

# Justice” establishes John Galsworthy as a sensitive Social Reformer

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**ABSTRACT:** John Galsworthy has been a social crusader of his times. He has talked of several burning issues facing the society and prison reforms is one of them. In ‘Justice’ he not only portrays the plight of a woman in a marriage without love but also of two lovers who suffer at the hand of Justice and are forced to continue the with love without marriage. Though the story of the life of the protagonists , Galsworthy gets to talk of prison reforms and Justice

**KEYWORDS :** Crusader, burning issues , prison , reforms , portrays, plight, Justice, The Silver Box

## INTRODUCTION

In The silver Box or Strife, John Galsworthy maintains a semblance of impartiality. But in Justice he is a crusader, who seems to have realized that the spirit of impartiality is incompatible with the modern realistic social drama. Justice was highly successful on the stage and it led to an important piece of prison reform. This places Galsworthy at par with prison reformers like Elizabeth Fry and John Howard. It contains scenes of highly surcharged emotion and those are very effective on stage.

Law and marriage are two parallel themes in Justice. Both the institution of law and marriage have become insensitive and dehumanized. They are reduced merely to a mechanized process. Ruth Honeywill is the only female character in the play who belongs to the Galsworthian type of woman in who, *“at first patient, eventually rebels ‘” She suffers unspeakably from her husband’s brutality and drunken fits ‘” the social institutions ‘” have forced her to immorality.(1)“* Galsworthy in this play presents a woman whose life has become awfully miserable because of her brute husband. She is *“a patient, long suffering woman of the type of Mrs. Jones”(2) in The Silver box.*

Ruth honeywill’s husband is a drunkard. He abuses Ruth under the influence of alcohol and is quite a brute. Ruth is tired of being *“knocked”* about, and to escape emotional and physical harassment she plans to leave the country with her lover. Falder is a compassionate young man who is attracted towards Ruth. Realizing what a ruthless brute her husband is, he wishes to be able to help her out and promises as much to her. When Ruth runs to him one morning and explains that her husband tried to strangle her he feels deeply concerned for her safety. Ruth tells him that her husband, *“tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake.”(3)* Falder sympathizes with her and promises to take her to a far away land where they can live as “man and wife” without fearing either husband or the law.

Falder, although well meaningly , promises Ruth to take her away from her husband , is in no position to afford the expenses. When Ruth comes to him leaving her husband after he tries to mortally assault her, he is very disturbed and desperate to acquire some money. At work that day he is presented with an opportunity to forge a cheque and goes ahead with it only to be caught. This changes the whole course of their plan. Falder is tried in a court of law for felony – forging a cheque. Frome is the lawyer who fights the case. Through him Galsworthy puts the problem of unhappy married life of the Honeywills in a proper perspective. Frome pleads with deep passion for Falder and Ruth Honeywill. The crux of his argument is *“the tragic circumstances of her life”* which inspired Falder to help her. Ruth *“has been leading a miserable existence with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life.”* The ill-treatment and misuse of a wife by her husband is stressed here. Ruth, who is otherwise a good and faithful wife, turns towards Falder for help only when extremely oppressed by her husband. Falder sympathizes with her and so she hopes that he would *“rescue her from an ogre-like husband.”* The law cannot and does not help her. She cannot get a divorce on the charge of physical abuse. Divorce can be asked for only in the face of a serious charge like adultery.

Ruth was pathetic for help. She had no option except that she could either *“go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life , or she could apply to the court for a separation order.”(8)* Under the circumstances she had to choose

between *"the work house"* and *"the streets"*. Both were undesirable. Frome, the lawyer, emphasizes the fact that Ruth was *"an unskilled woman without the means of livelihood to support herself or her children without resorting either to the poor law or – to speak quietly plainly, to the sale of her body."* In a terrible trying situation of this kind, Galsworthy pleads for emancipation of a married woman, Ruth, from the clutches of her *"ogre-like"* husband. She is, of course guilty of violating the sanctity of conjugal life, but the fact is that there was hardly any conjugality left, let alone its sanctity or fidelity. Her married life was worse than a prison, a cage, where she was exposed to the fury of her drunken brute of a husband. The sooner a woman is extricated from such heartless bond of marriage, the better it is for her, for her children and even for the society.

