

## The Fate of the Hunted

### A Note on Two Galsworthian Plays

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Just two of Galsworthy's plays are treated here for the sake of the author's viewpoint concerning human nature, and not of his dramatic technique. More correctly, they have been taken in hand because in them is shown what the present writer believes, after many years of reading Galsworthy's plays and novels, to be the essential part of his view of life. Needless to say, one will find more or less of a writer's viewpoint in any of his works. In plays with their well-defined situations, however, it is set forth more effectively than in any other type of writing. This is why the present writer is concerned with the two plays — "*The Fugitive*" and "*Escape*" — by John Galsworthy.

Both of the plays deal with the fate of a man or woman hunted by and fleeing from some power overwhelmingly oppressive. A hunted man hates bondage and seeks freedom. Galsworthy believes that a man can never be happy unless he is physically, financially and spiritually free, and that a society of free people is the only one that is peaceful. In the freedom in his sense is implicated the state of a man who is liberated from all sorts of traditional enthrallments, and capable of seeing everything in its true nature and appreciating it in the broad vista of human life — the freedom of soul which is the only source of lively imagination.

Of all the unfortunate circumstances under which men and women were deprived of their freedom, those which aroused in Galsworthy the deepest sympathy with the afflicted were the lot of women who had found their married life a failure but could not liberate themselves from it. His lifelong concern with those women may be traced to the sympathy he felt towards the unhappy woman whom he married later. This sympathy caught in dilemma deepened into an agony, from which he suffered alone and jointly with the woman for many years till they were finally united. It left a

lasting impression upon his soul, and then, as Mrs. Mabel E. Reynolds, his sister, says,<sup>(1)</sup> the cases of women who wished to liquidate their married life but could not do so on account of social prejudices, the fetters of law or their own economical incompetence, turned into an obsession with him. This is easily imagined from the fact that Galsworthy deals over and over again in his works with a woman who has fallen victim to such torments. Remarkable among the examples are Irene (*"The Man of Property"*), Olive (*"The Dark Flower"*), Audrey Noel (*"The Patrician"*), and Clare (*"Over the River"*). Irene may have been modelled after Mrs. Galsworthy, and the poignant touches noticeable in *"The Man of Property"* tell of the personal anguish the author had undoubtedly known before he was relieved from it by marrying the original of Irene.

The heroine of *"The Fugitive"* is another instance of those unfortunate women. In this play, however, the author's recurrent theme is handled entirely for its own sake and rescued from falling into confusion with any parallel ones. It is the most fit to illustrate the author's lifelong concern and elucidate the primary sense of freedom as conceived by him.

The play is the tragedy of Clare, who, like Irene, was married to a man whom she soon found she could not love. George Dedmond, her husband, is a prosaic type of a man who, in face of a beautiful London sunset, merely says: "Ah, Westminster! Clock Tower! Can you see the time by it?" The relations between George and Clare are parallel to those between Soames and Irene in *"The Man of Property."* Born as the eldest daughter of a poor country rector, she was married with no experience of the world to a son of a noble family, but soon became aware of her mistake in marrying a husband she could not love. Since then she has gone through every consideration of worldly importance, and attempted in vain to sacrifice her own feelings for the peace of all the people around her. She can no longer stand the marital tie sanctified merely by the sense of family honour. The life with a man who is unable to respond to her feelings, whose materialistic viewpoint is revolting to her, and who is, in short, a typical man of the world, is almost choking to her, however capable and morally integrate the man may be. Her grievance uttered before her brother, Cap-

tain Huntingdon, is:

"..... I can't explain, Reggie — it's not reason, at all; it's — it's like being underground in a damp cell; it's like knowing you'll never get out. Nothing coming — never anything coming again — never anything."

As Bosinney, Irene's lover, figures as a symbolic character of unrestrained artistic temper in "*The Man of Property*", so Malise appears as an exponent of liberal thought, and, as Bosinney does Irene, leads Clare to the determination to extricate herself from the bondage. In spite of her brother's efforts to make her change her mind, she does not think there is any alternative for her but to leave her husband. After her abscondence, what George does to defend the name of his family is everything he can do to bring her back to himself. Here starts the tragedy of Clare the hunted.

