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Emerging from the Shadows:
John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, Modernism, and the Effect of Sequential Publication

By

Patricia Miller Schmidt

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To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of Patricia Miller Schmidt find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Dr. Matthew Van Winkle
Major Advisor

Dr. Matthew Levay
Committee Member

Dr. Anna Hiller
Graduate Faculty Representative

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Abstract

Despite praise from the Nobel Committee in 1932 for his distinguished art of narration, John Galsworthy has been widely ignored by literary scholars for the past 100 years. Much of this dismissal originated with a few influential modernists who felt Galsworthy's work did not fit their vision of modern literature. However, recent scholarship in modernism has widened the field of authors and offers a broader understanding of the period. This thesis, using a more nuanced view of modernism, examines Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* – with particular attention on its sequential publication. In the *Saga*, Galsworthy marries sequential publication with historical fiction in innovative ways: Begun before World War I, in the heyday of the British Empire, and completed in the aftermath of the War, the *Saga*'s sequential publication provides a fascinating look at the effect of cultural trauma on an entire generation.

Introduction

Completed in 1922, John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* has never been out of print; it was recognized by the Nobel Committee in 1932 as a literary masterpiece; it inspired two significant and successful television mini-series in 1967 and in 2002-03. Its popularity and recognition suggest Galsworthy is worthy of study, yet he has been generally ignored by literary scholars. This dismissal is mainly rooted in a tradition begun by a few influential modernist writers who had a particular vision for the canonization of modernism, and who did not feel that Galsworthy's work fit that vision. Compared to the more striking innovations of high modernist writers, Galsworthy's work seems conventional. This perception led to his dismissal as "old-fashioned," and the sequential publication of the *Saga* as mercenary. Using a broader and more nuanced understanding of modernism, however, this thesis assesses Galsworthy's work and reveals him to be a genuinely original writer and an early modernist, who rewards attention as his work provides a more complete vision of the early twentieth-century literary landscape.

One key reason Galsworthy has been widely ignored is that writers who defined the canon of modernism, particularly Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, did not like him. They actively denigrated him and his work. Woolf's most serious blow to Galsworthy's literary afterlife was her 1923 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." In it she clearly sets forth the battle lines: "I will suggest that we range Edwardians and Georgians [or modernists] into two camps; Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, and Mr. Galsworthy I will call Edwardians; Mr. Forster, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Strachey, Mr. Joyce, and Mr. Eliot I will call the Georgians" (320). Later in her essay, Woolf explains the key difference between the Edwardian and the Georgian camps centers on the writer's interest "in

character in itself; or in the book itself” (327). While Georgian writers found that “everything was inside the book, nothing outside,” Edwardians were always requiring the audience to reach beyond the book (327). The Edwardian book was incapable of standing on its own, but required the audience to take some form of action to complete the book. This incomplete nature of Edwardian literature marked it away from more modern, Georgian, works.

In creating this distinction between Edwardian and Georgian writers, Woolf established a false dichotomy of early twentieth century literature that gives preference to the Georgians. Literary scholars have adhered to this hierarchy for nearly a century, giving far more attention to the modernists than to Edwardians. Even Galsworthy’s admirers adhere to this bias; take for example Walter Kidd. In his book on British winners of the Nobel Literary Prize (1973), Kidd attempts to justify Galsworthy’s award. However, near the conclusion of his essay, he surrenders to the tradition of denigrating Galsworthy’s work: “At the time the award seemed an appropriate culmination to an exceptionally successful literary career. As novelist, playwright, essayist, and short-story writer, Galsworthy had earned an international reputation as one of the important literary masters of the twentieth century” (165). By conditioning his praise with the qualifying remark, “at the time,” Kidd implies that the Committee was shortsighted in their award: “Following his death in 1933, his reputation began a sharp and steady decline. Nearly four decades have passed, and there has been little serious critical interest in his work. The generally accepted view remains: Galsworthy is hopelessly dated. The eclipse has been almost total” (165-66). Kidd then enumerates Galsworthy’s perceived shortcomings,

which include an over-inflated reputation, old-fashioned technique and style, and limited range and subject matter.

It is remarkable how Kidd's evaluation is simple summary of Desmond MacCarthy's obituary article on Galsworthy in *The Sunday Times* in 1933. MacCarthy, a literary critic with ties to the Bloomsbury Group, though his circle of friends extended much further, writes: "Galsworthy is most curious in that there was with him a wider gap between merit and reputation than with the others [world famous contemporaries]. It was not that his merits were small, but that his reputation was colossal... He was a very good writer of the second class who had the renown of a master, a genius, an artist" (para. 3). The most serious deficiency in Galsworthy's work, according to MacCarthy, was his lack of character construction. "His characters were drawn with admirable clearness, but he seemed more interested in them as 'cases' than as individuals. The temptation to which he yielded as creator was to think more about the representative value of his characters than about character itself" (para. 9). The emphasis on character can be a major point of separation into the modernist and non-modernist camps. Robert Caserio observes in his discussion of "various modernisms" in *The Novel in England, 1900-1950* that many modernists like Woolf were interested in pursuing character in an atemporal sense, but Galsworthy's characters did not behave that way. Rather, his characters "become more and more graspable, during the unfolding of his novel-series, as ephemeral functions of something beyond individuated centers of consciousness" (154). Yet, as we expand the idea of modernism to include various interpretations of character beyond the atemporal sense preferred by Woolf and similar writers to include its fairly opposite alternative, the

historical, we find that Galsworthy's use of character, particularly of repetition, becomes its own type of experimentation in character development.¹

The faulty either/or argument forcing authors into Edwardian or modernist camps established by Woolf is finally being challenged. Lynne Hapgood recognizes in her essay, "Transforming the Victorian" (2000), that "Virginia Woolf's categorization of Edwardian and Georgian writers which treated Edwardians as Victorian blast survivors" has been deeply engrained into the scholarly psyche (23). She argues that the relegation of the Edwardians to the dust heap of literary history is a tragedy of pride rather than of literary failings. Hapgood reports that Woolf's reflections in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" were not the result of careful, considered study and reflection; rather, "she was stung into making them by Arnold Bennett's review of *Jacob's Room* (1922) in which he praised the book's originality and exquisite style but criticized the characters who 'do not vitally survive in the mind because the author has been obsessed by details of originality and cleverness'" (29). In response, Woolf lashed out at key "establishment" authors, launching her literary theory as an act of vengeance, not contemplated scholarly debate. We see this, as Hapgood observes, if we follow the chronology of Woolf's argument because we stumble in the "actual contemporaneity of realist and modernist writers and the synchronicity of many of their literary productions" (23). A brief examination of early twentieth century writers reveals the problem: Yeats, Joyce, Woolf, Wells, Galsworthy, Eliot, and Bennett were all Edwardian in chronology. However, Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett have been designated "as Victorians lingering on in a state of Edwardian life-in-death to be succeeded by the Georgians and modernists; that is Yeats, Joyce, Woolf and

¹ This idea is developed further in Chapter 3.

T.S. Eliot” (23). To rectify the resulting holes in twentieth-century scholarship that stemmed from Woolf’s essay, Hapgood suggests that early twentieth-century works should be viewed a continuum – changing over time – and not in the old/new dichotomy. In this light, new writers emerge – “inheritors of literary activity in the 1890s (many of them also contributors to it) which transformed genres and created new ones” (31). From this perspective, *The Forsyte Saga* seems transformative in its consideration of social effects and changes during the late Victorian and post-World War I era. As Hapgood notes: “If readers are prepared to allow Galsworthy a voice, they can more easily appreciate the style and complexity of the Edwardian response to the modern and crossovers which are part of the artistic evolution of the novel from 1880 to the present day” (33). Indeed, if given a voice, one sees Galsworthy anticipating modernist, even post-modernist, techniques and themes.

A secondary problem that has led to scholarly neglect of Galsworthy’s work is the sequential publication that caused the story of the Forsytes to grow into that unwieldy monster known as *The Forsyte Chronicles*, an umbrella term for the nine novels and six short stories that form three trilogies, of which *The Forsyte Saga* comprises the first. As book after book in the *Chronicles* arrived between 1918 and 1933, critics became flummoxed as to how to address the vast narrative and, “demonstrating considerable critical fatigue with Galsworthy and the Forsytes,” the works soon were ignored (Gindin 521).

The *Saga* began almost accidentally with the first novel, *The Man of Property*, published in 1906. This novel satirizes the wealthy British upper-middle class, of which Galsworthy was a member, during the late 1880s. The book received some praise, but

had only modest sales, and Galsworthy abandoned the Forsytes until 1918 when he published “Indian Summer for a Forsyte,” in a collection of short stories, *Five Tales*. Galsworthy intended the short story to wrap up loose ends at the end of the first novel, but soon after writing the “interlude,” as the short story came to be called, Galsworthy embarked on the rest of the *Saga*. The second novel, *In Chancery* (1920) and another short story interlude, “Awakening,” followed quickly with the concluding novel, *To Let* (1921). According to tradition, Galsworthy had no intention of composing a saga when he began writing *The Man of Property* in 1906; rather, it came to him in a vision near the end of World War I with the writing of “Indian Summer.” Galsworthy perpetuates this myth in a 1921 letter to Harley Granville-Barker: “I think the July Sunday at Wingstone in 1918, when it suddenly came to me that I could go on with my Forsytes, and complete their history in two or more volumes with a link between, was the happiest day in my writing life” (Marrot 497). Yet, in a July 1905 letter to his editor, Edward Garnett, he speaks of writing about young Jolyon as a commentator through a series of three novels (Marrot 174-75). Clearly the idea of a long narrative with the Forsytes was in his mind for many years before he gained sufficient reputation to allow him to further his narrative about the Forsytes. Whatever the actual history behind his *Forsyte Chronicles*, in 1932 he received the Nobel Prize for literature “for his distinguished art of narration, which finds its highest form in *The Forsyte Saga*,” which actually refers to the larger *Forsyte Chronicles* (“John Galsworthy” 300).

To avoid some of the pitfalls of Galsworthy’s prolific creation, I focus solely on the first trilogy, *The Forsyte Saga*. This trilogy is the most important of the *Chronicles* because it is the foundation for the significant work that characterized Galsworthy’s

greatest achievement. A further benefit is that the trilogy's self-contained nature permits exploration of Galsworthy's techniques and themes independent of extra knowledge about numerous characters, branching plotlines, and extended timelines that is required to understand the later two trilogies. Moreover, the *Saga* is also sufficiently diverse and distinct as it contains the essence of the Forsytes by reaching back to the first generation and forward into the third generation. The scope of the other two trilogies is much narrower and does not provide the same generational experience.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore the importance of setting and the historicity of the *Saga*, with emphasis on the first novel, *The Man of Property*. I also examine the intricate relationship between satire and nostalgia, and the tragic results of Forsyteism – the acquisitive, possessive, and corruptive nature of mankind. Reflecting on the results of the apparent victory that Soames, the prosperous and possessive title character of the first novel, experiences at the end of the novel, Galsworthy observes that avoiding a positive ending “will make more impression on the public than any happy ending, and [be a] palpable defeat of the Forsytes” (Marrot 169). In making this observation, Galsworthy reveals his social and political goals to separate virtue and economic success to create a more equitable society.

In the second chapter, I focus on the legal issues raised by *In Chancery*, comparing and contrasting the divorce experiences of Winifred Forsyte Dartie, sister to Soames, and Irene Herron Forsyte, first wife to Soames. I examine Galsworthy's efforts to alter the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Act, the law still governing marital relationships until 1923, in order to be more just – to women as well as to men. In making this argument, Galsworthy anticipates the social and legal reforms of the later twentieth

century that eventually resulted in “no fault” divorces. I also discuss Galsworthy’s troublesome position as an activist and his occupation of the middle ground as modernists found his reform efforts either too active, or not enough.

In the final chapter, I turn towards the issue of sequential publication, focusing particularly on the third novel, *To Let*, and the development of Soames – described by St. John Irvine as Galsworthy’s “biggest creation” (Marrot 530). I explore Galsworthy’s artistic choice to have Soames remain a static character throughout the *Saga*, and the challenge of creating a sympathetic audience for this unlovable figure. When preparing to publish *The Man of Property*, Galsworthy wrote to his sister, Lilian: “I was very pleased that you felt sympathy with Soames. I have been very much afraid of not doing him justice” (Marrot 182). Ultimately, Galsworthy successfully makes Soames such a sympathetic character that many readers embrace him to the point of unjustly abusing Irene (Preface 6). I propose the creation of this effect is heavily dependent upon the sequential publication of the novels, which permits readers to grow with the family. The result is similar to the feeling expressed by Thomas Hardy in a 1921 letter to Galsworthy upon finishing *To Let*: “[Y]ou have made me feel sorry you have finished with the family. This is strange, considering that I do not (personally) like any of *its members* very much – except perhaps Jon – so that it must be owing to your handling of them that I regret you are going to tell us no more about them” (Marrot 510).

Galsworthy received compliments from many other literary contemporaries, including Joseph Conrad, who had high praise for Galsworthy’s narrative abilities. In an essay about *The Man of Property* he wrote: “The passages of high literary merit, so uniformly sustained as to escape the notice of the reader, expose the natural and logical

development of the story with a purposeful progression which is primarily satisfying to the intelligence, and ends by stirring the emotions” (125). However, in spite of the recognition he received during his lifetime, Galsworthy has fallen in the shadows. While he was disowned by some important modernists, his works in many ways are part of what they were hoping to achieve. This includes his way of re-envisioning history and his use of character within that context (Caserio 154). By reclaiming Galsworthy we are able to see a more panoramic vision of literary art in the early twentieth century and to appreciate his influence on subsequent generations, such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* or even Julian Fellowes’ creation of *Downton Abbey*. Galsworthy’s effect lingers, and it is time to recognize it.

Chapter 1

The Tragedy of a Forsyte Victory: Historicity, Modernism, and Nostalgia in *The Man of Property*

“[T]he question has been asked by one or two critics of standing – What right has the Historical Novel to exist at all?” observes Jonathan Nield in his *Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales* (1902). Nield’s question echoes through the deafening silence of the early twentieth century as critics continued to neglect English historical novels. Fortunately, through the work of Avrom Fleishman and other later critics, the question of the English historical novel has been resolved to show its remarkable influence upon literature. To show some of that influence, in this chapter I will examine the historical novel and its relationship to modernism using *The Man of Property*, the first novel of *The Forsyte Saga*. I begin with a brief sketch of the historical novel and explore how Galsworthy’s *Saga* fits into the genre. Next, I explore a central issue for modernists: the balancing of commerce and aestheticism by focusing on a key moment of conflict in the novel between Soames and Bosinney over the construction of the country house at Robin Hill. This discussion leads to an exploration of the tensions between satire and nostalgia with its echoes on Victorianism and modernism. Finally, I discuss nostalgia and its softening effect on the narrative, especially regarding the tragic results of Forsyteism.

