

John Galsworthy's Art of Characterization.

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Abstract

Characterization forms the very foundation of Galsworthy's dramatic art. He regards character as the most significant element of dramatic technique and constructs his plots around the personalities of ordinary men and women drawn from everyday life. His characters are introduced not merely as individuals but as representatives of social problems explored in each play. Through them, he develops dramatic conflict and frequently presents contrasting pairs of characters to highlight opposing social attitudes and values. They function more as representative types than as highly individualized personalities, embodying distinct ideas and points of view that contribute to the exploration of social issues.

Unlike the witty intellectuals of Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy's characters are governed by emotion rather than intellect. They possess deep feelings but often lack the ability to articulate them with eloquence. Their emotional restraint lends them a quiet dignity, and many endure suffering silently without open protest. Most of his characters remain static rather than dynamic; they undergo little psychological development throughout the course of the drama. Nevertheless, they remain unforgettable figures, such as the uncompromising Anthony, the resolute Roberts, and the pathetic Falder, whose suffering leaves a lasting impression upon the reader.

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Galsworthy devotes exceptional care to the delineation of character because he considers it the cornerstone of dramatic technique. According to him, character is the foundation upon which plot is constructed. While Aristotle regarded character as subordinate to action, Galsworthy reverses this relationship by maintaining that plot should evolve naturally from character. He writes: "The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring-fence of a dominant idea which fulfils the craving of his spirit; having got them there, he suffers them to live their own lives. Take care of character, and action and dialogue will take care of themselves." Elsewhere, he remarks: "The dramatist who hangs his characters upon his plot instead of hanging his plot upon his characters is guilty of a cardinal sin." These observations reveal Galsworthy's firm conviction that authentic dramatic action must arise organically from the nature of the characters rather than from artificially constructed incidents.

Galsworthy derives his characters from careful observation of the society around him. Consequently, they are convincing human beings of flesh and blood rather than imaginary abstractions. They are ordinary English men and women possessing the common virtues, weaknesses, hopes, and limitations of everyday life. Instead of inventing extraordinary personalities, he simply transfers living individuals from homes, factories, offices, law courts, and streets to the stage.

Unlike the classical dramatists, Galsworthy concerns himself almost exclusively with ordinary people, whom he considers no less important than kings and princes. His plays contain neither idealized heroes nor melodramatic villains. He does not create tragic figures of Shakespearean grandeur such as Macbeth, King Lear, or Othello, nor does he portray villains like Iago or Bosola. Instead, his tragic protagonists are ordinary men whose suffering arises from the oppressive forces of society rather than from exceptional personal greatness or villainy.

Dancy is a retired army captain, Falder is an ordinary clerk, Roberts is a labourer, and Jones is a poor working-class man. These characters evoke sympathy not because of heroic achievements but because they are victims of unjust social institutions. In Galsworthy's tragedies, society itself—and the institutions that sustain it—assumes the role traditionally assigned to the villain.

The machinery of justice is represented by advocates, magistrates, and judges. There are also commercial magnates, high financiers, manufacturers, company directors, and shareholders. The Army, the Navy, and the Church also contribute to the dramatis personae. Artists, housekeepers, landladies, governesses, and servants occupy their respective places.

Working-class people and rustic characters also find representation, while the unfortunate members of society, including convicts of both sexes, complete Galsworthy's rich portrait gallery.

The characters are introduced not for their own sake but for the function they perform in the plays. Shakespeare created great characters like Falstaff, who lead an independent existence beyond the plays in which

they appear. Galsworthy's characters, however, are introduced solely to bring out the social problem presented in each play.

In order to emphasize the central conflict in his plays, Galsworthy frequently presents pairs of contrasting characters. Thus, we have Anthony and Roberts, Barthwick and Jones, and Hillcrist and Hornblower. These contrasting pairs effectively highlight opposing attitudes, interests, and social values.

