) and to let (1921). The saga chronicles the lives of three generations or a large upper middle-class family at the turn of the century. Having recently risen to wealth and success in the profession and business world, The Forsytes are tenaciously clannish and anxious to increase their desire-For property is morally wrong. The saga intersperses diatribes against wealth with lively passages describing character and background. Galsworthy was also a successful dramatist his plays in a naturalistic style usually examining some controversial ethical or social problem. They include the silver Box (1906), which like many of his works, has a legal theme and depicts a bitter contrast of the law's treatment of the rich and the poor. Strife (1909) a study of industrial relations; Justice (1910) a realistic for trail or prison life that aroused so much feeling that it led to reform; and loyalties (1922) the best of his later plays.

Galsworthy's writings, by their abstention from complicated psychology and their greatly simplified as faithful pattern of English life for a time. Galsworthy is remembered for this evocation or Victorian and Edwardian upper middle-class life and for his creation of



Soames Forsyte a dislikable character who nevertheless compels the reader's sympathy. A television serial of The Forsyte Saga by the British Broadcasting Corporation achieved immense popularity in Great Britain in 1967 and later in many other nations especially the United States reviving interest in an author whose reputation had plummeted after his death. As a dramatist Galsworthy belongs to the realist tradition of Jones and Pinero. He says himself in a magazine article. "Some platitudes concerning Drama"<sup>(9)</sup>

"Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral. And the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light or day,"<sup>(10)</sup> and his plays are all didactic in purpose. Galsworthy was a social reformer objectively and impartially posing a problem, showing always both sides of the question, and leaving his audience to think out the answer. His chief protagonist are usually social forces in conflict with each other, and the human concern in his drama, though real enough and very true to ordinary life are studied more as individuals who are of interest for their own sake. To this extent they are types.

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