

The Psychological and Moral Impact of property in John Galsworthy's The Man of Property

Instructor. Hadeel Hatif

Diyala University \ Diyala TOEFL Centre & Instructor

Aseel Hatif

The University of Mustansiriyah \ College of Arts

Abstract

The Man of Property (1906) , the first book of John Galsworthy's first trilogy , The Forsyte Saga , is intended to be a criticism of the possessive instinct in the modern social life . The research aims at the evils of that instinct , that holds modern man's interests and attention , how destructive the effect of property has been upon the Forsyte family , most represented by Soames Forsyte , who are characterized by their desire to increase their wealth , self preservation , lack of imagination and their disbelief in love , beauty , and philosophical ideas . It sheds light on this family's reversed concept of property , their acquisitive attitudes and their suffocating moral codes , that bring about their final degradation .

The core of John Galsworthy's criticism in *The Man of Property* was the English upper – middle class family , known as the Forsyte family that survived from 1886 to the advent of the nineteen- twenties . Through *The Man of Property* , Galsworthy tried to show the decline and degeneration of the bourgeois family , how their manners and behaviour changed " as the Victorian era came to an end and the 20th century began . " ¹

As an Edwardian , Galsworthy in his works challenged the ideals of society often depicted in the 19th century literature . He examined the destructive force of private property and its impact on human behaviour , how this force or instinct opposed the idea of beauty , love and imagination , " which the Forsytes do not take into their philosophy " ² and which " upset their plans and disturb their emotional life . " ³ This very idea is carefully explained by Galsworthy himself in his preface through which he intends to clarify the title of the novel , that he " used with a suitable irony . " ⁴ In this view and using Galsworthy's words , the main theme of the novel is " the impingement of beauty and the claims of freedom on a possessive world " ⁵ , how beauty has become a source of disturbance in the lives of men . This theme is best exemplified in the story of Irene Forsyte , the wife of the novel's central character and it is the one on which Galsworthy builds his " tragic story . " ⁶

The novel opens in 1886 , with the Forsytes gathering at the home of Old Jolyon , the family's head , on the occasion of the engagement of his granddaughter , June , to Philip Bosinney , an architect and an artist . What matters in this incident is the Forsyte family or clan and their opinion of the newcomer . From their point of view , this man whom they meet seems a little dangerous , he is a stranger and that " he will never do any good for himself . " (Part I , Ch. I , p. 22)

Galsworthy , as an observer , draws a clear picture of the Forsyte as a family . They are depicted as a unit of society " that is made formidable by the cohesion of its members between whom there need not exist either affection or even sympathy upon a concrete point . " ⁷ As an Edwardian , Galsworthy portrays them as selves in a " post cultural crisis . " ⁸ For him , they are not self conscious , but rather unconscious of their environment . There is a kind of conflict between the self and the culture that has been as Lionel Trilling says " the particular concern of the literature of the last two centuries . " ⁹

As it is noted before , property has been of great effect upon the characters presented in the novel . It affects the personal relationships of the Forsytes . The general characteristics that the Forsyte , as members of the family , share are their distrust , dislike and suspicion of each other. ¹⁰ But this does not negate the idea that there is a kind of contradiction in the relationships of the Forsyte clan , which is made clear in their opinion and attitude of Philip Bosinney as he is introduced to the family , when they show their " colossal sense of solidarity , " ¹¹ before the outside threat symbolized by Bosinney , who is "known to be a young man without fortune . " (Part I , Ch. I , P. 6) This idea is best shown when:

At one time or another during the afternoon , all these faces , so dissimilar and so alike , had worn an expression of distrust , the object of which was undoubtedly the man whose acquaintance they were thus assembled to make .

(Part I , Ch. I , P. 6)

This view is also manifested in the dialogue that takes place between Bosinney and Young Jolyon , Old Jolyon's deserted son , the outcast who runs away from his conventional marriage just like Galsworthy himself and through which the latter defines or expounds the theory of Forsytism on Galsworthy's behalf to the impecunious architect Bosinney :

A Forsyte takes a practical – one might say a commonsense – view of things , and a practical view of things is based fundamentally on a sense of property .A Forsyte , you will notice , never gives himself away .

As a Forsyte myself , I have no business to talk . But I'm a kind of thoroughbred mongrel ; now , there's no mistaking you . You 're as different from me as I am from my Uncle James , who is the perfect specimen of a Forsyte . His sense of property is extreme , while you have practically none . Without me in between , you would seem like a different species . I'm the missing link . We are , of course , all of us the slaves of property , and I admit

that it's a question of degree , but what I call a " Forsyte " is a man who is decidedly more than less a slave of property . He knows a safe thing , and his grip on property – it doesn't matter whether it be wives , houses , money , or reputation – is his hall-mark .