Cleaver and the judge represent the unfeeling, dehumanized institution of the law. It is none of their business to see Ruth's misery and suffering. They are bound by the ritualistic side of the law. Ruth's version of the story does not carry enough conviction for them. Cleaver puts it as a case of *"forgery"* He asks, *"Divested of the romantic glamour which my friend (Frome) is casting over the case, is this anything but an ordinary forgery?"*(11) Frome stresses the background in order to show the brutality of Ruth's husband which drew sympathy from Falder. A sensitive person like Falder was not *"likely to contemplate with equanimity marks of gross violence on a woman to whom he was devotedly attached."* (12) The thought of conjugal fidelity vanishes into thin air when a woman has to live in constant terror of her husband. Ruth came to give evidence in the court for Falder *"at the risk of her life,"* for the simple reason that she turned to him for *"affection"* denied her by her husband. Form appeals to the judge *"to request the reporters not to disclose the name of woman witness in Press reports of these proceedings. Your lordship would understand that the consequences might be extremely serious to her."*(14) But the Judge is unmoved and impassive because the attachment between them (Ruth and Falder) was to further *"an immoral design."* It is evident that *"Justice, the guardian of morality, has ruined not only Falder, but has also on its conscience the fate of Ruth. Thus, the machinery of law simultaneously crushes perhaps a promising couple who might have led useful lives."*(16)

Falder is imprisoned and the consequences are disastrous. Ruth could not stay with her husband for long. She comes to Cokeson and opens her heart to him. She tells him that she had married Honeywill when she was *"only a girl"*. She had loved him deeply and *"thought the world of him."* But he ill-treated her. His misbehavior could not break her *"nerve"* but then he began *"knocking the children about,"* and she could not *"stand that"*. She was so disgusted with him now that she *"wouldn't go back now, if he were dying."*(18) She had nothing to fall back upon so she worked hard to earn a living. She tells Cokeson that she *"Tried the same as when I left him before ""making skirts"" cheap things."*(19) But she couldn't make more than ten shillings a week which was by no means enough for herself and her children. Soon they came to state of starvation. Under such trying circumstances she had to yield to her *"employer's passions."* She has now *"no one else to go to."*(20) In spite of heavy odds she continues to cherish her sincere love for Falder. Falder too, loved her deeply. After Falder is released from prison James Howe agreed to take him back on the condition that he serves his relationship with Ruth. Falder looks from one to the other with a hunted expression and pleads: *"But Sir "" but sir "" it's the one thing I looked forward to all that time. And she too."*(21)

Galsworthy here comes through with his thinking that true love is much more pure and sacred than *"holy"* matrimony. Honeywill married Ruth but rejected her; failed to look after his wedded wife and children. On the other hand, there is Falder, who loves her deeply and although he has to serve penal servitude for her, his love remains undiminished. He frankly tells James Howe, *"I couldn't give her up. I couldn't! Oh! Sir I am all she's got to love to. And I'm sure she's all I've got."*(22)

In verity, this assertion of love cuts across all bonds and barriers and reduces to a nullity the sanctity of all matrimonial relationships and all that is sacrosanct in the name of matrimony. Ruth, too, does not lag behind in her love for Falder. But just when better days were to come, life takes a bitter turn and throws them apart. They were tantalized like accursed Tantalus.

When Falder dies, Ruth's heart is broken.

On her face there is an expression of fear and horror. She drops on her knees by Falder's body. Crouching over his body she addresses him most affectionately: *"My dear! My Pretty!"*(23) Cokeson expresses his heart-felt sympathy for Ruth by saying *"poor dear woman"*. Ruth stands as though turned to stone, staring Cokeson, who, bending humbly before her, holds out his hand, as one would do to *"a lost dog."*(24) Cokeson's gesture for Ruth is an expression of succor and sympathy for distressed women who have suffered at the hands of tyrannical and brutal husbands.

In this play we have cases of marriage without love and love without marriage. The tyranny of law also causes tragedy. Like Clare Desmond, Ruth married when she was very young. She was not mature enough to know her mind. Later, she is unable to continue her living with her husband because of his ill-treatment. She suffers terribly from her husband's brutality. Misfortune follows not because destiny but because of insensitive social institutions. Ruth is not

only deprived of Falder's true love but is also forced to lead the life of an immoral vagabond. She rebels against oppressive wedlock but fails to get the solace of love offered by Falder.

Galsworthy here seems just content to suggest that release from oppressive wedlock is the first pre-requisite in the direction of the full liberation of women from the clutches of cruel husbands. A strong plea for the humanization of the law has also been made. Law in the case of Ruth and Falder ignored the human aspect and conformed to the old and traditional view. The result was tragic.

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2. R.H Coats :**John Galsworthy as a Dramatic artist**, London , duckworth, 1926, pp.255-56.
3. **The plays if John Galsworthy As A Dramatic Artist**, London, Duckworth , 1929, pp. 221
4. Ibid, P. 231
5. Ibid, P. 231
6. Ibid, P. 231
7. Ibid, P. 231
8. Ibid, P. 232
9. Ibid, P. 232
10. Falder deposes in the court :*"I was having my breakfast when she came. Her dress was all torn, and she was gasping ....; there were the marks of his fingers round her throat; her arm was bruised and the blood had got into her eyes dreadfully. It frightened me, and then when she told me, I felt – I felt – it was too much for me!"*  
**Ibid**,p.240.
11. Ibid, P. 241
12. Ibid, P. 243
13. Ibid, P. 243
14. Ibid, P. 246
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16. Leon Schalit :**John Galsworthy : A Survey**, London, Heinmann, 1929, p.246.
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18. Ibid, P. 263
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