She is like an animal which, out of covert, is chased by hunters with hue and cry. It runs from covert to covert; they will never let up till they have run it down. Once a beautiful wife relinquishes the protection of her husband, hers is the fate of a hunted animal. "Pudgy, bull-necked brutes, devils with hard eyes, and the chivalrous men, who don't mean her harm, but can't help seeing she is made for love" — "the respectable, the pious, even those who love her" — all of them will not let her be, but join the hunt of her.

Clare has no one but Malise to turn to, but what could she give him in return for whatever protection and love he could possibly give her? She says:

"If I must bring you harm — let me pay you back! I can't bear it otherwise."

"She puts up her face to be kissed, shutting her eyes," But there she stops, unable to proceed.

"I don't feel. And without — I can't, I can't."

When she knows she can't do anything beyond that, she feels she must go.

"... I can't take when I am not giving."

Her birth and breeding, epitomized in her moral sense, will not allow her to stay where she is not really wanted for all that she can do.

So she works now "in one of those big shops — selling gloves." But her new life is so different from the one she has led as a daughter of a

country rector or the wife of a young aristocrat that it is hardly possible for her to put up with its squalid circumstances — “every morning getting up the same time; every day the same stale ‘dinner’ as they call it; every evening the same ‘Good evening, Miss Clare.’ ‘Good evening, Miss Simpson.’ . . . . And the same walk home, or the same bus; the same men that you mustn’t look at, for fear they’ll follow you. Oh! and the feeling — always, always — that there’s no sun, or life, or hope, or anything. . . .”

Mrs. Fullarton, Clare’s best friend, comes across her, but, soon after that, Clare gives up her job, seeking refuge somewhere else, as an animal will do on the hunting ground when it knows it was sighted. Utterly wasted in body and mind, she returns to Malise, ready to be his this time. All this while, she knows that she is tracked by George and his agents, but she is determined not to return to her husband to be prisoned forever, to be buried alive and slowly smothered.

Mrs. Fullarton’s diagnosis of Clare’s case is:

“. . . You’re too fine, not fine enough, to put up with things: you’re too sensitive to take help, and you’re not strong enough to do without it. It’s simply tragic. . . .”

That is, Clare is not apathetic enough to take help when she is unable to return it. At the same time, she is not well-born enough to sacrifice her personal feelings for the sake of her family honour. If she had been either less sensitive by nature or more exalted in birth, probably she would not have left her husband. As it was, she could not stay with the man she could not love or take anything from others for nothing, though she was quite unfit to live on her own through the rough and tumble of the world. She is not of blue blood and so trained, like daughters of highly respectable families, as to put decency before anything else. She is too human to disregard her own feelings and patch up any possible disgrace of the family for decency’s sake. Yet she is equipped neither with money nor with ability enough to struggle for her independent life. Her impossibility either way points to an inevitable destruction in store for her.

It is not long before Malise’s protection is no longer cheering to her moral sentiments. For, when she knows that George is intending to ruin Malise by bringing a damage suit against him, she decides to leave him

and again wanders out in the streets. It is not only her fear of giving him harm that induces her to do so, but her moral training that sees no reason for letting him suffer such an infliction for her sake. There are things impossible for some people that others are ready to do. It depends upon their birth and breeding.

When Clare has evacuated Malise's rooms, the only way open to her is to live by selling her charms. She appears in an Epsom restaurant on Derby Day. The first man she falls in with is astonished to see that she is not of the ordinary sort, and rather wants to help her. But it again jars on her moral sentiments to take help without giving anything in return. It seems to her moral sense rather easier to offer herself than nothing. But is it really possible for her to do so with all her past life behind her? During a few moments, while the man is gone to get the waiter, she pours morphia in her champagne glass and drinks it. What is decidedly impossible for one is impossible even when to do it is the only way left for one to live. In order to save her soul, Clare had to reject the only alternative for her life. By taking flight in death, she has escaped all her pursuers, the conventional and relentless world. The hunting chorus of drunken men reaches where Clare lies, like a young stag hunted down, with her soul flitting away.