(Part II , Ch. X , P. 221)

From the above quotation , it becomes clear what property means according to the Forsyte , for even human relationships have become " an extension of property relationships , " ¹² the idea clearly exemplified in Property, and his wife Irene. Soames mistakes possession for love . He marries the beautiful and lovely Irene Heron , " who fits rather poorly into the Forsyte clan because of her willfulness " ¹³ and whom he looks upon as merely a part of his collection of beautiful objects of art . Their marriage proves to be a failure and Irene soon begins to feel that she is the victim of unhappy and loveless marriage . Then the question is why should she accept him as a husband ? In fact there are many factors that force Irene to marry Soames . She marries him not out of love but under duress . She accepts his fifth proposal for money on her widowed stepmother's advice . As an impoverished woman , Mrs. Heron finds her chance in that marriage for she recognizes that it is advantageous for both herself and Soames to arrange that " liaison between her stepdaughter and a man of property . " ¹⁴ The second factor that makes their marriage unsuccessful is that Irene belongs to a world different from that of Soames . This is the central theme that runs through the novel and through which Galsworthy develops the novel's pattern , the juxtaposition of two different worlds and the clash between them .The first world is the world of property which is associated with the Forsyte clan and which is epitomized by Soames , " the man of property . " Soames is so practical , materialistic and acquisitive . Though he is a collector of a large collection of paintings , " he views these first and foremost as sound business investments . " ¹⁵ The second world is the world of beauty , art , love , and emotion that is identified with Irene , Bosinney , Irene's lover , and Young Jolyon . Standing for this realm , that Soames can't appreciate , Irene finds it impossible to go on with Soames , who is the direct antithesis of her , always reminding him of her premarital stipulation that she puts on him , that she would have her freedom " if their marriage were not a success . " (Part II . Ch. I , p. 120) As the spokeswoman for Galsworthy's opinions , Irene is against the idea of loveless marriage .Galsworthy " disapproves of hypocritically continuing loveless marriages , " ¹⁶ fighting the societal pressure to keep such marriages intact .He attacks the morals of Victorian England , its marriage laws and social conventions .

Through Irene's unhappy marriage , Galsworthy wants to comment on " the plight of women in the ninetieth century England before the passage of the woman's property Act (1881) and the agitation for further reforms " ¹⁷ . During the nineteenth century , women have been suppressed and subjugated by the

Victorian culture that defines and limits their role in society and justify their social definition " as primarily a sexual object , whose principal reason for existence is in passively giving her body for [the] male sexual satisfaction . " ¹⁸

In fact , Galsworthy , through Irene's marriage , tries to reflect upon his own experience for his wife's previous unhappy marriage with Galsworthy's cousin , Arthur John Galsworthy , forms the basis of this novel , The Man of Property , which he dedicates to his wife , Ada Nemesis Pearson , whom he sees as a model for Soames's beautiful and tortured wife , Irene .He , as an author , attributes his fame and inspiration to his beloved Ada . This view is made clear in his dedication to The Forsyte saga in 1922 , as he comments on her role in his becoming a writer , for without her " encouragement , sympathy and criticism I could never have become even such a writer as I am . " ¹⁹ Because of the family's opposition , Galsworthy has secretly and closely associated with Ada for about ten years before their marriage that is accomplished only after the death of Galsworthy's father who is also called John and the model for Old Jolyon Forsyte .In the subplot , Young Jolyon , who is seen as the " well-nigh shadow of the author , " ²⁰ has also been in such a cage of a loveless marriage . He is cut off from the Forsyte family and fortune first for running away with a governess , the woman whom he loves and marries after the death of his wife , June's mother , and second for following an artistic career as a painter in water colour . Having such an experience , he explains his point of view concerning the idea of marriage and how people look at it to Bosinney in the following lines :

The core of it all , ... , is property , but there are many people who would not like it put that way . To them it is ' the sanctity of the marriage tie ' ; but the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent on the sanctity of the family , and the sanctity of the family is dependent on the sanctity of property .And yet I imagine all these people are followers of One who never owned anything . It is curious ! (Part II , Ch. X , pp. 225-226)

Being caged in a conventional unhappy marriage , Young Jolyon comes to understand the condition of the animals which is obviously shown in his analogy of the zoo ; " To shut up a lion or tiger in confinement was surely a horrible barbarity . But no cultivated person would admit this . " (Part II , Ch. VI , p. 177)

Going on in his criticism , Galsworthy shows his contempt of the Forsyte family or of the upper-middle class society at large and their marriage codes with their implicit injustice and bitterness :

Half the marriages of the upper classes were conducted on these lines : Do not offend the susceptibilities of society ; do not offend the susceptibilities of the church .To avoid offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings . The advantages of the stable home are visible , tangible , so many pieces of property ; there is no risk in the *status quo* . To break up a home is at the best a dangerous experiment , and selfish into the bargain .