Is *The Forsyte Saga* an Example of Historical Fiction?

When Avrom Fleishman wrote *The English Historical Novel* (1971), he was astonished to discover a substantial gap in the scholarship because no “full-length critical study of the English historical novel” seemed to exist (xiv). He asserts that this neglect of the English historical novel is a serious oversight by critics who have pursued the poetry

of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, but failed to “recognize that the historical themes and images of these poets are available as fiction as well,” thus encouraging expansion of critical work on modernist historical fiction (xviii). By reclaiming Galsworthy’s work as an example of early modernist historical fiction, we begin to realize some of Fleishman’s goal.

While Fleishman’s study of English historical fiction does work to fill some of the gap in the scholarship, it also creates biases of its own. For example, he concurs with Hugh Walpole’s 1932 essay on historical fiction that “the family-chronicle novel in the hands of a Bennett or a Galsworthy borders on the genre,” thus not quite qualifying as an example of a historical novel (xvi). Fleishman appears to support this marginalization of Galsworthy’s work because he mentions it only once in a passing reference to Irene as an example of late-Victorian womanhood that is “cruelly broken by the force of historical movements and men” (208). Perhaps Fleishman’s neglect of Galsworthy is understandable as *The Forsyte Saga* does not entirely fit his perception of a historical novel: “When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel’s characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel” (4). His more specific parameters require a novel to be set 40-60 years (two generations) in the past, outside of easily accessible living memory; involve historical moments of the public sphere, like wars and politics; and include at least one “real” historical personage (3).

At first glance, *The Forsyte Saga* does not meet most of Fleishman’s strictures; yet, Galsworthy’s family-chronicle is an example of historical fiction if we expand the parameters. For example, regarding the third point, Fleishman writes: “There is an

obvious theoretical difficulty in the status of ‘real’ personages in ‘invented’ fictions, but their presence is not a mere matter of taste. It is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel if it is to qualify as historical” (3). *The Man of Property* does not include a specific historical person that the characters interact with, but Galsworthy does use real people from his personal genealogy as the basis for his Forsytes. Indeed, Galsworthy carefully traced his family heritage for most of his life and reached back into his personal history to present the Forsytes with great accuracy (Gindin 16). The fictional account of his family lineage was so representative that it caused some concern. In a letter to his sister, Lilian, Galsworthy attempts to assuage her concerns about the obvious inspiration for his characters: “Apart from yourself, Mab [their younger sister], and Mother (who perhaps had better not read the book), who really knows enough or takes enough interest in us to make it more than a two days wonder that I should choose such a subject?” (Marrot 182). By expanding Fleishman’s concept of “real” historical people to include people who are not historical public figures, we afford greater flexibility to embrace the everyday nature of the past, a goal for some historical fiction like Galsworthy’s *Saga*. This type of historical fiction seeks to value the history of the ordinary, not just the prominent.

A second important expansion of Fleishman’s boundaries involves the setting. The novels of the *Saga* are not set two generations in the past; Galsworthy is writing of events within recent, living memory. However, Fleishman’s guidelines do not take into consideration the speeding up of time. The decades of the fin de siècle and the early twentieth century are an example of the rapid changes that altered the everyday nature of life. This speeding up of time to create a world that has dramatically and irrevocably

changed in the span of only one generation is a distinctive attribute of modernism. Many modernist artists were sensitive to the sense of rapid change that colored these decades and they incorporated it into their work. An example of this is the Futurist movement with their devotion to speed as seen in their manifesto where they praise “a new beauty: the beauty of speed.” Marinetti adds to this point: “Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.” While Galsworthy was not a Futurist, his work reflects a similar feeling of the driving nature of speed that resolves the differences between *The Forsyte Saga* as historical fiction and Fleishman’s restrictions for the genre.²

Modernist Tension: Commerce v. Aestheticism

Though set in Victorian England, Galsworthy was using his novel as a commentary upon the concerns of Edwardian England. In doing so, he is exploring the modernist interest in the conflict between aestheticism and commerce. Galsworthy illustrates this divergence in the relationship between Soames, a Forsyte who has broken with the family convention of city dwellers to build a country house, and Bosinney, his architect. Near the end of April, the shell of the house at Robin Hill is completed, and Soames visits with Bosinney about the accounts for the construction. As he looks over the books, Soames realizes that the project is £700 over budget. He instructs Bosinney to find a way to cut corners and bring down the costs: ““Take ten per cent off all around”” (*MofP* 107). Bosinney insists that he has already trimmed off every farthing that he possible can, but the overage is due to extras that fulfill aesthetic purposes rather than

² An example of this is Soames’ reflections on the numerous changes that have occurred within popular culture in general and to the Forsyte family in particular during the nineteenth century while watching Queen Victoria’s funeral procession in *In Chancery* (*IC* 567).

pragmatic ones. This explanation exasperates Soames, and the narrator interjects with the observation:

The qualities of both men had contributed to this not inconsiderable discrepancy. On the one hand, the architect's devotion to his idea, to the image of a house which he had created and believed in – had made him nervous of being stopped, or forced to use the make-shifts; on the other, Soames's not less true and whole-hearted devotion to the very best article that could be obtained for money, had rendered him averse to believing that things worth thirteen shillings could not be bought with twelve. (*MofP* 108)

The argument between the two can be seen as an example of modernist conflict with earlier traditional movements. Bosinney is creating a work of art, regardless of costs. He strongly feels that the house should be an example of art for art's sake. He demonstrates this in a letter to Soames regarding the question of decorating the newly constructed house. Bosinney insists that if he is to decorate the house, which he would prefer not to do in light of the conflict over money he has already experienced with Soames, then Soames must grant Bosinney a "free hand" in decorating. The narrator observes: "The exact and immediate cause of this letter cannot, of course, be told, though it is not improbable that Bosinney may have been moved by some sudden revolt against his position towards Soames – that eternal position of Art towards Property" (*MofP* 143). On the other hand, Soames, though he recognizes aesthetic value, is reluctant to pay full price for it. This position can be seen as Victorian because it mirrors the attitude of imperialism – to get more from the colonies than they cost to maintain.³

³ The link between Soames' acquisitive nature and imperialism is even more dramatically demonstrated in the second novel, *In Chancery*, with his opinions about the Boer War.

However, in even recognizing the value of Bosinney's progressive architecture, Soames also occupies a middle ground between Victorian and modernist sensibilities. This can best be demonstrated by considering Soames' hobby of collecting paintings. Leonee Ormond observes in her study of Soames' fictional art collection that the older generation of Forsytes' taste is in accord with Victorian sensibilities about art: "Apart from family miniatures, they buy still-lives by Hondecoeter and Snyders, John Robinson drawings, an 'oily masterpiece' called *Dutch Fishing Boats at Sunset*, and doubtful works by Turner and Morland" (753). Galsworthy demonstrates this in the scene regarding a collection of marble statues Swithin had recently acquired and was prominently displaying during a dinner party. Made from Italian marble, the statues included six nude females pointing towards a seventh, central nude female, who was pointing at herself in such a way that "gave the observer a very pleasant sense of her extreme value" (*MofP* 58). Old Jolyon, who has demonstrated aesthetic taste earlier in the novel, asks his younger brother, Swithin, about the cost of the collection, proclaiming it not worth even half the amount Swithin paid. An argument ensues, finally solved by James, who appeals to Bosinney:

'Now what do *you* say, Mr. Bosinney? You're an architect; you ought to know all about statues and things!'

Every eye was turned upon Bosinney; all waited with a strange, suspicious look for his answer.

And Soames, speaking for the first time, asked:

'Yes, Bosinney, what do you say?'

Bosinney replied coolly:

‘The work is a remarkable one.’

His words were addressed to Swithin, his eyes smiled slyly at old Jolyon; only Soames remained unsatisfied.

‘Remarkable for what?’

‘For its naiveté.’

The answer was followed by an impressive silence; Swithin alone was not sure whether a compliment was intended. (*MofP* 59)

Bosinney’s pronouncement about the statuary is a modernist response. He subtly denies the collection any aesthetic value and condemns it as vulgar, ostentatious. The only person who is unsure about the denigration of the piece is Swithin, whose aesthetic taste is clearly questionable, even for a Victorian. In addition, it is interesting that Soames is the only Forsyte who remains unsatisfied with Bosinney’s original enigmatic response and demands further enlightenment. Soames stands at the crossroads between the two aesthetic tastes, and his curiosity is aroused by Bosinney’s pronouncement; he needs further clarification to ensure that his own aesthetic understanding is in line with the new trends of artistic value.

Soames is interested in keeping up with the forward art trends, yet Ormond comments that though he “escapes from [the] family taste in art, ... he remains very much a Forsyte in business” (753). Unlike Bosinney who values aesthetic quality above monetary considerations, Soames strives to balance the two points. Again this is demonstrated most clearly with his art collection. As an amateur collector, he is always interested in the offerings of art galleries. Truly, he purchases so many paintings that he maintains a room separate from his house, which is “full of canvases, stacked against the

wall, which he had no room to hang” (*MofP* 60). He retreats to this room on Sunday afternoons “to spend hours turning the pictures to the light, examining the marks on their backs, and occasionally making notes” (*MofP* 61). Ormond observes: “His weakness for beauty conflicts with his cautious flair for money-making and both qualities are present in his collecting proclivities” (753). For Soames, the beauty of his art collection is never fully removed from its value on the market. Ormond notes that this is present in the later novels as artistic tastes transform in the post-World War I era: “Soames, with his eye firmly fixed on the market, is quite prepared to make the progression from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism, whatever his aesthetic reservations” (754).

In some ways, this conflict between beauty and money – between Bosinney and Soames, reflects the larger conflict between modernism and Victorianism in multiple artistic expressions. Ormond observes that while Galsworthy’s descriptions of Soames’ collection in the first two novels benefit from hindsight, the last book of the series, *To Let*, is more contemporary and reveals Galsworthy’s understanding of value in modernist tastes. She comments that Soames’ interest in French art anticipates Roger Fry’s 1912 exhibition of Impressionist art. “Virginia Woolf, Fry’s friend and biographer, scorned Galsworthy as a novelist, but Galsworthy was no less aware than the Bloomsbury Group of the importance of Post-Impressionists” (754). If we carry this over into literary art, then we can also argue that Galsworthy was not unaware of the changes in literature through the modernist movement. Indeed, perhaps his decision to write a traditional three-decker Victorian novel was his attempt to match the topic of his historical novel with the format. This could be viewed as an innovative, artistic choice; however, his

continued use of the form makes it difficult to apply the argument to future novels in the collection.

Despite the stagnation in format for the later novels in the larger *Forsyte Chronicles*, the point remains that Galsworthy, especially as may be demonstrated with his early novels in *The Forsyte Saga*, was not ignorant of evolving artistic trends. Another example of this may be seen in his use of satire and nostalgia, which allows us to consider the tension between these two, particularly as seen in *The Man of Property*, as an extension of the conflict between outdated Victorianism and modernism. The two points wrestle for dominance within the novel and within the larger Edwardian culture of early modernism.

Conflict between Satire and Nostalgia in *The Man of Property*

The nostalgic approach often encounters sharp criticism in the twentieth century. John J. Su, in his book, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, traces the evolution of attitudes – none favorable – toward nostalgia. “What began in the seventeenth century as a physiological disease had become in the twentieth century a social ailment that leads to an obsession with kitsch and heritage in its most benign forms and fascism in its most extreme versions” (1). Su further observes that despite recent scholarly interest in memory by humanists, nostalgia itself is often denigrated as “inauthentic or commodified experiences inculcated by capitalist or nationalist interests” (2).

Indeed, the association of nostalgia with commercialism was present when *The Man of Property* was published, and forms the basis for D.H. Lawrence’s criticism of Galsworthy. In an essay on art and literature, Lawrence writes that Galsworthy began *The*

Man of Property with the promise of a great satirical novel, but argues that it fails because “the author has not the courage to carry it through” (542). He claims that Galsworthy might have performed the work of a social surgeon to cut out sentimentality, but, instead, Galsworthy applies a poultice of sentimentality and makes the “corruption” worse (542-43). Included in this condemnation of sentimentality is an aversion to nostalgia, which often has the effect of sugarcoating the past rather than exposing it, as Lawrence desires. The later novels struck Lawrence as even more nostalgic than the first, and Lawrence summarily dismisses them with the comment: “The later novels are purely commercial, and, if it had not been for the early novels, of no importance. They are popular, they sell well, and there’s the end of them” (549).

Su argues against this condemnatory attitude towards nostalgia and observes that over the course of the twentieth century, the prevalence of the nostalgic story increased, rather than decreased. Instead of viewing nostalgia as a cash-generating machine for an author, Su points out that “a growing number of cultural critics argue that nostalgia is one of the defining features of the postwar era” (3). Viewed through this lens, Galsworthy’s nostalgic explorations, especially in the later novels that Lawrence particularly despises, anticipate future literary trends. While some modernist authors wanted to consign Galsworthy to the irrelevant past, we can now see him as reaching beyond the early modernists to presage some of the work of later twentieth century British authors, such as Evelyn Waugh, Kazuo Ishiguro, or Ian McEwan.

While Soames and Bosinney represent the conflict between commerce and art we explored previously, Old Jolyon (the Forsyte family patriarch) encapsulates the struggle between nostalgia and satire in *The Man of Property*. At times Old Jolyon seems a

stereotypical old man who prefers the past to the present; this creates a situation ripe for satire even as it simultaneously gives way to nostalgic reflections. Take, for example, chapter two, “Old Jolyon Goes to the Opera.” The scene opens late in the afternoon of the engagement party for his granddaughter, June. The old man, fatigued by his “at home” party with his extended family, is relaxing with a favored cigar. He falls asleep in his chair, alone, by the cold, empty fireplace. He stirs as the cigar slips from his fingers to the hearth, then as he rises and approaches his cigar cabinet, the scent of his cigars brings memories, sharp and clear, of old friends and past experiences. He falls into a brown study as he reflects back on his rise in fortune as a tea merchant: “He had worked at that business! Men did work in those days! These young pups hardly knew the meaning of the word. He had gone into every detail, known everything that went on, sometimes sat up all night over it” (*MofP* 34). In this moment, though we respect Old Jolyon for his work and pity him for his acute loneliness, we also view his conceited thoughts as trite, allowing satire to prevail.

