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**Class and Morality in John Galsworthy's *Strife***

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**Abstract:**

John Galsworthy's *Strife* presents a deep exploration of class conflict and moral dilemmas situated in the intense environment of an industrial strike. The play unfolds in the midst of a labor dispute involving the working class and their employers, offering a glimpse into the economic, social, and moral tensions present in early 20th-century Britain. Galsworthy intricately explores the human cost of industrialization, portraying the characters' struggles as a battle for better working conditions and a deeper moral confrontation between two classes with opposing interests and values. The play critiques the dehumanizing effects of capitalism through the lens of the strike, highlighting the ethical complexities that shape the actions of both workers and employers. In *Strife*, Galsworthy crafts a morally ambiguous narrative, illustrating how both sides struggle with their ethical responsibilities. The portrayal of workers highlights their status as victims within a system that values profit more than human dignity, while the employers' commitment to conventional ideas of authority and order faces scrutiny as well. Galsworthy's depiction of these characters compels the audience to consider the moral compromises that each side encounters while striving for their individual goals. This paper examines the theme of class and morality in *Strife*, focussing on the dramatic techniques Galsworthy uses to highlight the ethical complexities of the industrial era. Examining the characters' interactions along with the broader social implications of the strike, this research seeks to underscore how Galsworthy uses the play to challenge the prevailing moral and social order, inviting the audience to reconsider their views on justice, inequality, and the human condition in a class-divided society.

**Keywords:** Class, Morality, Capitalism, Justice, Dilemma.

## **Introduction**

Galsworthy's *Strife* stands as a significant piece within early 20th-century British drama, showcasing the escalating tensions among social classes along with the ethical dilemmas arising from industrial capitalism. Set against the backdrop of a labor strike in a factory, *Strife* serves as more than a depiction of the conflict between workers and employers; it offers a complex exploration of class divisions, moral responsibility, and the impact of social and economic structures on individual behavior. Galsworthy, known for exploring themes of social justice and the rights of the working class in his own works, presents a vivid portrayal of the harsh realities of industrial labor in *Strife* while also questioning the morality of both the exploited and the exploiters. This play features Galsworthy exploring the ethical implications of class struggle, illustrating how the pursuit of justice, power, and self-interest intersects with moral choices. The characters in *Strife* transcend mere representation of their social positions; they embody complexity, with decisions shaped through class status, personal experiences, and moral convictions. Through these characters' interactions and their respective positions in the conflict, Galsworthy examines how class structures dictate individual and collective morality, ultimately challenging the audience to confront the inequalities that underlie capitalist society.

The theme of class and morality in *Strife* focuses on Galsworthy's use of the strike as a dramatic tool to reveal the moral ambiguities present in both the working class and the capitalist class. The play's portrayal of these opposing groups, this paper demonstrates how Galsworthy critiques the ethical foundations of industrial society, revealing the tensions between personal morality, social responsibility, and the larger forces of class division. At the core of *Strife* exists a fundamental discord between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The story takes place at a factory where the laborers are embarking on a protracted strike against the proprietors with the assistance of their union officials. The employees' requests focus on enhanced compensation, superior working conditions, and acknowledgment of their rights as workers. Galsworthy, this strike is more than a mere labor conflict; it epitomizes the overarching fight between the affluent and the impoverished. The conversation and actions of the workers in the play provide a clear criticism of the economic and social mechanisms that sustain inequality.

The workers in the play, depicted as fervent and desperate, saw themselves as victims of an inequitable capitalist system that values profit over human decency. His portrayal of the workers' distress emphasizes the pervasive sense of social injustice that the labor force experiences. Their ethical position is founded on a commitment to justice and equity, and they are prepared to jeopardize all to attain improved circumstances for themselves and future generations. Nevertheless, Galsworthy complicates this perspective by illustrating the human cost of their actions, which includes the impact of the strike on their personal lives and society as a whole. The factory proprietors, illustrated with the figure

of Mr. Spon, who embodies the conventional capitalist principles of power, order, and profit, are the ones opposing the fighting. Spoon considers the workers' demands to be unrealistic and damaging to the existing social order. He defends his position based on moral obligation, asserting that he is striving to preserve the factory's stability and safeguard the interests of both employees and proprietors. The factory owners portray themselves as altruistic; however, their ethical rationale is fundamentally based on self-interest. Galsworthy used the employers to illustrate how moral authority often serves as an instrument to sustain social and economic inequalities, so strengthening class differences instead of confronting the fundamental causes of inequality. The impression of Leon Schalit in *John Galsworthy: A Survey* about the thematic approach of the play is:

Strife is a drama of irreconcilable extremism embodied in the figures of two chief characters, and Strife, a relentless tragedy of human conflict, is a far leap, bold, and perhaps bewildering... suffering comes from the implacability of the two extremists, Anthony and Roberts. So it is ever in party struggle—extremism with its demagogy and its pride and its greed for power waste human life and cause infinite trouble. (389-400)

Galsworthy's adept depiction of the moral complexity of the characters on both sides of the strike is what distinguishes *Strife* from other works that address class conflict. The characters in *Strife* are morally equivocal, with neither the laborers nor the employers portrayed as clear-cut champions or antagonists. Each is attempting to resolve their own ethical dilemmas. The play challenges the audience's preconceived notions of who is morally right and who is morally wrong, promoting a more intricate understanding of morality and class. For instance, *Strife* does not depict its employees as entirely selfless or virtuous. Although they are depicted as victims of a callous and exploitative system, numerous individuals are also demonstrated to possess personal faults and conflicting motivations. Some of the workers' actions, such as resorting to violence and intimidation, complicate their moral position, implying that their pursuit of justice may necessitate ethical compromises. Galsworthy illustrates the tension between the individual decisions that individuals must make within the broader system and the collective action that is necessary for social change through these morally ambiguous characters.