(Part II , Ch. X , P. 225)

Knowing how uncomfortable his wife is , Soames attempts to save his marriage by commissioning Bosinney , June's fiancé , to build them a new house in the country , at a place called Robin Hill . But unluckily , Irene falls in love with this young architect , and their close attachment has become the gossip of the Forsyte family .

Aware of his wife's affair with Bosinney and of " their love for each other by dancing passionately in front of the entire family , " ²¹ Soames , after coming back home , and losing his control , rapes his wife , or as Galsworthy puts it " asserted his rights and acted like a man . " (Part III , Ch. IV , P. 292)

What infuriates and frustrates Soames is Irene and her continuous refusal to have sex with him and her request for separate bedrooms plus the humiliation that he gets by his wife's relationship with Bosinney . Driven by all these factors and by his " frenetic obsession that his property – i.e. , his wife – is being tampered with by a member of the unpropertied , Bohemian class , " ²² Soames culminates his action by forcing his conjugal rights on his wife .

After the invasion of his own property rights , Soames seeks to avenge himself upon Bosinney by suing him for breach of contract for exceeding the expenditures on the design of the house . In his determination to ruin Bosinney both emotionally and financially , Soames manages to win the case but he " loses for ever the woman for whom he has such desperate longings . " ²³

In this world of the Forsytes , even law is reversed for it does not only secure property but also emphasize its power in society . It is seen , through the eyes of Galsworthy , as a " symbol of the propensity of property to crush the sphere of beauty . " ²⁴

After spending all the afternoon of that day with Irene and learning that Soames has degraded her by exercising his own right on her , the act that is described by Galsworthy as " the supreme act of property , " (Part III , Ch. IV , P. 299) the distraught Bosinney on that same night , in his quest to find and confront Soames , is run over by a cab and killed as he wanders aimlessly in the foggy streets of London . After breaking this terrible news to her , Irene gets devastated and returns home , looking " like a bird that is shot and dying . " (Part III , Ch. IX , P. 349) Bosinney's disappearance and death in a foggy night has become a symbol of this man's suffering and misfortune . It stands to his powerless " struggle with the world of proprietors . " ²⁵ In Galsworthy's novel , even nature is presented as an element that opposes the lovelessness and the inhumanity of the world of property . The Forsytes with their ethics , morals , and principles are presented as unnatural , contradicting human nature and life , thus doomed to destruction .

Conclusion

Reading John Galsworthy's novel , The Man of Property , one can arrive at the conclusion that it is a harsh satire of the standards of the upper –middle class society of which he is a member and which is best represented by Soames Forsyte , the novel's chief male character . As the product of his own society , he comes to recognize everything by its material value , and how much it brings him .Obsessed with the idea of material assurance , Soames Forsyte extends his sense of property to his wife and his house , and this is the cause of his own destruction . Ironically enough , he is mistaken in thinking that money is his only salvation that can bring him the happiness that he seeks with his beautiful wife , whom he fails to look at as a wife , a human being or a woman who deserves much respect and love from her husband . Determined by money and his acute sense of property , he strives to win the unattainable Irene and buy her love .

Galsworthy , through the Soames –Irene's marriage which is characterized by its lack of mutual love or attraction , shows how disruptive the effect of beauty is on the world of the Forsytes and how morally wrong is their desire for property .

Notes

- ¹ Anonymous , " John Galsworthy Biography, " Aug 12 , 2009 . << [http : // great –writers . suite 101 . com / article . cfm / john galsworthy biography .](http://great-writers.suite101.com/article.cfm/john-galsworthy-biography) >> . Cited in 1/12/2010 .
- ² Joseph Warren Beach , The Twentieth Century Novel : Studies in Technique , (New York , Appleton –century –Crofts , Inc. , 1932) , p. 250 .
- ³ Ibid. , P. 250 .
- ⁴ John Galsworthy , " Preface to the complete Forsyte Saga , " 1922 in John Galsworthy , The Man of Property , (London , Heinemann Educational Books Ltd , 1906) , p. v . All subsequent references to the novel are taken from this text .
- ⁵ Ibid. , p. vii .
- ⁶ Herbert J. Muller , Modern Fiction : A Study of Values , (New York , McGraw-Hill Book Company , 1973) , p. 233 .
- ⁷ Walter F. Wright , ed. , Joseph Conrad on Fiction , (Lincoln , University of Nebraska press , 1964) , p. 91 .
- ⁸ William Bellamy , The Novels of Wells , Bennett and Galsworthy 1890-1910 , (London , Routledge & Kegan Paul , 1971) , p. 2 .
- ⁹ Cited in William Bellamy , The Novels of Wells , Bennett and Galsworthy 1890-1910 , p. 9 .
- ¹⁰ Arnold Kettle , An Introduction to the English Novel , Vol. II , (London , Hutchinson & Co publishers Ltd. , 1967) , p. 88 .