At other times, the tension between satire and nostalgia becomes muddled. If we continue to follow Old Jolyon through this evening, we depart from Galsworthy’s satiric tone and venture on a seemingly nostalgic journey during a night on the town, including dinner at Old Jolyon’s club and a visit to the opera. When Old Jolyon arrives at his club, he is overcome with memories of many similar evenings, following the same itinerary, which he spent with his son, Young Jolyon, or Jo. Recalling those evenings, “[Old Jolyon] ordered dinner, and sat down in the very corner, at the very table perhaps...at which he and Young Jolyon used to sit twenty-five years ago, when he was taking the latter to Drury Lane during his holidays” (*MofP* 37). The scene becomes poignant as

Galsworthy uses this opportunity to share back-story about the relationship between Old and Young Jolyon, including the events that led to their estrangement. Old Jolyon's feelings of loss and longing for the past are interrupted by the shortcomings of reality. Old Jolyon suddenly feels dissatisfied: "His dinner tasted flat. His pint of champagne was dry and bitter stuff, not like the Veuve Clicquots of old days" (*MofP* 37). The nostalgia-tinged moment fades as the intervening bitterness of reality cuts through the memories and becomes tinged with satire as he again falls into stereotype, preferring "the Veuve Clicquots of old days."

Despite his disappointment in his lackluster dinner at the club, Old Jolyon continues his evening of melancholic reflection as he makes his way to the opera house. In this scene, nostalgia predominates with only shadows of satire on the edges. For example, Galsworthy dwells on Old Jolyon's opera clothes, including an ancient opera hat that "looked like an emblem of greater days" and "an old pair of very thin lavender kid gloves smelling strongly of Russian leather" (*MofP* 38). Galsworthy is gently satirizing this old man for his old-fashioned clothes and his preference for the way things used to be. However, there is also a layer of sadness to Old Jolyon's night on the town that highlights his isolated state. Time has a hurtful edge. For example, Old Jolyon is pleased when he approaches the ticket booth at the opera house and is recognized. Though he has been away from the theater for many years, he is still known. It is a comfort to him that while so many things change and disappoint, the man in the ticket booth still recalls the grandeur of Old Jolyon Forstye. Riding high from this moment of recognition, he marches into the opera house "like an old war-horse to battle," and takes his seat in the gallery (*MofP* 38).

Folding his opera hat, he sat down, drew out his lavender gloves in the old way, and took up his glasses for a long look around the house. Dropping them at last on his folded hat, he fixed his eyes on the curtain. More poignantly than ever he felt that it was all over and done with him. Where were all the women, the pretty women, the house used to be so full of? Where was that old feeling in the heart as he waited for one of those great singers? Where that sensation of the intoxication of life and his own power to enjoy it all? (*MofP* 39).

There is an *ubi sunt* quality, an ancient literary device for mourning, to Old Jolyon's reflections as he sets down his opera glasses. The repetition of questions about the thing that is missing highlights its absence and allows Old Jolyon to mourn not only the long ago days when life was so pleasant, but also all that he has lost, including his relationship with his son and his declining social relevancy.

Ultimately, nostalgia prevails in *The Forsyte Saga*, despite only traces of that future victory in *The Man of Property*. The struggle against nostalgia in this first novel reflects Galsworthy's intent in writing the story of the Forsytes, which he intended to be satirical. His initial impulse was very much in line with Lawrence's hopes for a deeply cutting lampoon of the upper-middle class, especially in the conclusion of the novel. However, the heavy satire in the initial draft caused Galsworthy's editor, Edward Garnett, to send a lengthy letter of criticism with an emphasis on the original conclusion wherein Bosinney commits suicide after learning of Soames' assault on Irene. Garnett wrote: "You've overdone a little the anti-British, middle-class feeling. It's a little *too* one-sided, a little too biased, a little too semi-caricature in these last chapters" (Marrott 167). This assessment sparks a response from Galsworthy, who repeats his desire to "defeat

Forsyteism” – his term to describe the overwhelming desire to acquire and possess property of all forms at the expense of emotional, moral, and aesthetic principles – yet, Galsworthy also acknowledges that in his enthusiasm, he may have been “a touch burlesque” in his treatment of the British middle class (169). His decision to alter his ending and to tone down the satire changes the ending of *The Man of Property* in a way that affects the perception of earlier chapters of the novel and the course of the series. By scaling back the satire, the door for nostalgia opens a crack in this first novel, and Galsworthy continues in a slightly nostalgic mode through the remainder of the work on the Forsytes. The intricate interweaving of nostalgia with other narrative elements combines in a way that eventually earns Galsworthy praise from the Nobel Prize Committee for his ability to capture the conflicting feelings and thoughts of an earlier era and to portray them in an artistic way. They observe Galsworthy’s transformation over the course of writing about the Forsytes: “The radical critic of culture [Galsworthy] rises by degrees to a greater objectivity in his appreciation and to a more liberal view of the purely human” (303). They specifically cite Galsworthy’s treatment of Soames, who transforms from an object of satire in the first novel to one of respect and, eventually, of sympathy. From the Committee’s reaction, it becomes clear that nostalgia can be viewed as a progressive, positive attribute in a narrative.

Old Jolyon and Nostalgia in a Progressive Way

Literary critics have traditionally denigrated nostalgia, as have psychologists, who labeled it an avoidance mechanism, but this attitude is changing. A recent study by psychologist Krystine Batcho (2013) suggests that rather than being a maladaptive escapist device, nostalgia is a helpful coping mechanism. For her study, Batcho

developed a test that generated nostalgic feelings in the test-takers by asking questions about their childhood. These nostalgia-inducing questions were followed by questions involving hypothetical stressful situations in which the subjects were asked how they would cope with the situations. Independent of the happiness or lack of happiness that subjects felt in childhood, those who were nostalgia-prone were able to use their feelings of nostalgia to help them manage current stressful situations. This coping occurs, Batcho explains, because personal nostalgia, “a longing for one’s remembered past,” provides people with the necessary strength and skills to cope with current crises (357). Memories of surviving a difficult situation in the past improve one’s ability to handle new stressful situations in the present. The strength afforded by nostalgia to adapt to new problems comes from “an enhanced sense of self and social connectedness. Motivating the rehearsal of past experiences, nostalgic yearning may promote the sense of ownership of thoughts, actions, and feelings across time and change” (356).

While Galsworthy’s focus for *The Man of Property* was a satirical reflection on the upper middle class, we can see how applying Batcho’s work to the novel does transform nostalgia into a force for good. Returning to Old Jolyon’s *ubi sunt* reflections in the gallery of the opera house, we see how his nostalgic reflections permit him to unite with his past, and acknowledging the feeling of loss in the face of inexorable change helps connect him with the past while also assisting him to adjust to the present. The sense of mourning that accompanies *ubi sunt* recitations allows Old Jolyon to express feelings of loss and loneliness that have only a superficial relationship to the lack of pretty women at the opera. These feelings substitute for the more immediate crises of his changing relationship with June and his estranged relationship with his son, Jo.

In addition, Batcho reports, nostalgia “has been shown to occur in response to loneliness...and to serve a restorative function by increasing perceived social support during loneliness” (356). Old Jolyon is unquestionably lonely in this opera scene, as the emptiness of his house had propelled him to a nostalgic night out. Old Jolyon’s thoughts throughout his evening at the opera illustrate Batcho’s findings that “nostalgia-prone people are more likely to reflect on their past and its relation to their present identity. Such reflection may provide consolation that comes from appreciation of the transience of time and circumstance, and it may bring to mind adaptive coping options learned during a favorable past” (356). Old Jolyon is facing a crisis when he decides to attend the opera – June’s engagement has distanced her from him. This estrangement with June, a natural effect of altered family dynamics, leads Old Jolyon to reflect upon his troubled relationship with her father, Jo, which impels him to do something to alter his relationship with his son. Perhaps Galsworthy wrote this nostalgic scene with a reflection on the similarity between the two troubled relationships that fill Old Jolyon’s life. The *ubi sunt* moment in the opera certainly leads Old Jolyon to make specific changes to repair his relationship with Jo.

Soon after leaving the opera house, Old Jolyon’s carriage passes by his son’s club. Suddenly, “the yearning that had been secretly with him the whole evening prevailed. He called to the driver to stop. He would go in and ask if Jo still belonged there” (*MofP* 41). After learning that Jo is present, he asks if his son will come see him. Jo obliges and even accepts a carriage ride with his father to return to Old Jolyon’s house. After arriving home, Old Jolyon consciously shares with Jo the news of June’s engagement and less consciously shares his feelings of loneliness. In searching for a

sympathetic ear, Old Jolyon gains emotional social support and is able to express his emotions, common healthy coping mechanisms that nostalgia-prone people often employ (Batcho 359-60). By reconnecting with estranged family, Galsworthy seems to indicate that nostalgic reflections can lead to positive changes.

Yet, the visit with Jo was only a temporary fix to the larger problem of June's impending marriage and permanent departure from Old Jolyon's house. This is difficult for Old Jolyon because he is socially oriented, particularly favoring the company of young people. As the narrative progresses from the night at the opera, June's continued lengthy absences due to long trips with her fiancé again induce the crisis of loneliness for Old Jolyon. His empty, lonely days begin to accumulate, creating a feeling that "[June] has left him stranded in his great house, with a parcel of servants, and not a soul to speak to from morning to night" (*MofP* 83). The effect of isolation is physically evident in Old Jolyon: "the desolation of his spirit; the lines down his face deepening, his eyes day by day looking forth with the melancholy that sat so strangely on a face that was wont to be strong and serene" (*MofP* 83). At this moment of crisis, Old Jolyon returns to the solace he received on the night at the opera and takes a trip to a run-down part of town to unexpectedly visit Jo, his second wife, Helene, and their two children: Jolyon (known as Jolly) and Holly.

Based on his experience from the night at the opera, Old Jolyon knows he can reach out to Jo for social connection and emotional support, and he also knows that forming a relationship with his two additional grandchildren will help him cope with the distance that has entered his relationship with June. Galsworthy explicitly details this switch of alliances:

And Nature with her quaint irony began working in him one of her strange revolutions, following her cyclic laws into the depths of his heart. And that tenderness for little children, that passion for the beginnings of life which had once made him to forsake his son and follow June, now worked in him to forsake June and follow these littler things. (*MofP* 86)

It seems that Old Jolyon is caught up in a cycle of forsaking the aging for the young, yet he also seems to be using the past to connect with the present – a common feature of historical fiction. This feature, seen by tracing Old Jolyon’s shifting alliances, allows Galsworthy to also explore the effect of nostalgia upon present events, using the past to cope with the present – using Victorian attitudes and perceptions to comment upon modern changes and events that might be too sensitive to discuss forthrightly.

While some rightly criticize nostalgia for its sentimentality and inability to properly address problems, we see in this case that it is helpful. By indulging in nostalgia, Old Jolyon finds the needed strength to cope with the abandonment he felt from June and, even further, to reconcile with his son. This strength leads to further action towards the end of the novel. Having restored his relationship with Jo, Old Jolyon desires to share a house with him and his young family. An interesting wrinkle occurs when he informs June of the forthcoming change. She states that she is fine with it, but there is one small thing... “and with her cheek pressing against his knee, old Jolyon knew at once that this something would be no trifle: As he was going to buy a house in the country, would he not – to please her – buy that splendid house of Soames’s at Robin Hill?” (*MofP* 282). This seed of thought gains fruition as Old Jolyon slowly favors the idea of taking Robin Hill from Soames and giving it to his son, Jo. This would be a fantastic victory over

James and all the other Forsytes, who had been so quick to reject Jo. Moreover, Old Jolyon had heard on “Forsyte ‘Change,” the network of family gossip, some comments that the house was very fine, but a bit “too artistic.” All these desires: to please June, to get revenge on James and the other Forsytes, and to elevate his son to be “a man of property,” work on Old Jolyon and propel him to purchase Robin Hill (*MofP* 284). With Old Jolyon, a forward-looking Victorian aesthete, in control of Robin Hill, the conflicts between aestheticism and commerce, as well as Victorianism and modernism, are resolved. Nostalgia is seen as the catalyst for a progressive disposition toward the future, not a regressive muddle that critics often cite as its fatal flaw.

Victorian Triumph in the Conclusion of *The Man of Property*?

Though Old Jolyon is able to resolve the tensions between commerce and aestheticism surrounding Robin Hill, the divergence as manifest between Soames and Bosinney is not so fortuitous. At the mid-point of the novel, Old Jolyon sensing the possible consequences of the growing schism between Soames and Bosinney, asks Jo to serve as a mediator between Soames and Bosinney. Jo is an ideal go-between because he is an aesthetically minded watercolorist with strong modernist tendencies, yet this is balanced by the equally strong Victorian commercial pull of his Forsyte nature. In a brief meeting, Jo advises Bosinney to use caution when interfering with a Forsyte and property issues, but Bosinney, insulted by Jo’s advice, rejects the information shared and the opportunity to have an ally between the separate camps of the aesthetically motivated versus the financially motivated. The interchange between the two is important because it sets up the last part of the novel where Bosinney attempts to withstand the Forsytes and is run over, figuratively and literally.

The climax of the novel brings the conflict between these points – Victorianism and modernism, commerce and aestheticism – back to the forefront. Through the perspective of George Forsyte, a cousin to Soames and Jo, we find Bosinney in the modern Underground, learning from Irene that Soames has “at last asserted his rights and acted like a man” by raping his wife (249). Bosinney reacts strangely, perhaps drunkenly, to the news. George follows Bosinney as he staggers away from Irene, who remains on the Underground, and up to the densely foggy streets above.

Bosinney walked right out into the thoroughfare – a vast muffled blackness, where a man could not see six paces before him; where, all around, voices or whistles mocked the sense of direction; and sudden shapes came rolling slow upon them; and now and then a light showed like a dim island in an infinite dark sea (*MofP* 255).