The author seems to say in this play that there can be no real happiness of man where the freedom of soul is denied, and that, in order to attain it, he sometimes is driven to his destruction. Between the lines may also be read his strong resentment against every form of constraint upon men as well as his deep sympathy with people held in bondage.

According to the author, what holds a man in captivity is not always an external force realized as something confronting him. A man as a social being is inevitably subject to the way of thinking particular to the time and place in which he was born. His level of society and education also largely account for what he thinks. These will in time turn into the fundamental things in his nature and be the basis of his spiritual being. He feels himself safe and comfortable as long as he rests upon it, though he is in fact tied to it. If it is demolished, the whole structure of his spiritual being will go. It may be his creed in life, but, when it is not

known to himself as such, it is all the more impossible for him to escape it. He is so inseparably tied to it that it seems as if it were part of his whole being. It has been incorporated into himself and constitutes the essential part of his nature. When he feels it threatened, he will make desperate effort to defend it as his last stronghold. It is impossible for him to desert it because to do so means his final defeat and the end of his moral independence.

This thing at the basis of a man's soul will sometimes stand in his way as if it were something external and hostile. For instance, when a man flees from the crushing forces of all his enemies, he may find it barring his only retreat; for, if he is to be successful in his flight, he will sometimes have to deny all that is fundamental in himself. But he can never break through this barricade blocking his way inasmuch as he can never escape himself. Those which stood in Clare's way were all that characterized her innermost self. She avoided them one by one till at last she found it no longer possible for her to do so so long as she lived.

The theme is by no means a new one, but it is all the more veritable, reminding us of the age-old cognizance of man's character as the determining factor of his fate. The same theme is more graphically represented in "Escape". The play is an adventure of an escaped convict who undergoes a series of scrapes before he is arrested again.

Matt Denant prevents a plain clothes man from arresting a woman who has accosted him in Hyde Park. Knocked off by Matt, the plain clothes man, in falling down, hits his head on the rail and dies. One foggy day towards the end of his penal servitude, Matt breaks away, in spite of his fellow prisoner's distrust in his luck. Matt is an Oxford man, and has commanded a company on the front. Being a devotee of fair play, he takes it an ill luck of the plain clothes man that he died from hitting his head on the rail. Being a sportsman, he feels the three more years' imprisonment more than he can stand. He was not sure of his success in running away any more than his fellow prisoner, and was well aware of the prolonged miseries his failure would bring to him. Nevertheless, he could not refrain from taking the slightest chance before him.

The readers of Galsworthy's novels and plays sense in him more or less of what Mr. R. H. Mottram calls *claustrophobia* in his study of the author.<sup>(2)</sup> Whatever *claustrophobia* he had is supposed to have much in common with Matt Denant's hatred of being shut up, which plunges him into the racklessness of seeking his release against the least chance of success. It should also be affiliated to the obsession in him of unhappy women bound by the ill-assorted marriage tie. These sentiments in him account a great deal for the staunchness with which he stood throughout his life by the cause of freedom for man's body and mind.

Matt's footsteps from his breaking away to his arrest are followed by the author through nine episodes. All of the episodes except the last two are rendered with humorous touches. There is not to be seen in them anything of the harshness noticeable particularly in "*The Man of property*". This indicates the serenity of mind the author had attained when he wrote the play, but which he had never been capable of before, when he dealt with one of his preoccupying problems. The pastoral atmosphere and humorous mood in those episodes turn out to be felicitous in them as an overture of the following two with their moving effect.

Hunted by policemen and villagers, Matt, in the eighth episode, is compelled to seek refuge in a house inhabited by two spinster sisters. One of them, Dora, is humanistic and liberal, while her sister Grace is conservative and religious. Dora is willing to protect Matt, but Grace hates to do so. While they are disputing, the policemen and villagers are already in their room; Dora denies the presence of the criminal in their house, obliging Grace to admit it. When the hunters are away, there goes a hot wrangle between the sisters, Grace snapping at her sister for compelling her to tell a lie. Matt does not like to have them quarrel about himself even at this pinch of his fate. He slips away into the open, just as Clare did when she knew that her staying with Malise would ruin him.

