

Galsworthy's 'Silver Box' A Truthful Representation Of Sufferings Of The Underdogs

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Abstract

It is intended to focus on the partial treatment of rich and poor in the play *The Silver Box* by John Galsworthy. *The Silver Box* contains a social satire on unjust social partiality. The play is an appeal for compassion and sympathy for the poor who invariably suffer. It indicts the society for its contrasting treatment of two men, Jack and Jones, the one belonging to the affluent section and the other to the vertically opposite ... Law which is equal for all is ruthless and unjust toward the weak and helpless. The purpose of this paper is to portray both the characters with all their doings. However, both the characters are found equally guilty in the play, then arise the role of wealth and social status in the court, which makes Jack a respectable gentlemen and the miserably poor Jones guilty. This paper will highlight the mastery of Galsworthy in portraying the reality of the 20th century English society and the legal system and making the audience to be the real judges between Jack and Jones.

Keywords: Galsworthy, *The Silver Box*, Jack Barthwick, Jones, Social Injustice.

Galsworthy was a social idealist and a through artist. He possesses a remarkable faculty to discover dramatic elements in natural and unforced situations that never introduces false themes, he always maintain a classic balance, which can be seen in his works. His work reveal that he is essentially English in his humor, he wrote plays first to instruct and then to delight. He was completely dissatisfied with French pattern plays of his days and wished to present real life. He says – “My dramatic invasion, and the form of it , was dictated rather by revolt at the artificial nature of English play of the period, and by resolute intention to present real life on the stage”.¹ Galsworthy believes the writer should make its audience to think. His temperamental preoccupation was with social reform. His didactic tendency is a great menace some times, but his skill enables him to copy with the demon of times didacticism using the device of creating occasion for speech making and propounds on dramatist’s behalf Sheila Kays Smith remarks, “

Undoubtedly his most striking quality as a dramatist is his sense of formal and craft, but he is far removed from that school of playwright, of which Pinero and H.A. Jones are leaders, whose technique amounts to little more than a working knowledge of the stage".²

When we study the themes of his plays, we notice that he chooses the graver aspects of contemporary life and he lays strong emphasis on incidents as the outcome of forces stronger than the individuals. Ibsen too adopted the same method, but he concentrated on the individual only while Galsworthy gave more emphasis on the forces of nature as Skemp remarks, "For Galsworthy the individual problem leads always to the fundamental problem of general relations between individuals within the social organism".³ His plays are well made plays. The plays of Galsworthy are full of thought and substance. He uses where necessary the usual tricks of the melodrama, but he displays a through artistic restraint. Galsworthy wrote his first play "The silver Box" in 1906, in naturalistic manner. The play had been praised by all class of audience. In his very first play he showed his craftsmanship. This play is one of the first example of naturalistic school of England. Vernon Frank says, "A single play 'The Silver Box' by till then where caused astonishment, even in the amidst of astonishing court theatre session"⁴

'The silver Box' is Galsworthy's first play. It arrays class against class in a manner prophetic of its author's subsequent work. It opens with a night scene in which we see young Jack Barthwick returning home completely drunk. He enters the room with a purse in his hand, which he has stolen for a joke from the girl with whom he has been spending the evening. He is accompanied by rather a less drunk workingman, who met him outside the house and helped him to find the keyhole for his key. Barthwick falls asleep and Jones, the workingman, seizes the opportunity to steal the street girl's purse and silver cigarette-box from the table. The play then goes on to show how different are the consequences for an upper-class and a lower-class criminal. Jack Barthwick is visited by a girl, who demands her purse back, but she is satisfied when his father, a rich M.P., instead gives her a generous sum of money. Jones is sentenced to a month's hard labor, no one thinks about him at all. In this play a case is portrayed of Jack and Jones. Jack is a pleasure seeking man and the son of a rich M.P. Law favors the rich and crushes the poor.

Jones meets Jack at night and helps him to open the door of his house, where upon Jack offer him wine as he has no money to pay and in fit of sudden impulse Jones, an unemployed person, decide to score off Jack. Mr. Barthwick, the liberal M.P., cross questions Mrs. Jones and finds out the previous history of him. It reveals that Mr. Jones had a child before marriage. He decides on this account to discontinue the poor Mrs. Jones, who is honest. The police arrests Jones on charge of theft, Jones had a small quarrel with police and on the charge he is still more sternly dealt with by the law. Jack and Jones have committed the same crime, but Jones is punished because he is poor.

Jack being the son of rich M.P. goes free. Jones says, “Call this justice? what about him? E got drunk E took the purse ‘e too the purse but it’s the money that got him off justice”.⁵ Jack and Jones committed the same crime, but treated differently. Through this play Galsworthy want to present the idea of the society which have different rules for the two sections of society. The play is realistic and so there is no melodramatic painting nor do we find a trace of conscious wickedness. Barthwick is not a villain, the judge is not a wicked person yet the actions of Jack and Jones receive different treatment.

The silver Box that jones took away from Jack was not of spite. Jones is a honest man , who wants to work he says, “ A man wants to sweat his soul and to keep breath in him and ain’t allowed that’s justice that’s freedom and all the rest of it”.⁶ Jones feels very odd, when he is not working, when he is out of employment. He drinks heavily, but another kind of work that sets him to drink. According to Galsworthy : “ The key note of Barthwick is want of courage. He thinks himself full of principles and invariably compromises in the face of the facts. The key note of Mrs. Barthwick is want of imagination”.⁷

“The silver Box” contains a social satire on unjust social prejudice. In “Silver Box”, which is architectonic in style and realistic, having no freaks or chance to any exterior element. We find a sympathy for the underdog in his plays. Jones loves his children, he is unemployed and feels, “ If I’d had known as much as I’d now, I’d never had one o’ them . what’s the use o’ bringin’ e ’r into a state o’ things like this? It is a crime, that’s what is in, but you find it out too late, that what’s the matter with this I’r world”.⁸ The unemployed Jones wonders in search of employment and he says, “a lady D’ you want to earn a few pence, my man? And gives me her dog to ‘old outside a shop fat as a butter’s was tons ‘o’ meat had gone to the making of him”.⁹ This shows the sympathy of playwright towards Jones. The play deals with the contemporary life, ordinary people and suggest how there is one law for the poor and one for the rich. The play has a tragic tone but it is not tragic.

It is according to the naturalistic style of drama, which faithfully presents the reality. It has no soliloquies the whole drama takes place before, as if we are on the stage. In the play, we notice that both are almost but not quite parallel. Jack Steals a woman’s sky blue velvet silk purse, the latter steals a silver cigarette box are parallel, although the theft was wrong in both cases, Jones’ side is weakened and jack’s side is strengthened. This is because Jack enjoyed favorable circumstances of economic and social status, whereas unemployed Jones was leading a life of poverty. Thus, Jones is condemned to one month’s hard labor for the noblest thing he ever did the second point, which engages our attention is that the power of wealth divers the course of justice. As due to wealth, the magistrate himself, influenced by weather and power.

Mrs. Jones would have left her husband however, she is faithful and loyal to him, she stands by him. While, he is not to her. Galsworthy excellently portrays his best and worst characters together and Barthwick symbolizes hypocrisy. In 'Silver Box' Galsworthy has dealt with the problem of underdogs. Thus, his plays are the plays of social themes and are known as drama of ideas. Thus, he is great humanist full of intimate pity for human suffering. Galsworthy stands for fair play, human understanding and fellow feeling. His studies of the contemporary English society and its inherent conflicts and maladjustment are valuable human documents of considerable historical and artistic importance.

References

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