Victorian London was notorious for its blinding fogs that were magnified in density as they coupled with the smoke from coal fires. This murky darkness is a sharp contrast to the clarity of the modern Underground system that Bosinney has abandoned. Reeling through the Victorian darkness, Bosinney’s modernist attitudes towards aestheticism and love have been viciously assaulted by Soames’ action. He has underestimated the power of Forsytes’ sense of property and willingness to do whatever it takes to maintain control of that property. In this stunned condition, he accidentally falls or deliberately steps in front of the wheels of an omnibus carriage.

Later the next day, the police seek out the Forystes to identify Bosinney’s body. As they travel to the morgue, it is suggested that Bosinney may have committed suicide. The Forsytes are shocked at this idea; they reject this proposal because the Forsytes

cannot accept this “final renunciation of property” (*MofP* 288). Instead, they believe it was an act of Fate that caused Bosinney to fall beneath those carriage wheels. “In their hearts they would even feel it an intervention of Providence, a retribution – had not Bosinney endangered their two most priceless possessions, the pocket and the hearth?” (*MofP* 292). With this feeling of Divine Justice being served, Soames returns to his house – and his wife. “She had come back like an animal wounded to death, not knowing where to turn, not knowing what she was doing” (*MofP* 294). Though initially conflicted about what to do with her return, Soames quickly reasserts his control over her life with that remarkable ease afforded a Victorian husband, who ruled by the law of coverture.

In the concluding scene of the novel, Young Jolyon, sent by his father to offer Irene an escape from Soames, meets Soames at the door of his house. Jo asks for Irene but is told that she will not see anyone.

Young Jolyon’s glance shot past him into the hall, and Soames turned. There in the drawing-room doorway stood Irene, her eyes wild and eager, her lips were parted, her hands outstretched. In sight of both men that light vanished from her face; her hands dropped to her sides; she stood like stone.

Soames spun round, and met his visitor’s eyes, and at the look he saw in them, a sound like a snarl escaped him. He drew his lips back in the ghost of a smile.

‘This is my house,’ he said; ‘I manage my own affairs. I’ve told you once – I tell you again; we are not at home.’

And in young Jolyon’s face he slammed the door. (*MofP* 296-97)

The final picture of Irene and Soames together seems a villain's victory, a triumph for possessive, materialistic, outdated attitudes towards hearth and pocketbook. The front door slams shut in the face of modernist ideals, especially for women's rights.

Galsworthy specifically chose this image to close his novel because he wanted to win the sympathy of readers against Forsyteism. He saw that "the only way to cap the purpose of the book, which was to leave property as *an empty shell* – is to leave the victory to Soames" (Marrot 169). The tragedy of Soames' triumph was meant to inspire a negative reaction against the sense of property and Victorianism. It is a pro-modernist statement. However, rather than directly proclaiming this in his novel, Galsworthy uses historical fiction as a screen to project his more contemporary arguments about Edwardian social conventions. It is a powerful condemnation of Victorianism, not a reinforcement that some critics, like Woolf and Lawrence, claimed he was endorsing. Galsworthy returns to historical fiction in order to challenge Forsyteism even more forcefully in the second novel, *In Chancery*. There Galsworthy directly addresses the social and political norms that make possible, and even natural, the concluding image of Irene desperately trapped at her hearthside with her rapist husband.

Chapter 2

“A Disgusting Sanctimonious Law”:
Galsworthy’s Argument Against the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Act

“A sensitive man like Mr. Galsworthy could scarcely step out of doors without barking his shins upon some social iniquity,” comments Virginia Woolf in her 1923 essay, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” In making this criticism, Woolf is arguing that Galsworthy’s emphasis on the need for social change makes him an outdated Edwardian. In her denigration of Galsworthy’s political activism, Woolf simultaneously complains that Galsworthy is old fashioned and out of touch with modern society, and is also too focused on attempting to alter the course of future realities. On the other hand, another modernist, D.H. Lawrence, criticized Galsworthy for not using his literature in a more powerful way to effect social change. Lawrence writes about the satire in the first novel, *The Man of Property*: “The greatness of the book rests in its new and sincere and amazingly profound satire. It is the ultimate satire on modern humanity, and done from the inside, with really consummate skill and sincere creative passion, something quite new...And then it fizzles out” (542). Unfortunately, Galsworthy occupied the middle ground between the two poles argued by Lawrence and Woolf, and this has caused him to fall into the shadows of scholarship for subsequent generations. This no-man’s-land between Woolf and Lawrence was compounded by the uncomfortable relationship with modernism that Galsworthy struggled with during the latter part of his career (Hargreaves 139). Though rejected by many critics, following the lead of Woolf or Lawrence, or both, it is now clear that Galsworthy was far ahead of his time on many social issues of his day, ones that anticipate some of our current social conflicts, making the study of his works of continued importance. A clear example of this can be seen in the second novel of *The*

Forsyte Saga, his novel on gender issues and legal injustices, *In Chancery*. By writing *In Chancery*, Galsworthy criticized the legal system and its restrictions and paved the way for later legal reforms.

The novel focuses on the divorce laws as they currently stood in 1920, which adjudicated cases in light of the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Act. According to Ann Sumner Holmes in her article, “The Double Standard in the English Divorce Laws, 1857-1923,” when the 1857 law was first passed during the mid-Victorian era, it was revolutionary because it shifted the authority to grant divorces from ecclesiastical courts into the secular ones (602). While this was an important development in jurisprudence, it also contained some significant shortcomings, such as its declaration that the only ground for divorce was adultery. In addition, the law established a double standard between men and women who filed for divorce: a husband could divorce his wife solely on the grounds of infidelity, but a wife had to have further extenuating circumstances that compounded his adultery. These grounds included incest, bigamy, rape, sodomy, bestiality, cruelty, and desertion (without good excuse) for more than two years (602). The problems and shortcomings of the law were immediately apparent and were contested over the next fifty years. Indeed, by 1912, there was significant political agitation for change, but it was delayed by the death of the law’s sponsor, Lord Gorrell – the chairman of the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes – and then by World War I (615). By July 1918, Galsworthy had begun *In Chancery*, and the issue was again gaining attention and encouragement for change, although the reasons cited by the majority fighting for change differed from those that Galsworthy endorsed (Marrott 479n). Change did not come until 1923 when the law was altered to remove the controversial double standard,

allowing both husbands and wives to divorce solely on the grounds of adultery. However, this change was not to the level that Galsworthy had promoted in his novel. Legislation that permitted grounds for divorce other than adultery, specifically “no fault” or “incompatibility,” was not passed until 1969. Clearly, Galsworthy was anticipating and urging social changes far in advance of his contemporaries.

By setting his novel, *In Chancery*, in 1899, Galsworthy highlighted the need to put away the archaic Victorian double standard of the nineteenth century. He presents two different case studies to encourage an alteration in the divorce laws. One study focuses on the discriminatory double standard woven into the 1857 Act, which is resolved by a new Act passed in 1923: the case of *Dartie v. Dartie*. The second, *Forstye v. Forsyte*, argues in favor of legislative changes that will not be fully realized for nearly fifty more years: grounds for divorce other than adultery.

The Case of the Rotten Husband: *Dartie v. Dartie*

One of the greatest arguments against the inequality established by the 1857 Act was the implied endorsement it gave men for extramarital affairs. The Act was based on the premise that men were physically incapable of maintaining the same level of chastity as women, and thus a man’s adulterous behavior was more excusable than a woman’s (Nelson 37). In *The Forsyte Saga*, Montague Dartie embodies this pre-Victorian attitude. Galsworthy often refers to him with the slightly contemptuous nickname, “a man of the world,” drawing attention to his loose moral standards. An early example of Dartie’s corrupt moral outlook is provided in the first novel, *The Man of Property*, with his sexually tinged thoughts about his sister-in-law, Irene. With “his mouth water[ing],” Dartie surmises “and yet she could go far enough, he wouldn’t mind betting. He knew

women; they weren't made with soft eyes and figures like that for nothing..."(*MoP* 168).

In these comments, Dartie's immoral nature is revealed as a man who would lust after and chase another man's wife, even against her will. Moreover, the implication here is that Dartie, though married to Winifred for only seven years at this point, has already engaged in multiple extramarital affairs.

Compounding his sexual affairs, Dartie also lacks control in financial matters. He is addicted to gambling, but is terribly unlucky. This frustration is further aggravated by the terms of his marital agreement, created by his father-in-law, James, which ensures that only Forsytes handle the family money, restricting Dartie to what he can beg or borrow from Winifred (*IC* 358). He chafes under these restrictions until, with a self-destructive willfulness, he steals Winifred's pearls and uses them to pay a Spanish dancer. Upon her discovery of the missing pearls and Dartie's confession, Winifred denounces her husband as "a thief and a blackguard," which causes Dartie to react with violence (*IC* 360). He grabs his wife by the arm and twists it. Though tears of pain come to her eyes, Winifred does not complain, but waits for "a moment of weakness" to wrench her arm free from his grasp. Circling away from him to put the dining room table between them, she hisses at him: "You are the limit, Monty" (*IC* 360). She retreats to her room and contemplates the compensation Dartie received for her pearls.

Tired of being kept under the Forsyte thumb, and knowing that the Spanish dancer is leaving with her ballet company to go to Buenos Aires, Dartie decides that he will go with her. Winifred is shocked to find the next morning that Dartie has left her. She considers the ramifications of his actions. While Winifred has maintained the outdated role of the forgiving mid-Victorian wife, culturally bound by the double standard of the

1857 Act, her legal status in 1899 is quite different than it was for earlier women. For example, the culture and tradition of coverture received a fatal blow with the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which created a great shift in women's legal status as this new law granted women the right to own property independently of their husbands (Holmes 608). The quiet revolution of the 1882 Act is demonstrated by Winifred as she considers Dartie's departure. Her first thought upon discovering his departure was decidedly Forsytean: "Though he was 'the limit' he was yet her property, and for the life of her she could not but feel the poorer" (*IC* 362). This is an interesting variation of other marital relationships described in the *Saga*, as no other wife claims to own her husband in this same way. Perhaps this exception is unique because we do not see the thoughts of any other married woman who was born a Forsyte, or perhaps it is owing to Dartie's financial dependence upon Winifred, which is also an unusual situation in the *Saga*.

Soon after Dartie's pre-dawn departure, he sends a note, confirming his intention to start a new life. Winifred shows the note to her brother, and legal advisor, Soames. He independently confirms Dartie's exodus to Buenos Aires by visiting with George Forsyte, a cousin and Dartie's chief gambling companion, then he returns to Winifred to discuss the dirty details of divorce that bound a wife to the 1857 law. After relaying his discovery, he casually interrupts himself:

"By the way," he went on, "can you prove cruelty?"

"I don't know. What is cruelty?"

"Well, has he struck you or anything?"

Winifred shook herself, and her jaw grew square.

“He twisted my arm. Or would pointing a pistol count? Or being too drunk to undress himself, or – No – I can’t bring in the children.”

“No,” said Soames; “no. I wonder! Of course, there’s legal separation – We can get that.

But separation! Um!” (*IC* 371-72)

Soames hesitates at the thought of settling for separation rather than outright divorce because of the small, but significant, legal differences that distinguished the two statuses. In his article, “Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty,” A. James Hammerton observes that legal separation was a common solution to marital discord in England due to the stringent and expensive divorce laws, yet it was not ideal (271). Soames describes the legal solution of separation to Winifred as being a state both “married and unmarried,” wherein the spouses are legally independent of one another in all aspects, except they are not free to remarry (*IC* 371). In this way, legal separation provided women with the legal status of spinsters, who could own property and control their own financial affairs independently of their husband – rights not permitted to a legal wife (Nelson 8). Additionally, it was easier to obtain legal separation than divorce. For example, a wife could legally separate from her spouse solely on the grounds of adultery – the requirement of a compounding circumstance was only necessary for a divorce (Hammerton 271). Soames’ ruminations on the necessary legal maneuverings form part of Galsworthy’s underlying argument against the difficult divorce law as its unfair nature becomes exemplified in Winifred, who cannot obtain a divorce even as everyone recognizes the pain of her marriage.

The hesitation against settling for legal separation as a solution hinges on Soames' own estranged marriage to Irene. This legal status for the last twelve years has brought him considerable added grief, and upon this reflection, he quickly determines, in a dictatorial and patriarchal decree, that divorce is the only path for Winifred – she must be free from Dartie.

“It must be divorce,” [Soames] said decisively; “failing cruelty, there’s desertion. There’s a way of shortening the two years, now. We get the Court to give us restitution of conjugal rights. Then if he doesn’t obey, we can bring a suit for divorce in six months’ time. Of course you don’t want him back. But they won’t know that. Still, there’s the risk that he might come. I’d rather try cruelty.” (*IC* 372)

Soames' calculating appraisal of Winifred's position is decidedly Forsytean in its cool weighing of risks and benefits with little regard to her feeling. He sees only two possible options resulting from Dartie's behavior: cruelty and desertion. He would prefer to try cruelty because Winifred could continue to pursue the divorce even when Dartie returns, as he certainly will. Winifred balks at the idea of proving cruelty because it would require extremely embarrassing testimony, particularly if it required the children to testify (Horstman 90). In addition, she may be considering the attention her case would likely draw from the press, who were attracted to such situations (Hammerton 276). The Forsytes shudder at the thought of scandal, and a case involving cruelty would be like blood in the water for the circling reporters. Cruelty, though easier to prove, must be avoided for the Forsytes to save face. However, Winifred's problem is not entirely due to her Forsyte nature – Galsworthy's argument is that the law itself is the problem.

Winifred's compounded trouble of providing the Court additional proof of her husband's multi-faceted violations of his wedding vows is wrong. The law is gender discriminatory, forcing her to meet a higher level of proof in order to achieve the same result – divorce from a flagrantly adulterous spouse.

Still, in 1899, a woman had to provide the additional causes, which forces Winifred and Soames to pursue the tricky course for proving desertion. Soames is reluctant to pursue the obvious circumstances of abandonment because it requires a two-year waiting period. He recognizes that a man like Dartie (one with a weak will and no independent financial support) is unlikely to stay away from Winifred for the necessary two-year period. Acknowledging these circumstances, and the reality that Winifred would be unlikely to harden her heart against her philandering husband, Soames discusses the possibility of shortening the requisite period of desertion. The legal manipulation that he proposes is to claim that Winifred wants a restitution of her conjugal rights, which would force Dartie to respond to that decree within six months. Failing to obey the order of restitution would allow Winifred to then sue for divorce, almost eighteen months earlier than if she followed the strict rules for abandonment. However, exploiting this loophole is a dangerous choice because it is unethical to deceive the Court, which could put Winifred at some risk for contempt, but the larger risk is that Dartie will return in less than six months. If that happens, then Winifred will be compelled to take him back and legally forgive his indiscretion with the dancer. This forgiveness would negate the previously existing grounds for divorce, requiring her to start over again to build a case against him because “guilty spouses, once forgiven and taken back to the marital bed could rest easy there as no divorce could be threatened” (Horstman 91).