¹¹ Ibid. , P.88 .

¹² Ibid. ,P.88 .

¹³ Donald Heiney and Lenthel H. Downs , Essentials of Contemporary Literature of the Western World , Vol. 2 , (Woodbury , Barron's Educational Series , Inc. , 1974) , p. 34 .

¹⁴ Linda Strahan , " Reading the Strange Silence : Irene's Acquiescence in Galsworthy's The Man of Property , " . << [http : // www. Revistahumanidades . uda . cl / publica / 010001 . pdf](http://www.Revistahumanidades.uda.cl/publica/010001.pdf)>> . Cited in 1/12/2010 .

¹⁵ Robert Normey , " Man of Law , man of property , " April- May , 2005 . << [http : // findarticles com. / p / articles / mi m00jx / is 5 29 / ai n25106355 .](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m00jx/is_5_29/ai_n25106355)>> . Cited in 17/11/2010 .

¹⁶ Anonymous , " The Man of Property , " . << [http : // www. Ceejbot . com / Eric Porter / Forsyte / man of property essay . php .](http://www.Ceejbot.com/EricPorter/Forsyte/manofpropertyessay.php)>> . Cited in 1/12/2010

¹⁷ Strahan . " Reading the Strange Silence : Irene's Acquiescence in Galsworthy's The Man of Property , "

¹⁸ Marlene Dixon , " The Subjugation of Women Under Capitalism : The Bourgeois Morality , " 1977 . << [http : // www. Marxists . org / subject / women / authors / Dixon- marlene / morality . htm .](http://www.Marxists.org/subject/women/authors/Dixon-marlene/morality.htm)>> . Cited in 17/11/2010 .

¹⁹ Cited in David Robinson , " For the Love of Ada , " 1 April 2002 , Edinburgh . << [http : // living . Scots man . com / features / for – the –love- of –Ada . 2314873 . ip](http://living.Scotsman.com/features/for-the-love-of-Ada-2314873.ip)>> . Cited in 3/6/2010 .

²⁰ Massoa Imazawa , " The Stoic in John Galsworthy , " . Hirosaki University << repository. Ul. Hirosaki – u. ac. Jp / dspace / ... / 1 / AN00211819-8-11- pdf>> . Cited in 3/4/2012 .

²¹ Anonymous , " The Forsyte Saga (2002 miniseries) , " Wikipedia , the free encyclopedia . << [http : // en . wikipedia . org / wiki / The –Forsyte –Saga- \(2002 – miniseries \)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Forsyte_Saga_(2002_miniseries))>> .Cited in 1/12/2010 .

²² Donald Heiney and Lenthel Downs , P. 35 .

²³ David Waldo Clarke , Modern English Writers , (London : Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd. , 1947) , p. 42 .

²⁴ Robert, Normey .

²⁵ N.I. Romanyshyn , " Nature in John Galsworthy's Novel " The Forsyte Saga " . An Attempt of Frame Analysis , " 2009 . << [www. nbuv. Gov. ua / portal / natural / Nwnu / filolog / Romanyshyn . pdf .](http://www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/natural/Nwnu/filolog/....Romanyshyn.pdf)>> . Cited in 3/4/2012 .

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الأثر النفسي والأخلاقي للملكية في رواية جون كولسويردي رجل الملكية

م. هديل هاتف جسام

جامعة ديالى / مركز اختبار التوفل

م. أسيل هاتف جسام

الجامعة المستنصرية / كلية الآداب

الخلاصة

إن رجل الملكية (1906) ، الكتاب الأول لثلاثية جون كولسويردي John Galsworthy الأولى "حكاية الفورسايت" كان القصد منها هو نقد غريزة التملك في الحياة الاجتماعية الحديثة . يشير البحث إلى مضار وشورور تلك الغريزة التي شغلت اهتمامات الإنسان الحديث وانتباهه ، كيف كان تأثير الملكية على أفراد عائلة الفورسايت ، المتمثلة بشخصية سومس فورسايت مدمرا ، الذين تميزو برغبتهم في تنمية ثروتهم ، بحفظ الذات (النفس) ، قلة الخيال وعدم تصديقهم بمفهوم الحب والجمال والأفكار الفلسفية . سلط البحث الضوء أيضا على مفهوم العائلة المعكوس للملكية ، على مواقفهم الحريصة على الاكتساب ومبادئهم الأخلاقية الخائفة التي أدت إلى دمارهم النهائي .