The characters represent ideas and points of view, and they contribute significantly to the discussion of the social problems confronting society. They are representative types rather than highly individualized personalities. As Coats observes, to focus attention upon an outstanding individual of high rank or noble character would divert attention from the communal group whose struggles constitute the real subject of modern social tragedy. Even when distinguished individuals appear in Galsworthy's plays, they derive their importance not from their personal greatness but from their representative capacity. It is within the social relationships of ordinary people, rather than within the lives of extraordinary individuals, that tragic conflict takes place.

The sufferings of individuals in modern society are not caused by inherently wicked people. Those responsible often possess the best of intentions, yet they are governed by the passions, prejudices, and conventions of the class to which they belong. They inflict misery upon their fellow human beings when they enforce the laws and conventions of society without imagination or sympathetic understanding. The real villains of modern society are the invisible social forces that ruthlessly crush weak individuals in the same manner as the gods did in Greek tragedy and villains did in Shakespearean tragedy.

Galsworthy takes his characters from the life around him. He does not consider it necessary to introduce kings and great personalities into his tragedies. His tragedies differ fundamentally from both classical and romantic tragedy. He completely eliminates supernatural agencies as well as conventional heroes. His chief character is generally a weak individual who is overwhelmed by powerful social forces that grind him to pieces. As Coats has rightly observed: "To focus attention on an outstanding individual of high rank or noble character would be to divert it from the communal group whose struggles are primarily to be studied." Thus, Hillcrist represents the landowning aristocracy, Hornblower stands for the owners of industry, Anthony represents capital, and Roberts represents labour. Barthwick symbolizes the rich, while Jones represents the poor. Falder is the ordinary clerk who represents the lower middle class—romantic by temperament and constantly struggling against poverty.

Galsworthy's characters are highly emotional, yet they rarely express their feelings eloquently. Their emotional expression is restrained rather than verbose. Like the typical Englishman, they believe in deliberate understatement. Their deepest emotions remain largely unspoken, and this emotional restraint contributes significantly to the realism of their characterization.

Galsworthy's characters are essentially flat characters. They remain fundamentally the same from the beginning to the end of the play, showing little or no psychological development. They are static rather than dynamic. As Skemp observes: "We do not find development of character under the stress of circumstances; and here we come to the chief dramatic weakness of the plays. For a satisfying dramatic effect, definite progress is needed alike in character and in action."

John Anthony and David Roberts in *Strife* do not grow or change under the influence of events; they are simply broken by them. Similarly, in *Justice*, Falder remains, until the end, what he was at the beginning—a weak man, though one possessing a nervous sensitivity that drives him, in moments of despair, to desperate action. James is perhaps the only character who undergoes even a slight transformation, becoming somewhat more kind-hearted as the play progresses.

Galsworthy's plays present a remarkably wide range of characters. They include company directors and ordinary labourers, Members of Parliament and drunkards, criminals and idealists, accidental thieves and respectable citizens, aristocratic ladies and charwomen. All these characters are drawn directly from life. Although Galsworthy's characters do not attain the immortality of Shakespeare's creations, many of them remain unforgettable. One can never forget Anthony's rigidity, Roberts' qualities of leadership, Mrs. Jones's simplicity and sincerity, or the pathetic figure of Falder.

There is an infinite variety in Galsworthy's portrait gallery. On the one hand, there is a large and interesting group of characters, mostly of conservative or aristocratic leanings, who are the upholders of tradition. They are interested in maintaining the established social order. Their selfishness, class consciousness, and traditional prejudices are responsible for preserving social evils whose removal would make society healthier and the people happier. Confronting this class are those who rebel against the existing social order. Their discontent brings them into constant conflict with the privileged classes. There are other characters who may be described as victims of the social order rather than rebels, since they are too weak to resist it and can only suffer the misery of injustice. Then there are those who have been reduced to social outcasts and are relentlessly pursued by society. There are also a number of sympathetic and kind-hearted people who represent the humane side of life.

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