Moreover, seeking the decree for the restitution of conjugal rights will require her to testify in Court about her dirty laundry, particularly repulsive for the extremely private Forsytes. However, it will not require her minor children to testify of cruelty they have observed in the home, which would be far more enticing to the circling reporters and would attract even more attention. Still, rather than leaving Winifred in a limbo similar to what he endures – and with the risk of Dartie’s return to the family – Soames seeks to get Winifred the best legal position as quickly as possible, thus the need for the awkward and ugly legal machinations.

After a few months, Winifred’s case comes before the Court. In the chapter, “Dartie versus Dartie,” the brief hearing on the restitution of conjugal rights is told through the perspective of the Dartie’s young adult son, Val. He listens as Winifred testifies to the Court that Dartie had left her due to differences about money, not because she had insulted him (as Dartie claims in his note) by calling him “the limit.” The Judge questions her about the financial circumstances and Winifred testifies that she has sent Dartie money since his departure because she wants him back. Val squirms in his seat at this patently false testimony, convinced that the Judge would see through their game.

“But you supplied the money. Do you suggest that he left you to better his position?” [inquires the Judge]

“The brute! The old brute, and nothing but the brute!” thought Val suddenly. “He smells a rat – and he’s trying to get at the pastry!” And his heart stood still. If – if he did, then, of course, he would know that his mother didn’t really want his father back. (*IC* 487)

When the Judge does issue the decree for restitution, Val is relieved but also contemptuous of the Court. He strongly feels that the entire charade had been indecent (*IC* 485-87). However, for Winifred, the injustice of her suit is not finished with her humiliating testimony.

During the six months before she can file for divorce, the Forsytes' worst fears are realized when Dartie suddenly returns home. After petitioning for the reinstatement of her conjugal rights, Winifred cannot deny Dartie his place in her bed. Late one afternoon, Winifred returns home and notices a familiar scent. She follows it to her rooms and beholds her husband: the missing watch-chain, the cracked boots, the unpressed suit, the absent tiepin, the gaunt figure and darkened complexion. "Something big and relentless had 'been at him,' had turned and twisted, raked and scraped him" (*IC* 516). He is a different man, one who has suffered and is begging for a place to sleep. But his suffering was the result of his own decisions; Winifred has also suffered for Dartie's choices. She sees in this moment that the indignities she has endured in the Court are forfeit. She has suffered and gained nothing.

However, while legally nothing has changed for Winifred, Dartie is different. He looks at her angry figure, closes his eyes and says: "I've been through it. You needn't hit too hard – it isn't worth while. I've been frightened; I've been frightened, Freddie" (*IC* 517). She has lost her Court battle, yet being a Forsyte, Winifred does not see it as a loss. She reflects: "she had won a sort of victory, retained her property... if she wanted to punish [Dartie], she could do it at home without the world knowing" (*IC* 520). She soon learns that Dartie's great fear now is that the children will learn of his indiscretion. Realizing this is the weapon she has needed for years, Winifred blackmails Dartie into

good behavior for the remainder of his life. While she could not legally separate from him, she could illegally control him with blackmail – and in 1899 that was the best a wife could do.

This case reveals part of Galsworthy's argument against the 1857 Divorce Act. It is indecent to inquire in open court about the status of a woman's heart, to ask if she would take back her husband after all that she has suffered. Moreover, it is unjust to have to resort to perjury on top of the insult of the adultery, merely because she is the wife in the suit. During the first decade of the twentieth century, movement had been made to change the divorce laws, but World War I delayed the requisite action. As a political and social activist who, Woolf described, could "scarcely step out of doors without barking his shins upon some social iniquity," the delay in changing this law caused Galsworthy to take up the standard on behalf of women to grant at least equality in the right to file for divorce solely on the grounds of extended adulterous behavior.

In 1923, Parliament passed a new divorce act that granted the desired equality to women, allowing them to seek a divorce with adultery as the sole incriminating factor. However, it was granted for reasons that were not entirely in keeping with Galsworthy's larger political goals, as it resulted from the influence of middle class morality that had spread throughout England during the Victorian age. The diverse group of activists proclaimed victory over the immorality permitted by the earlier divorce laws, which allowed men to indulge in "unbridled sexual appetite" that resulted in "a host of social problems. These included prostitution, illegitimacy, adultery, ... and venereal disease" (Nelson 37). Thus, while some, like Galsworthy, believed that the change to the divorce laws should come because it was unfair to maintain a double standard, the law was

ultimately changed for different reasons – the moralists felt it was wrong to allow men to have affairs, not that women should be treated equally to men. While this slight change appeased some people, it was still not sufficient for others, including Galsworthy, who believed that divorce for reasons other than adultery should be permitted.

The Case of Rotten Matchmaking: *Forsyte v. Forsyte*

While the matter of Winifred's divorce is complicated, the more difficult divorce case presented by Galsworthy is *Forsyte v. Forsyte*. From the beginning of the first novel in the series, *The Man of Property*, it is clear that Soames and Irene were not well suited. Irene's artistic spirit feels suffocated in her relationship with the pragmatic, materialistic Soames. He is confounded by her aversion towards him because he believes that his dogged pursuit of her had been "a devoted wooing which books and people praise, when the lover is at length rewarded for hammering the iron till it is malleable, and all must be happy ever after as the wedding bells" (*MoP* 60). Yet, after four years, Irene sees their marriage with realistic eyes – "she had made a mistake, and did not love him, had tried to love him and could not love him..." (*MoP* 59). After she begins a flirtation with Bosinney, she reminds Soames: "Before we were married, you promised to let me go if our marriage was not a success. Is it a success? ... Will you let me go?" (*MoP* 199). Soames declares her questions are nonsense and will not even consider her request. Locked into this hopeless situation, Irene begins an affair with Bosinney. This violated popular Victorian ideals. According to Nelson, the general attitude of Victorians was that a wife's adultery was a more serious transgression than a husband's not only because "it might foist upon [the husband] children not biologically his, but also because woman's sexual drive was, or should be, different from man's in being focused on pregnancy

rather than pleasure” (8-9). In other words, a man’s philandering was unfortunate, yet understandable and forgivable; a woman’s was evidence of one “who forgot her marriage vows [and] betrayed both her family and all womankind” (9).

Irene’s affair ends with Bosinney’s death. An informal separation follows when Irene leaves Soames, but neither party seeks for a legal separation. Irene does not because, despite Soames’ act of marital rape, he has not committed adultery, leaving her no legal grounds for a formal separation. At this point, Soames does not seek legal action because, as Jolyon explains to Irene years later, “[Soames] was a Forsyte; we never part with things, you know, unless we want something in their place; and not always then” (*IC* 400). Yet, as *In Chancery* begins, we see that Soames has discovered he wants more than Irene, which creates legal problems – not just because he is a Forsyte, but because the divorce law is problematic and needs to be amended.

The source of the trouble is “a strongly, philoprogenitive side to Soames; baulked and frustrated, it had hidden itself away, but now had crept out again in this his ‘prime of life’” (*IC* 354). In the first novel, Soames was 38 years old and had already been married to Irene for four years, without producing a child. Twelve years later, Soames is 50, the “prime of his life,” and is beginning to worry about his legacy. However, as Sarah Edwards observes in her article “The Rise and Fall of the Forsytes,” Soames’ desire for an heir is complicated by the lingering marriage to Irene that leaves them “in a permanent limbo” and “jeopardize[s] the possibility of bearing children who might inherit property and provide emotional solace” (201). As the second novel opens, after twelve years of separation, Soames has begun to seek for alternative solutions. He discovers a possible

substitute for Irene in a young French emigrant, Annette. Yet, this solution is also fraught with troubles.

One is the family's obsessive protection of their privacy, thus an interest in avoiding scandal. Since Winifred has been forced to file her petition for the restitution of conjugal rights with Dartie, she is already drawing more attention than the family would care to endure. On the other hand, her divorce also brings the benefit of the family being rid of Dartie – a sufficient benefit to endure the trauma of legal scandal. Reflecting on his preference to avoid further scandal, Soames considers: “Would not a liaison be better than that – a liaison, and a son he could adopt?” (*IC* 377). Immediately he rejects this thought as impossible due to his “fastidious” desire for “law and order” that would necessitate his heir being born in wedlock (*IC* 354). He must endure a divorce. Deeply frustrated to be caught in a state of “married, yet unmarried,” he asks: “Why had he not pushed the thing through and obtained a divorce when that wretched Bosinney was run over, and there was evidence galore for the asking!” (*IC* 357). Again, it was his desire to maintain control over his prized property, Irene, that prevented Soames from seeking the divorce at a time when there was plenty of evidence.

Soames eventually reaches the point where he is willing to release Irene in order to have an heir. Having determined the need for a divorce, Soames realizes that the new complication is “which of us?” (*IC* 378). The 1857 Divorce law allowed only adultery as the grounds for divorce. Either Irene or Soames must bear the burden of being the spouse at fault for violating the marriage vows. In a vindictive continuation of his thoughts, Soames reflects: “She ought to pay for it” (*IC* 378). Yet, this also causes trouble because the affair with Bosinney is an old matter and will not be sufficient grounds in Court. He

knows he needs new evidence. In light of Irene's previous affair, he spitefully presumes: "There'll be someone, I suppose" (*IC* 378). With this assumption that Irene would have entertained other lovers during intervening years, he underestimates Irene's devotion to Bosinney's memory. Not long after this, Soames contacts his cousin, Jolyon, who serves as trustee for Irene's inheritance from Old Jolyon. Soames asks his cousin to serve as a messenger and ask Irene for a divorce.

During Jolyon's conversation with Irene about the possibility of divorce, she recognizes the legal difficulties of the situation. She reveals the falsity in Soames' assumption of her having "someone" and providing the needed grounds for divorce: "Unless I have a lover now. But I have never had one since" (*IC* 400). Curiously, Irene does not resent Soames' desire for a child, nor does she feel vindictive towards him. She states: "I would help him to be free if I could... You see, he has a lot to lose, and I have nothing. I should like him to be free; but I don't see what I can do" (*IC* 401). In this magnanimous declaration, we see the point of Galsworthy's argument. Unlike Soames with his obsession about the Forsyte reputation, Irene does not shrink from bearing responsibility for the failed marriage, but her willingness to serve as scapegoat for the failed marriage is insufficient. As is implied with Soames' question, "which of us?" one of them must provide the evidence of recent adulterous behavior for divorce proceedings to be initiated. Without that foundational violation of marital vows, all other issues are irrelevant.

Jolyon reports to Soames the results of the conversation. He relates that Irene has been faithful to Bosinney's memory, causing Soames to burst out: "'I can't go on like this. I tell you, I can't go on like this.'" His eyes were shifting from side to side, like an

animal's when it looks for way of escape" (*IC* 403). With compassion, Jolyon suggests: "Surely,...it lies with yourself. A man can always put these things through if he'll take it on himself" (*IC* 403). Clearly, the legal maneuvering suggested here is that Soames should purposely engage, or claim to have engaged, in an adulterous relationship to end his current marriage to Irene. The additional circumstance of desertion for more than two years is already present, thus an affair would solve the problem. However, this solution requires Soames to sacrifice his name by taking upon himself the burden of fault in the divorce. Aggrieved, because he is the innocent party in this divorce, Soames looks at Jolyon and asks: "Why should I suffer more than I've suffered already? Why should I?" (*IC* 403). Though Jolyon does not like Soames and has little sympathy for his plight, he acknowledges the soundness of his logic. Soames' situation serves to highlight the unfair nature of the divorce laws that force further suffering and immoral behavior rather than providing a simple escape for those who do not wish to remain bound together.

Deeply frustrated with Irene's proclamation, via Jolyon, that she has not had any other lovers since Bosinney, Soames decides to pay her a personal visit. Their strained conversation reveals the same information that she shared with Jolyon: she is willing to get a divorce (and always has been), but she has not had a lover in the past twelve years. She also repeats Jolyon's comment that it is up to Soames to find a way out of the matter. Confounded, he implores: "Why couldn't you have made me a good wife?" This heartfelt cry reveals the basis of Soames' frustration with Irene. She responds: "Yes; it was a crime to marry you. I have paid for it... You needn't mind my name, I have none to lose" (*IC* 418-19). The terrible impasse that causes these two to remain locked together illustrates Galsworthy's point that a legal option must be available for a couple whose

marriage was doomed from the start. While Soames thinks to himself that Irene is like ice in her position on the divorce, she truly has gone as far as she is legally permitted.

Similar to Soames' argument above, the fact that the law only permits adultery as grounds for divorce is unfair – and more than a little cruel – to both sides. For this couple, the law is working in opposition to its proclaimed goal of curbing adultery. Ironically, the moralists asserted the law would help protect families; however, in this case, it forces either the husband or the wife to commit an act of adultery in order to divorce, remarry, and begin the families they desire, independent of one another.

Caught in this ugly legal dilemma, Soames schemes to find a new way to get a son. After all, “If only Irene had given him a son, he wouldn’t now be squirming after women” (*IC* 438). Following this line of thought, he comes to the conclusion that Irene is still his legal wife, and like an empty house, she was “only waiting to be retaken into use and possession by him who legally owned her” (*IC* 439). This is the same line of thinking that led Soames to commit marital rape in the first novel, precipitating Irene’s decision to remain independent of Soames for the rest of her life (*IC* 320). Now, because the unjust nature of the divorce law will not permit this couple to separate – despite their shared desire to be apart, even despite Irene’s willingness to bear the fault of the divorce – Soames is contemplating the possibility of his previous crime in a new light. A woman does not have to love a man to give him a child.