In the last episode, Matt sneaks into the vestry of the village church, where he is discovered by the parson. They talk about the duties of a minister. To a query raised by Matt as to what Christ would have done, the parson, one of the few fascinating clergymen Galsworthy depicted, replies:

“That, Captain Denant, is the hardest question in the world. Nobody ever knows. . . . The more you read those writings, the more you realize that he was incalculable. You see – He was a genius.”

The pursuing party is now inside the parsonage. After an exchange of words between the parson and the party, he is demanded to answer “on his honour as a Christian” to the question whether or not he has seen the escaped convict. The parson is placed in a dilemma of human love and clerical duties, the former, however, beginning to prevail over the latter. Seeing all this from behind the cassocks hanging on the wall, Matt steps forward in order to intercept words of perjury about to escape the parson’s lips. He says that the parson did not see him when he got into the vestry. In Matt’s remark just before the curtain fall may be read the verdict of the whole play:

‘It’s one’s decent self one can’t escape.’

Indeed, the author himself was one of those who could never for a moment turn from their own decent self or the conscience embedded deep in their nature.

One’s decent self or conscience, however, is the force not only to bind but sustain one. It will prove to be the last prop of one’s soul when one is stripped of all the skin-deep creeds and extraneous embellishments of culture. When it has gone, his real being will no longer exist even if he subsists in flesh and blood.

The substance of this conscience varies from man to man. It is the most essential part of what one has come to possess by his birth and breeding. If one is to break with it, one will have either to exist as a mere living carcass or, more easily, to put an end to his whole existence. Clare chose the latter, or took flight in death. Matt would not give over his conscience either way. To profit by allowing the parson to neglect his clerical duties would be to kill his own conscience. In order to preserve his own conscience, he was brave enough to return to the plight under constraint.

In the light of these two plays, the author may be said to have been particularly jealous of man’s freedom. At the same time, he seems to say

that every human being is tied to that which constitutes the essential part of his creed settled deep in himself, and which will not let go of him so long as he lives, since it is the vital force of his moral existence. There is no doubt that "*The Fugitive*" and "*Escape*" were intended to focus the general attention upon the human nature which is hungry for freedom but can never be set free from something deep-rooted in itself.

The resistance to binding forces and the obeisance to conscience are contrary in principle to each other in that the former involves reluctance and the latter willingness to yield to forces compelling a man. Only the force is external in the former case and internal in the latter. But the reactions in a man to the external and the internal forces may establish an equilibrium between them. Indeed, they have struck a marvellous balance in Galsworthy which accounts for the chief fascination of him. The fascination of balance is of course out of date nowadays when people are attracted by the writers who are decidedly slanted in their thought and sentiment. Nevertheless, balance is still a form of beauty, as it has been from time immemorial, however outmoded it may look for the present.

If the most important factor in the western cultural tradition is that of Christianity, the desire for emancipation from the reign of all-powerful Western tradition may be called pagan. On the other hand, indomitable attachment to one's basic creed and assertion of it in face of every inimical inducement of worldly concerns are characteristic of a stoic. In this sense, the balance in Galsworthy may be regarded as that of the pagan freedom and the stoic fortitude. Old Jolyon, for instance, is one of the most fascinating characters in his works, since the two tendencies concur in the octogenarian and reflect the balance originally to be observed in the author. So much so that Louis Ferrand ("*The Island Pharisees*") or Wilfrid Desert ("*The White Monkey*") are no more than nomads of the society, and as such do not appeal to us, at least in the works of Galsworthy, however unprejudiced and independent they may be as exponents of liberal thoughts.

Galsworthy the writer started as a champion of the liberalist camp and was particularly impatient of social conventions. But, with the lapse of years, he was awakened to the stoic quality in himself as well as in his

countrymen. It was not long before he could establish in his works as well as in himself an equilibrium between the liberal and the stoic, and allow them to coexist in perfect balance in his personality. There are, however, reasons to suspect that the balance was slightly disturbed in favour of the stoic towards the end of his life, as he came to be more attracted to it in human nature, during the period of post-war restlessness and agitation. (The reasons shall be expounded in another paper.)

- (1) M. E. Reynolds: Memories of John Galsworthy p. 33. 34
- (2) R. H. Mottram: For Some We Loved p. 80