Soames returns to Irene’s apartment with a new proposition. Since she maintains there is no ground for divorce, then will she allow him to give her everything else, if she will come back to him? She can be totally independent from him, but the cost is a son. Irene is horrified that her husband/rapist is asking her to conceive and bear his child. As

he makes his proposal, Irene is backed against the wall with Soames towering over her, grabbing at her hands. She finally answers his request: ““You can’t have a reasonable answer. Reason has nothing to do with it. You can only have the brutal truth: I would rather die”” (455). He states that he will not continue to endure the spider’s web of being married yet not married, then, he forces a kiss upon her. As she cries out and pushes him away, “[s]hame, compunction, sense of futility flooded his being, he turned on his heel and went straight out” (457). The horrors of this scene are shared by both Irene and Soames: she is assaulted again; he is shamed – both for having to ask her to bear him a son and for having assaulted her.

This scene of misery and shame exemplifies Galsworthy’s larger argument about divorce. It is not right for either Soames or Irene to suffer in this way because of a law that forces them together when they want to be apart. This argument finds a voice in June, eldest daughter of Jolyon – from his first marriage and former fiancée of Bosinney, who upon hearing Irene’s account of Soames’ last visit and assault states: ““It’s all horrible...Why should people be tortured and kept miserable and helpless year after year by this disgusting sanctimonious law?”” (*IC* 461). There is no answer offered to June’s question because the only possible response is that the law needs to be changed. This is the type of moment that Woolf protests against in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” when she writes that Edwardian novels “leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something – to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque” (326). Or, in this situation, to advocate that an unfair law be amended to permit people to live the lives they want, not the ones they are compelled to endure. Surely that “social iniquity” that Galsworthy is

“barking his shins” against is in keeping with Woolf’s sentiments as she speaks so clearly against the inequitable situation of women to men in her essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” so it seems strange that she is so dismissive of Galsworthy and his work to promote legal equality for women.

Ultimately, Irene has no legal options to escape Soames, so she decides to leave London to avoid Soames and his increasingly violent petitions. Soames chases Irene from London to Paris – and back – seeking proof of her phantom lover. Gaining enough circumstantial evidence, he files for divorce, naming Jolyon as her lover. When Jolyon is served with the papers, he considers the irony of the situation because they are not guilty of adultery. “For, whatever the Scriptures said about the heart, it took more than mere longings to satisfy the law” (*IC* 546). While Irene could easily defend herself against Soames’ evidence, why bother? Not long after, they leave for Italy together and give Soames the evidence he needs to dissolve the marriage. Even with Irene and Jolyon’s gift, Soames is jealous and frustrated as “[t]he monstrous injustice of the whole thing excited in him a perpetual suppressed fury” (*IC* 560). He is particularly resentful that:

He had asked no better than to live in spotless domesticity, and now he must go into the witness box, after all these futile, barren years, and proclaim his failure to keep his wife – incur the pity, the amusement, the contempt of his kind. It was upside down. She and that fellow ought to be the sufferers, and they – were in Italy! (*IC* 560)

Clearly Irene has injured Soames’ pride more than anything else in her actions. In the end, the messy impasse that they had endured is resolved in half an hour. It was so

simple, Galsworthy indicates, once one of the parties was willing to commit a fresh act of adultery, so why not make it this easy without the need for immoral action?

After his court appearance, following English law, Soames must wait six months until the divorce can be confirmed. Shortly thereafter, in January 1901, Soames marries Annette, thirty years his junior, and – to Soames’ dismay – they have a daughter, not a son. Meanwhile, Irene marries Jolyon, and they have a son – three months after their wedding. As Sarah Edwards observes, by setting the divorce at the turn of the century, Soames and Irene’s divorce can be seen as a symbol of the transition into modernity with the new century as old Victorian ideals and morality are shed with the old Victorian marriage (204). The action also makes the book “an important example of the Edwardian divorce novel that made the destruction of Victorian marriage the subject of modern fiction” (Edwards 201). Again, walking this line between the Edwardians with their social agendas, middlebrow tastes, and materialistic themes, and the modern ideals he espouses, leaves Galsworthy in the tricky situation discussed earlier.

Although Galsworthy is often cast as hopelessly Victorian, he was also deeply dedicated to social progress as demonstrated in his attention to national and international issues, such as women’s rights. Indeed, Galsworthy’s saga began with a mission – to defeat Forsyteism. This is ironic because so much of his life exemplified the Forsytes. As noted in the previous chapter, after reading *The Man of Property*, Galsworthy’s elder sister, Lilian, protested that the novel was too life-like in portraits of the family. Of particular concern was the character of Irene, who was clearly a representation of Galsworthy’s mistress, Ada (Marrott 181-82). In his biography of Galsworthy, Marrott describes Ada’s first marriage to Arthur Galsworthy, first cousin to John, as “a tragic

mistake. Blameless and helpless, she was living in extreme unhappiness” (101). To escape her misery, Ada accompanied Lilian, John, and others on numerous European trips – and slowly fell in love with John. They began a nine year affair, which they kept secret to protect old John Galsworthy – the patriarch of the Galsworthy family. Marrott explains: “He was seventy-eight years old, and a Victorian of the Victorians in many ways, for all his bigness of soul; could he be expected to accept with composure that which training and the habit of years must force him to regard as a scandal?” (102). Certainly the risk of scandal is one the questions at the heart of both Winifred’s and Soames’ divorces.

While Galsworthy showed respect for his father’s Victorian sensibilities, he maintained his relationship with Ada. She got an apartment in London near John and they waited with their open secret affair for three more years, until old John Galsworthy passed away in December 1904. After a brief trip to the country together, Ada and John were served, “much to their satisfaction,” with divorce papers, and on January 10, 1905, they left for Italy to wait until they could be married on September 23, 1905 (Marrott 103). The sequence of events in John and Ada’s lives are clearly reflected with Irene, Soames, Bosinney, and young Jolyon. As Marrott observes: “Small wonder that these years left an indelible mark on [Galsworthy]!” (102). Small wonder that during this time Galsworthy developed the opinion that it was criminal for either party to be caught in a loveless marriage. In a 1913 letter to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch,⁴ Galsworthy wrote that he had seen the extremes of utter joy and utter despair in marriage, a reflection on his relationship with Ada. He continues:

⁴ a reviewer for *The Daily Mail* who had written about Galsworthy’s book, *The Dark Flower*, yet Galsworthy’s response is even more relevant to his work on *The Forsyte Saga*.

And my gorge rises within me when I encounter that false glib view that the vow is everything, that people do better to go on living together (for nothing else *is* marriage) when one of them, or both, sicken at the other. A more fiendish spiritual destruction I could not wish any man than that he should continue to possess a woman who revolted at his touch; a more cruel existence for either man or woman I cannot imagine than that daily longing of their spirits when they try to live in comity, the love not being there. (Marrot 383)

For Galsworthy, the ability for either party to file a “no fault” divorce was the most logical and humane reform possible for the 1857 Divorce law.

In 1969, nearly fifty years after Galsworthy wrote *In Chancery*, the British divorce laws were finally revised to permit a couple to divorce for “irreconcilable differences.” Finally, a couple could divorce simply because “their marriage was not a success,” as Soames had promised Irene so many years earlier, though he claims not to recall the promise (*MoP* 199). As a social and political reformer, Galsworthy recognized the unfair nature of Winifred’s situation – that a woman would have to find additional, aggravating circumstances in order to escape from a marriage plagued with a history of a husband’s adulterous behavior. From his own experience, he recognized the double injustice of Soames and Irene’s marriage – there must be grounds for divorce outside of adultery. They were caught in a terrible position with one of them being forced to commit adultery in order to escape one another. It was, as Soames describes it, a “spider’s web,” yet he did not have the power to “cut it” (*IC* 457). Though Woolf deprecates such novels with social and political agendas, *In Chancery* does draw attention to a problem that

needed wide sweeping change in order to cut the spider's web and alleviate real suffering for both the Soameses and the Irenes of such cases.

Chapter 3

“‘To Let’ – the Forsyte age and way of life”
as Seen through the Effect of Sequential Publication

Sequential publications are often excluded from serious literary consideration for various reasons, but a primary one is their historical relationship with subgenres considered, until recently, to be of inferior academic value, such as romances, science fiction/fantasy, detective stories, and children’s literature. Stories in these subgenres, Suzanne Keen notes in her study of series novels, often encourage a reader to “gulp” down novels in order to move forward to the next installment. The stories do not need, nor invite, sustained deep reading, and if one subjects them to literary scrutiny, one finds there is little to say. Advanced readers tend to shun series novels as they have matured beyond the “gulping” stage, or may feel a social pressure to suppress their interest in this type of literature (725). In addition, academics avoid sequential novels, viewing them as “the ultimate loose baggy monsters” (728). It is difficult to study, or teach, series due to sheer volume, and it is almost impossible to examine only one novel in a sequence because echoes from other volumes interfere. Lastly, the genre is often dismissed as crass commercialism, as each new installment merely fuels the fire of mercenary interest. Due to their commercial power, these works are often dismissed as lacking serious literary intent.

Despite their low esteem, Keen observes that the novel sequence is a pervasive, dominant form across all types of literature, including middle and highbrow works. Novel sequences span the nineteenth, the twentieth, and the twenty-first centuries; indeed, recent studies argue that series works can be considered art. “Serial artworks,” states Christy Mag Uidhir in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, “can be found quite

commonly throughout the artworld (both high and low) and in a variety of media” (261). She explains that for artwork to be serial, it must “be composed of a sequence of things,” which are ordered in a “nontrivial,” i.e. non-random, way and that each element of the work must “properly [attend] to each element in that sequence” (262). Moreover, Uidhir continues, beneath the umbrella of serial artwork, there are many subdivisions, including the strictness of the sequencing and the homogeneity of the series, which depends on the similarity of form and medium in composing the artwork (263-64).

The Forsyte Saga is an example of a strictly serial but loosely homogenous artwork. The series lacks homogeneity, as the short story interludes that bridge the larger novels are not novels, but they are the same medium. However, the set sequencing that applies to strictly serial artwork lends itself well to historical fiction given the chronological nature of such works. As Keen observes, “Sequences seem an especially appropriate form for following more of the eddies of historical change than could be accommodated in a single novel” (729). *The Man of Property*, as a single, standalone volume, was widely praised by a number of contemporary critics – though most were not high modernists, such as Woolf or Lawrence – but not until the *Saga* is viewed in its entirety, with its conclusion in *To Let*, do we appreciate the full complexity of this series.

By applying Keen’s and Uidhir’s studies, and examining scenes from *The Forsyte Saga*, we challenge the belief that sequential publication and literary mediocrity are inextricably linked. As we explore the character of Soames (recognized by contemporaries as Galsworthy’s greatest creation) over the course of the three novels, with a focus on the third, we see how the creation and maintenance of an apparently static character is artistically motivated rather than motivated by the desire for commercial

gain. Soames' unchanging nature is intended to demonstrate a cycle of repetition, a lack of progress, inherent even in a changing world. The series format permits a slow unfolding of the Forsytes transitioning from Victorianism to a modern world and highlights the truth that the world does not always change for the better. Galsworthy explicitly makes this observation in his Preface to the *Saga*. "It would be difficult to substantiate a claim that the state of England was better in 1913 than it was in 1886...England is as surely too molten and bankrupt [now, in 1920] as in the eighties it was too congealed and low-percented" (6). In other words, while the details changed from one era to another, the actions of people have simply circled back to where they began. This ageless reality makes Soames simultaneously sympathetic and repulsive as we recognize him within our society, perhaps most clearly in attitudes towards the acquisition and possession of property.

Soames' Constancy in *The Forsyte Saga*

Throughout the *Saga*, Soames' desire to possess Irene, and to get pleasure from that possession, is constant. His greatest frustration in *The Man of Property* is that he gains no pleasure from his legal possession of Irene. The aversion his wife feels for him is often a mystery to him and the audience alike. For example, upon leaving their house on a routine morning, Soames observes that every day, Irene sits on the sofa, with her hands crossed, clearly waiting for Soames to leave the house. She is unwilling to begin her day until he has removed himself from her presence; she wants to separate him from her life. This irritates and aggravates Soames, and he observes to himself: "He could not understand what she found wrong with him. It was not as if he drank! Did he run into debt, or gamble, or swear; was he violent; were his friends rackety; did he stay out at

night? On the contrary”(MofP 59). Soames does not understand that Irene is not interested in what he does not do as much as she is repelled by the attitudes that he manifests towards her. That is, she finds repellency for Soames’ feelings of possessiveness regarding her. He cannot comprehend that Irene was one of those women who was “born to be loved and to love, who when not loving are not living” (MofP 60). This truth is beyond Soames’ understanding. He sees her charming powers being exercised upon others and appreciates how this ability increases her value, but it also upsets him that she withholds those charms from him. This diminishes that value. As his property, she should give him pleasure, regardless of her thoughts and feelings. To his unending confusion and annoyance, Soames does not gain the pleasure of ownership that he is due as the rightful and legal owner of his wife. This feeling colors Soames’ relationship with and attitude towards Irene throughout the *Saga*.

Eventually, Irene escapes Soames’ possessive clutch and seemingly provides a catalyst to alter Soames’ possessive nature. In the concluding scene of the second novel, *In Chancery*, an incautious reader may be temporarily lulled into believing that Soames has become a different type of man from the possessive, cautious, cold figure portrayed in the first novel. As Soames enters the bedroom of Annette, his new wife, the morning after the birth of their daughter, Fleur, he experiences conflicting feelings: bitterly disappointed that the child is not a boy and that the complications with the birth have made it impossible for any subsequent children to be born, he also is afraid of the child. He encounters his mother-in-law on the stairs, who is effusive with praise for the tiny girl, but Soames resents this admiration. The scene becomes troubled as the narrator’s voice and Soames’ become mixed:

He even resented her cheap adoration of the daughter he had not yet seen.

Curious how he jibbed away from sight of his wife and child!

One would have thought he must have rushed up at the first moment. On the contrary, he had a sort of physical shrinking from it – fastidious possessor that he was. He was afraid of what Annette was thinking of him, author of her agonies, afraid of the look of the baby, afraid of showing his disappointment with the present and – the future. (*IC* 592)

It is unclear whether Soames is thinking about how he is avoiding the sight of Annette and the baby or whether the narrator is commenting upon Soames and his feelings in an omniscient way. Is Soames giving way to introspection and self-enlightenment or is this perspective granted by someone outside of him? Either way, his overwhelming sensation is fear. Throughout the series, Soames is composed and self-controlled, so to be ruled by fear at this moment of achieving his goal – a child – seems a remarkable change, yet we must not give way to this apparent transformation as seen in the next scene.

Soames enters the bedroom. He walks to the cradle where the baby is lying and stands staring into it. At first, he sees just a baby, but then it seems something magical happens, for “as he stared and the baby breathed and made little sleeping movements with its tiny features, it seemed to assume an individual shape...; not repulsive, strangely bud-like and touching” (*IC* 593). He reaches down and touches the child with a finger, curious to know the color of its eyes. “And suddenly his heart felt queer, warm, as if elated” (*IC* 593). It seems at this moment that Soames experiences a swelling of his heart and will finally be able to give and receive unconditional love. However, the last two lines of the novel dash this belief: “The sense of triumph and renewed possession swelled

within him. By God! this – this thing was *his!*” (*IC* 593). Clearly, Soames, though he has experienced a new sensation, has not changed. His heart swells within him when he looks at this child for the same reason he collects artwork: “The appreciation of enough persons of good taste was what gave a work of art its permanent market value, or in other words made it a ‘work of art’” (*TL* 682). He knew, in his instinctive way, as he looked at the infant Fleur, that he was seeing Beauty in the bud – something that others would see and admire. Recognizing this value, his sense of triumph and possession swells to meet his overwhelming desire to own and control something that others admire. His constant guiding force has been to possess and control his “grand passion” – first Irene, now Fleur. The difference in the relationship (a parent/child relationship versus a husband/wife) might make this comparison of Fleur and Irene appear untenable; instead, it reveals Soames’ vision of ownership expanding to incorporate his daughter into his sphere of control.

An example of Soames’ unrelenting need to control a grand passion occurs at the beginning of *To Let*. Soames has arranged to meet Fleur, now nineteen, at an opening of an art gallery. The meeting location and people present in the gallery form the catalyst for events that shape the remainder of the book. Soames soon learns that the art gallery belongs to his cousin, June, and that she has invited her stepmother, Irene, and her half-brother, Jon, to view the opening. Suddenly, the gallery is peopled with numerous relatives whom Fleur has never met and whom Soames would prefer never to see again. He hurries his daughter out of the gallery and into a sweets shop, which, as the narrator comments, was “a very surprising thing” for Soames to do (*TL* 632). Surprising, but not strange, for it is not strange for Soames to attempt to regulate the friendships and

associations of Fleur in ways that echo his similar attempts to control Irene. His actions more than twenty years earlier of trying to force Irene to retire from London to Robin Hill in order to get her away from June's influence seems present again in this scene. He fears having his prized possession act in ways outside of his control, so he attempts to restrict her access to people he believes disagreeable.

Another potentially transformative event for Soames is his second marriage to the much younger Frenchwoman, Annette. One might expect, in light of his experience with Irene and the significant differences in background between his two wives, that Soames would behave differently in his new marital relationship, but he remains unchanged. In his cool, dispassionate assessment of Annette, Soames catalogs her as "a fine possession, an excellent housekeeper, a sensible and affectionate enough mother" (*TL* 637). There are some significant differences in this marriage because unlike Irene, who chafed under Soames' possessive feelings, Annette chooses to handle him differently. For example, when Irene became involved with Bosinney, she became combative with Soames. She defied his request that she not go about town alone; she ordered him from her room when he requested a change in the state of her relationship with Bosinney; she avoided his good-night kisses, which particularly inflamed his ire. This final action of avoidance deeply offends his sense of respectability, for he feels that a husband and wife should kiss good-night and believes "[e]ven if she hated him, he at all events ought not to put himself in the wrong by neglecting this ancient rite" (*MofP* 227). Clearly, he perceives that Irene should do her part, too, by receiving his kiss. Ultimately, Soames' frustration boils over and he forces intimacy on Irene, but this act leaves him feeling remorse and shame.

By contrast, in the third novel, when Soames confronts Annette about having an affair with Prosper Profond, the results are different. He begins in a similar way when he orders Annette to “give up this friendship” (*TL* 752). Yet, unlike Irene, Annette responds by laughing at Soames and expressing the opinion that she is a very sensible woman and that by the end of her affair, he will be very sensible, too. She sets new conditions for their relationship: he is to be quiet and she will not make a scandal. Soames watches her coolly exit the room, “silenced by the tumult of his feelings” (*TL* 752). He is discombobulated by his inability to control Annette, and even more by a welling up of sexual desire for her that he has not felt for some time. This powerful desire, born of the feeling that his possession is threatened, sparks a need, as it did with Irene, to possess her, to reassert his rights over her. That night, he goes to Annette’s bedroom and “[s]he received him in the most matter-of-fact way...he returned to his room with a curious sense of peace. If one didn’t choose to see, one needn’t” (752). After reasserting his ownership, Soames turns a blind eye towards Annette’s affair, a marked change from the martial rape scene in the first novel. But Soames has not changed. The key difference here is Annette’s attitude, not Soames’. Annette is willing to behave as Irene was not – to remain married to Soames with the appearance of a decent marriage, to appear to be his property, while finding sexual fulfillment and affection outside the marriage, discreetly. Irene could not, would not live a double standard – she needed to love openly, freely.

Studying these scenes that span across the *Saga*, it is clear that Soames does not change in any fundamental way; instead, Galsworthy uses Soames to demonstrate how his unvarying nature brings into focus the volatility of a rapidly changing world. The shift in focus, carefully developed over the three novels, is subtle enough that the reader may

not realize how significant Soames' unchanging character is to the evolution of the series. This development depends upon the elastic nature of sequential publication. This elasticity allows the series to be more expansive and encompassing than any single volume could hope, and gives the author the space and time needed to develop and explore the changes that evolve in every culture. "[T]he expansiveness of the series allows it to become a kind of cultural repository," Laurie Langbauer argues, "to act as its [culture's] political unconscious; because it represents so much, the series is bound to contain at least a trace of any conceivable cultural dilemma or fantasy" (14). Indeed, the lack of change in Soames and Galsworthy's emphasis on the everyday (the ordinary, the unremarkable) nature of life, reveals the literary value of this format, a value that cannot be appreciated when reading only *The Man of Property*. It requires all three novels to see this feature.

For example, Soames generally does not engage with world events. This non-interaction highlights important changes both within the Forsyte family and in the broader world. In other words, we see how far the world has changed because Soames acts as a fixed point. Throughout the series, Soames remains a perfectly representative Forsyte as described by Young Jolyon to Bosinney in *The Man of Property*. Young Jolyon explains there are Forsytes everywhere, in every society, but there are two qualities that set them apart: " 'the power of never being able to give yourself up to anything soul and body, and the "sense of property" ' " (*MofP* 193,195). This description characterizes the majority of Forsytes in the first novel. The family, pleasantly ignorant of anything occurring outside their small community, seems only to focus on familial scandals and property issues. Minor wars were occurring in the British empire, but no

mention is made of them on Forsyte 'Change (the family gossip network); rather, the talk focuses on Irene's desire for a separate bedroom from Soames or Soames' lawsuit with Bosinney. The family is entirely self-absorbed throughout the novel.

In the second novel, the wider world impinges on the Forsyte collective conscience, influencing their conversations and opinions. While family gossip on Forsyte 'Change continues to be dominated by the debate and the dissection of family scandals, such as the divorce proceedings for Soames and Irene or Winifred and Monty, the acceptable subjects expand to include such events as the Boer War. However, the whole war seems an abstraction to Soames, who views it in simplified terms as an issue of ownership and control. He remarks to Annette: "'The Boers are only half-civilized...they stand in the way of progress. It will never do to let our suzerainty go'" (*IC* 414). Beyond the abstract question that threatened the rights of possession, Soames is indifferent to British international politics because they do not personally affect him. He remains an example of the narcissistic Forsytes. Indeed, Soames is disturbed to have the war even tangentially touch his life as shown in the scene when his parents' butler, Warmson, mentions that Warmson's son will likely be drafted for service in South Africa. The narrator explains: "The slighter shock Soames had felt on discovering that he knew so little of one whom he thought he knew so well was lost in the slight shock of discovering that the war might touch him personally" (*IC* 424). He continues this thought with a reflection on a variety of petty wars the British Empire had fought throughout its territory to maintain control of its possessions, but these were all impersonal matters, left for professional soldiers, and "quite unconnected with the Forsytes and all they stood for in

the body politic” (*IC* 424). Forsytes do not get their hands dirty with international affairs – professionals do that kind of work for them.

The final novel, *To Let*, opens with Soames’ reflections on World War I. Though so sweeping in its magnitude that Soames could not brush it aside as he had the Boer War, it still does not affect him in the ways one might expect. Rather than contemplating the transformation of world politics or the tremendous loss of life, Soames’ thoughts are directed toward justifying his personal, post-war irritation against taxi drivers. “Their drivers were, in his view, an uncivil lot, though now that the war was over and supply beginning to exceed demand again, getting more civil in accordance with the custom of human nature” (*TL* 619). Part of Soames’ unwillingness to forgive the perceived incivility of this group is because he associates them with gloomy memories from the war and threats of revolution – like the communist one in Russia, making them a potential domestic threat to his class and to his property. In a natural Forsytean continuation of thoughts, he reflects on the psychological damage he received during the war from his anxiety of possible financial ruin, which did not occur, and the insult of income tax, which did. The lack of attention for the apparent elephant in the room, World War I and the human suffering and devastation that he does not consider, makes the unchanging nature of Soames so remarkable. The world changed, but Soames did not. A passing of an Age occurred with the death of Victoria, which Soames transformed from being the representative Forsyte to not representing anything at all – he is neither Victorian nor modernist. He falls into the no-man’s-land between the two poles – rather like Galsworthy’s work does at this point.

In sharp contrast, Prosper Profond, wholly shaped by the war, is a representative of the future. In a conversation with Val Dartie about buying a racehorse, Profond relates that he is interested in doing everything. Val quickly follows with the question: ““Were you in the War?”” For Val, this is clearly a logical jump, showing the impact the war has had on his thinking and his interaction with other men of fighting age. Profond responds: “Ye-es. I’ve done that too. I was gassed; it was a small bit unpleasant”” (660). Following this blasé statement, the two men focus on the horse auction, and Profond casually buys an expensive filly that had caught Val’s eye. Profond then attempts to give Val the horse with the explanation: ““I made a small lot of money in the War....I ‘ad armament shares. I like to give it away. I’m always making money. I want very small lot myself. I like my friends to ‘ave it.”” (661). This explanation is easily given and easily received between two gentlemen of a generation fundamentally impacted by the experience of war.

The generational change towards money and possessions, markedly different from Soames’ Forsyteian attitude, is clearly demonstrated in the conversation that occurs in Soames’ art gallery at Mapledurham. He shows Profond a painting, a Post-Impressionist that Soames does not like but owns and displays for its monetary value. He asks Profond if he would care to purchase the painting; Profond agrees to the purchase, though observes that he does not care much for pictures. Soames asks:

‘What *do* you care for?’

Monsieur Profond shrugged his shoulders.

‘Life’s awful like a lot of monkeys scramblin’ for empty nuts.’

‘You’re young,’ said Soames. If the fellow must make a generalization, he needn’t suggest that the forms of property lacked solidity!

‘I don’ worry,’ replied Monsieur Profond smiling, ‘we’re born, and we die. Half the world’s starvin’. I feed a small lot of babies out in my mother’s country; but what’s the use? Might as well throw my money in the river.’

Soames looked at him, and turned back toward his Goya. He didn’t know what the fellow wanted. (680)

This revolutionary attitude towards property and money disconcerts Soames. Evidently, the experiences of war have created an indifferent attitude towards material possessions for Profond, an idea completely foreign to a Forsyte. Soames, stunned by Profond’s sangfroid philosophy, is left speechless. How could the world have shifted so far since Victoria’s reign?

Implications of Soames’ Static Nature

The unchanging nature of Soames aligns perfectly with the everyday subject matter that comprised the series novels during the early twentieth century. As the *Saga* spirals outward with its ever increasing generations, we see how, as Langbauer observes, the “expansiveness of the series allows it to become a kind of cultural repository” (14). Galsworthy places Soames at the center of that repository, a still center in a changing world. In chapter four of *To Let*, “The Mausoleum,” Galsworthy becomes unabashedly nostalgic when Soames visits Timothy’s house on Bayswater Road. His aunts, the elderly Forsyte sisters, have all passed away, leaving Timothy as the sole survivor of the older generation, hidden deep within the empty house as a “winter fly” (*TL* 648). As he stands on the front porch, Soames reflects, this house had once been a hive of activity, a place that he had entered and left countless times, “divested of, or burdened with, fardels of family gossip; the house of the ‘old people’ of another century, another age” (*TL* 648).

While waiting for Smither, the long serving housemaid, to prepare Uncle Timothy for a visit, Soames wanders through the house, making an inventory for when the house and furnishings will be sold after Timothy's death. As he walks through the abandoned rooms, Soames recalls the family history contained in those furnishings: the globe that reminded people of the time Timothy got seasick, the stuffed hummingbirds on the landing, the painted miniatures in a display case. Soames reflects in a fanciful way that the house ought to be preserved as a museum of a mid-Victorian house with a tablet affixed outside the front door proclaiming: "Specimen of a mid-Victorian abode – entrance, one shilling, with catalogue" (*TL* 651). A sense of tired frustration enters Soames' thoughts as he contrasts his feelings for this house and its inhabitants with his resistance for modern developments, such as his preference for subdued, shuttered Victorian femininity over the emancipated modern woman. He observes: "to-day with its Tubes and cars, its perpetual smoking, its cross-legged, bare-necked girls visible up to the knees and down to the waist if you took the trouble...and the hard-eyed, capable, older women who managed life and gave him the shudders" (*TL* 652). He recalls with nostalgia how his elderly female relatives were genteel, fastidious, and removed from the world: "his old aunts, if they never opened their minds, their eyes, or very much their windows, at least had manners, and a standard, and reverence for past and future" (*TL* 652). This moment of nostalgia and reflection is particularly suited for a series because, with Soames, we share memories of everyday events with these characters – the old aunts – once so vital and quirky, who have passed beyond the scope of the story. We also experience the passage of time through the series and feel that pull of the past.

It is possible to sympathize with Soames about the dramatic changes that have occurred over the course of the series. We realize the artistic value of what Galsworthy has created in this character – a generally disagreeable, dislikable character who becomes an object of sympathy, perhaps even beloved. Galsworthy observed: “One has noticed that readers, as they wade through the salt waters of the Saga, are inclined more and more to pity Soames, and to think that in doing so they are in revolt against the mood of his creator” (6). Galsworthy pities the unlovable Soames, a man not quite hard enough to not care that he is not loved. Soames is disturbed by the way that Irene, Annette, and Fleur do not really love him in the way he feels is his right to be loved. We saw this in his frustration with Irene for sitting on the couch and not letting him share in her daily routine. However, Galsworthy observes that some readers go so far in their sympathy for Soames that they accuse Irene of cruelty for her unrelenting rejection of him. Galsworthy agrees that she may seem cold in such moments of rejection, but more than that “she is wisely realistic, knowing that the least concession is the inch which precedes the impossible, the repulsive ell” (7). That readers might find Soames more favorable than Irene points to Galsworthy’s artistic skill – his ability to create sympathy for a generally unlikable character. In a letter Thomas Hardy sent to Galsworthy shortly after the publication of *To Let*, Hardy comments that he is sorry that this book marks the end of the Foryste story and observes: “This is strange, considering that I do not (personally) like any of *its members* very much – except perhaps Jon – so that must be owing to your handling of them that I regret you are going to tell us no more about them.” He continues with this interesting aside: “My wife, by the way, has a sympathy for Soames, who she considers a touching figure. This I do not altogether share” (Gindin 449). The *Saga*

demonstrates Galsworthy's artistic narrative skill, his ability to engage readers in the lives of unpleasant people to the point that they miss spending time with these unpleasant characters when the series ends.

The process of change is gradual, and in many instances we do not realize that it has occurred until we stop to see how far we have come. In writing the *Saga*, Galsworthy was attempting to replicate this understanding of change. He observes: "If these chronicles had been a really scientific study of transition, one would have dwelt probably on [such] factors as the invention of bicycle, motor-car, and flying machine;" however, "this long tale is no scientific study of a period; it is rather an intimate incarnation of the disturbance that Beauty effects in the lives of men" (6). Galsworthy intended for his readers to understand something new about the long reaching and timeless effects of ineffable Beauty. He works to achieve this through the character of Irene – the embodiment of Beauty – and contrasting her with Soames. It returns to the contrast discussed in chapter one that separates art and beauty and modernism from commerce and ownership and Victorianism. Irene is linked with the future generations as she moves to British Columbia with Jon while Soames remains in England, alone in the wake of Fleur's marriage, to bury the last of the old generation of Forsytes and contemplate the past.

Ongoing Reception of Galsworthy's Art

The undeniable success of Galsworthy's artistic accomplishment is noted in his award for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932. The Committee specifically observed that the award was given "for his distinguished art of narration, which takes its highest

form in *The Forsyte Saga*” (300). The Committee further explains that this trilogy, the *Saga*, and the sequel trilogy that follows, *A Modern Comedy*, work together to

form an unusual literary accomplishment. The novelist has carried the history of his time through three generations, and his success in mastering so excellently his enormously difficult material, both in its scope and in its depth, remains an extremely memorable feat in English literature – doubly remarkable, if we consider that it was performed in a field in which the European continent had already produced some of its best works. (302)

This praise gains particular weight as we realize that Galsworthy’s work is being evaluated in the realm of high modernism. For the committee, he has transitioned from early modernism into the later stages with great skill that makes his work so remarkable. The committee praises his deft interweaving of the everyday realities of Forsytes with the background of history. They note: “The situations recur as a curious documentation of the oscillation and the undulation in a family of given hereditary dispositions. The individual portraits are distinguished, and the law of social life is at work” (303). They point to the example of Soames who begins in *The Man of Property* as an object of satire and slowly grows over the course of the novels into a place of respect and sympathy. “Galsworthy has seized upon this sympathy,” they write, “his characterization of Soames’s personality thoroughly worked out becomes the most memorable feature of the Forsyte saga and the comedy of the descendants” (303). Near the conclusion of *To Let*, Soames visits the family vault in Highgate Cemetery, and in a mood of “melancholy and introspection” reflects on the changes that have shaped his life: “‘To Let’ – the Forsyte age and way of life, when a man owned his soul, his investments, and his woman, without check or

question. And now the State had, or would have, his investments, his woman had herself, and God knew who had his soul” (*TL* 849). As he reflects on this shift in his reality, while sitting on Highgate Hill, “where Victorianism lay buried,” he realizes that really only one thing bothered him. It is not the changes in society and the loss of possessions; it is that he could “wish and wish and never get it – the beauty and loving in the world!” (*TL* 849). It is this character that the Nobel Committee had in mind when they said that Galsworthy has captured a representative of “static old England” that has “his trying ways, but he [is] genuine.” They continue: “The sober prosaic respectability is in this manner duly honoured in Galsworthy’s realism, and this has been pointed out as the essential factor in his judgment of human nature” (304). The delicate balance of realism and nostalgia makes Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Chronicles* a sort of summer retreat for his audience. It is nostalgia, but above all, it is art.

Of course, not all of Galsworthy’s contemporaries would have agreed with the Nobel Committee’s opinion. Virginia Woolf repeatedly wrote that Galsworthy’s works lacked plot and character development. Apparently, the lack of development in Soames’ character was a flaw in Galsworthy’s work. Unlike the Nobel committee, she did not see an artistic hand in the recurring themes that “repeat an almost mythic pattern (the conflict of Soames and Irene) at the same time that they alter it” (Longbauer 42). Rather, Woolf saw Galsworthy as a class-conscious snob, stuck in the mire of traditional literature, unable to write something unique, and urged her readers to sweep him away with the past (326-28). While Woolf was disdainful, D.H. Lawrence was vituperative in his critique of the Forsytes. He wrote that Galsworthy had begun the *Saga* with real potential as a satire of the upper middle class, which would expose them as false and empty; however,

Lawrence claims that Galsworthy lacked the strength to carry out this satire and “gave in to the Forsytes” (543). Lawrence argues that Galsworthy became like his shallow, acquisitive characters, entirely devoid of passion in every aspect of their flat and meaningless lives. This occurs, Lawrence claims, because Galsworthy was a mercenary, a sell-out. He writes:

When you arrive at *To Let*, and the end, at least the *promised* end, of the Forsytes, what have you? Just money! Money, money, money and a certain snobbish silliness, and many more *anti* tricks and poses. Nothing else. The story is feeble, the characters have no blood and bones, and the emotions are faked, faked, faked. It is one great fake. (549)

While Lawrence conditions this tirade with a brief aside that Galsworthy is not necessarily a fake, he reasserts that the Forsytes’ emotions certainly are. From this, it is clear that Lawrence perceived no artistic value in writing a sustained narrative series. Unfortunately, as Galsworthy’s biographer James Gordin notes, “Lawrence’s perspective, most of which seems to be drawn from *The Man of Property* alone, has influenced critical response to Galsworthy’s trilogies ever since” (522). We have done as Woolf and Lawrence would have us do and swept Galsworthy away with the past.

Yet, Galsworthy remains worthy of further study in many ways. For example, he was setting out for something much larger when he chose to name his series a “saga.” Robert Scholes and James Phelan argue that the term “should apply to the Icelandic family sagas and other realistic, novel-length traditional prose narratives like them. The key word is ‘traditional,’ for otherwise the sagas might be indistinguishable from novels” (50). Scholes and Phelan explain that to be a saga, a story must bear the marks of oral

composition, especially the limited patterns that combine a “formulaic diction” that allows “the oral narrative artist to compose orally before an audience” (50). Thus, Galsworthy’s reliance on repetitive elements, such as Irene’s constant beauty or Soames unchanging nature, are like oral compositions. In having his characters behave in a cyclical, repetitive fashion, he is echoing this ancient practice of saga writing. In other words, the careful focus on a single family, combined with the heavy reliance on tradition and the repetitious nature of the *Saga* that both Woolf and Lawrence criticize, are key components in the development of a saga. He was carefully, specifically, deliberately, writing in a genre and attempting to achieve an artistic result.

Though Galsworthy was awarded the Nobel Prize for his ability to sustain an artistic narrative over a series of novels, this type of praise has disappeared from academic appreciation. Series are often denigrated for being examples of “baldly commercial gambits” and are duly ignored because they are unworthy of further study (Keen 725). While this assessment is sometimes merited, the over application of it has caused many fine works to be ignored – works that require the expansive, elastic nature of sequential publication in order to provide the panoramic vision necessary to do as Galsworthy did and explore large topics, such as “the changing mores of society,” or “explicitly historical sequences that tackle experiences of empire and war” (Keen 729). Viewed in this way, Galsworthy’s narrative work does reveal its artistic value as he spans the changes from Victorianism to modernism in a way that cannot be done without the elastic nature of series fiction.

Conclusion

Galsworthy died January 31, 1933; he was 65 years old. Not long after, his name disappeared from public notice, fulfilling the expectations of those critics, like Desmond MacCarthy, who felt Galsworthy's reputation was overblown. In his conclusion to Galsworthy's obituary, published February 5, 1933 in *The Sunday Times*, MacCarthy declared: "I have used a phrase to place him, 'a very good writer of the second class,' one which only sounds offensive because the currency of praise has been so absurdly debased, since in his work the sympathetic magistrate strikes me as having triumphed over the intuitive artist" (para. 12). This assessment that values intuition and artistry over sympathy and judgment is a common attribute of high modernism, and Galsworthy's apparent disinclination to write in this fashion contributed to his rejection from the developing canon.

Aside from rejection by influential modernists, like Woolf and Lawrence, and critics, like MacCarthy, Galsworthy's greatest cause for neglect was his own lack of interest in creating a literary afterlife. There is no grave – his ashes were scattered – and no "Galsworthy house" for tourists and scholars to visit; there is no conference held in his name; there is no central collection of his papers. Simon Barker, a recent Galsworthy biographer, explains that some of the collection was destroyed during World War II when a bomb hit the shed in which Ada Galsworthy, John's widow, had stored his personal papers. Consequently, the earlier biographies gain particular weight, as they contain the only documentation of a number of his letters and other personal records (99-100). Of the bulk of the papers that did survive, Galsworthy's nephew and executor, Rudolf Sauter, arranged for them to be held at the University of Birmingham. The University held the

collection until Sauter's death in 1977, at which time the family decided to sell it as one lot in a Sotheby's auction. *Forbes Magazine* bought the collection and has it housed at the magazine's New York City headquarters. Prior to the auction, a few of the papers had been bequeathed to the University of Birmingham by Sauter and can still be found there. Additionally, the manuscripts for *The Forsyte Saga* had been donated in 1929 by Galsworthy to the British Museum, except the manuscript for the first novel, *The Man of Property*. That manuscript had been destroyed in 1913 when Galsworthy felt the novel had no literary future.

Having his collection scattered to the four winds has not helped Galsworthy's literary afterlife, yet his memory lives on in informal ways, especially in television. This is an ironic development given Galsworthy's lack of interest in adapting his works to film, a medium he considered debased. In particular, he rejected dramatization of his Forsytes. In 1921, Gindin reports, when Galsworthy refused Samuel Goldwyn the rights to *To Let*, "he insisted that he did not want any parts of *The Forsyte Saga* filmed or dramatized" (473). However, the first television adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga*, a 1967 BBC mini-series dramatizing the first two trilogies of *The Forsyte Chronicles*, created tender feelings towards Galsworthy and his Forsytes. This 26-episode mini-series was tremendously successful. When *The Forsyte Saga* was rebroadcast in 1968, a third of the British nation tuned in every week to revisit the Forsytes (Edwards 216). The impact of this nationalistic experience forced church ministers to reschedule Sunday evensong services around the broadcasts (Barker 93, Edwards 216).

While these popular adaptations have granted more attention to the Forsytes, the dramatizations still cannot capture the praiseworthy nature of the passages that Joseph

Conrad so enthusiastically noted. For example, the 1967 adaptation of the *Saga* is fairly faithful to the novels in many ways, but it lacks the ability to convey the complex emotions Soames experienced when asked by the doctor, near the end of *In Chancery*, if he wished to save the life of his unborn child or his wife. In the television version, the screenwriters preserved some of the interior conflict by having Winifred visit Soames during the crucial moments of his decision. He is able to share his thoughts, fears, and hopes with Winifred (and the audience), which helps to justify his decision to choose the child over Annette. However, in the novel, we get a far more complete picture of Soames' struggle. He writhes under the weight of the decision – and his mind drifts back to Irene, a point not captured in the dramatized version. At this moment of crisis, Soames' thoughts are still on Irene and how his decision would have been different, simplified – anything to save Irene, even giving up the hope of an heir. She was his prized possession. Annette, who is valued only for her ability to produce an heir, does not get the same consideration (*IC* 581-83). Soames' thoughts spill over nearly three pages that defy adaptation to the screen and must be read to be truly appreciated.

Even with the struggle to capture Galsworthy's language, audiences were again drawn to the second adaptation of the *Saga*. When asked why audiences continue to show this interest, Damian Lewis, who played Soames in the 2002/03 version, replied: "Part of its appeal is that every ... single character is hypocritical, which makes them all incredibly real. But first and foremost, it's a great story. It's a ripping good yarn, as we'd say." It is remarkable how this comment mirrors one that Joseph Conrad made about the *Saga* nearly a century ago: "It is a great performance...so great that without for a moment stepping out of the scheme it escapes from the particular into the universal by the sheer

force of its inner life...I admit that the narrative has carried one along in a most irresistible way” (Marrot 509). The strength of a narrative to persist with such interest for more than a century illustrates Galsworthy’s enduring appeal.

Galworthy’s legacy may extend even beyond the successful adaptations of the *Saga*, including the recent interest in other popular Edwardian television dramas, such as the revival of *Upstairs/Downstairs* (a series that may have been inspired by the original Forsyte adaptation in the 1960s) and the creation of *Downton Abbey* (Barker 100, Edwards 218). Fascination in the halcyon days of pre-World War I Britain, and in the immediate years that followed, continues to bring Galsworthy to the forefront. It is clear that interest in Galsworthy’s work is reviving, though many still do not recognize his name. As Robert Caserio laments:

Given the enduring life of the man of property, it is all the more curious that the current age of literary criticism, which seeks publicly serviceable historical and aesthetical values, alternatives to Soames, and which has often castigated modernism for lacking public responsibilities, has dropped Galsworthy. He remains a name, another outsider among the various modernisms not in the canon.

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It is time that Galsworthy be reclaimed from the shadow cast by the Bloomsbury Group and other high modernists to be given his place in the development of early modernism during the first decades of the twentieth century.

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