In the same vein, the employers are not portrayed as ruthless antagonists but rather as individuals who are entangled in their own moral dilemmas. Spon and his colleagues advocate for the preservation of their business interests; however, their refusal to engage in substantive dialogue with the employees exposes their moral blindness to the systemic inequities that they profit from. The play investigates the constraints of their moral reasoning, positing that the power dynamics inherent in the capitalist system stifle any genuine sense of ethical responsibility. The factory proprietors' portrayal by Galsworthy demonstrates how moral authority can be distorted to bolster the preservation of an oppressive status quo.

Whether it is possible to reconcile the pursuit of economic justice with moral principles is the fundamental ethical question that *Strife* poses. Galsworthy employs the characters' interactions to investigate the intricate and contradictory intersections between personal morality and social responsibility. Although the workers' demands for improved wages and working conditions are depicted as justifiable, their readiness to employ extreme measures, such as personal sacrifice and violence, raises concerns regarding the ethical implications of revolutionary tactics. Galsworthy posits that the workers' pursuit of equity is a justifiable objective; however, the methods they employ to accomplish it may violate their moral integrity. Conversely, the factory proprietors' adamant adherence to the status quo exposes the moral deficiencies of the capitalist system. The employers show a lack of empathy for the workers' plight, prioritizing profits over human welfare. However, their opposition to change is also rooted in moral reasoning, as they are convinced that they are acting in the best interest of their enterprises and society as a whole. Galsworthy's examination of these conflicting moral perspectives compels the audience to confront the ethical contradictions that are inherent in class-based societies, where the pursuit of justice is frequently intertwined with moral ambiguity.

Galsworthy chose to use a live topic such as this for his play, which is a reflection of the depth of his social consciousness. Its subject matter was the most pressing issue of the day, which was the conflict between labor and capital. *Strife* is regarded to be the best. As a measure of the breadth of his social awareness and the incremental progress he is making in his comprehension of society, the fact that Additionally, at the time when Shakespeare was writing this play, there was no other question in England that was more significant than this one. Even more devastating has been the effects that the men have had on their families. The rights of laborers were only starting to be claimed at the time when Galsworthy wrote this play, which was written at that period. In light of the fact that Galsworthy was always a realist who maintained his impartiality, it provides a picture of both sides of the strike question. The play is significant not just for its social ramifications but also for the presence of a number of characters who are extremely genuine and strong, like Roberts and elderly Anthony, among others. Although it is primarily concerned with the struggle between labor and capital, it also takes into account the socioeconomic existence of women who are members of the working class. The dilemma that women find themselves in as a result of the strike has been brought into sharper light, and there is a need for their redemption not just from the shackles of famine but also from the dominance of males. Coats makes a valid argument about it, "On the side of the workers, the women and children are enduring the greatest privations through cold and hunger, for the winter has been exceptionally severe" (1).

Galsworthy exemplifies the present interest in social issues that are prevalent in recent times. His most significant works portrayed the upper-middle class, which he himself

belonged to, in a manner that was both objective and satirical. In the same way that his plays demonstrate that he is essentially a social critic, these studies are serious and respectful examinations of the shortcomings of the subject matter. He is more concerned with class than he is with character, and even his most successful characters are, to a significant measure, types. Furthermore, he places a secondary emphasis on impulse and motivation. In addition to being a realist who is capable of making sharp and precise observations, he approaches his subject with restraint, delicacy, and impartiality that immediately prompts the descriptor of gentlemanly. Irony is his primary line of defense, and he has a firm grasp of satire. His conversation is quite natural, which is something that we anticipate from him. In addition to being the author of the plays, his writing style has the polished ease and urbanity that are suitable for his genre of fiction, but it is also capable of reflecting profound emotions, and it does so.

The social reformer Galsworthy was known for expressing an issue in a manner that was neutral and fair, presenting all sides of the topic at all times, and letting his audience figure out the solution on their own. The human concerns in his play, albeit being genuine enough and quite close to everyday life, are explored more as products of these forces than as people who are of interest for their own reasons. His primary protagonists are often composed of societal forces that are in conflict with one another. Within this context, they are types. But Galsworthy definitely feels real compassion for the victims of social injustice, particularly for the impoverished and oppressed, and the underlying warmth of his play is one of the features that differentiates him most clearly from Granville-Barker. This is despite the fact that he seems to be emotionally detached for the most part. When it comes to appeal, Galsworthy touches not just the mind but also the emotions of his audience, in contrast to the latter, which is almost entirely intellectualized. His characters are well-researched, and his psychological understanding is especially discernible in the way that he examines the internal turmoil that people experience. He has a strong sense of form in the creation of his plays, and the finest of them are considered to be superb works of stage work. Never once does he slide into sentimentality or theatrical exaggeration, and his speech and events are completely realistic. via his repeated investigations of societal issues that arise from the inequities of the law, via the outstanding trial scenes that can be seen in his plays, and probably most importantly, through the clarity of vision with which he moved down the road that he had purposefully selected in the drama, his legal background is evident.

*Strife* is a play that deals with the analytical projection of social reality, Galsworthy as a realist writer, and the impact and relevance of social realism in the play. In this manner, the whole play deals with these topics. It is an amazing critique of the way industrial society is structured at the present time. It illustrates the conflict that exists between capital and labor and argues for a deeper comprehension of the relationship that exists between these two major forces in our industrial existence. Anthony is the head of the company's capitalists,

while David Roberts is the leader of the workers. It is Galsworthy's mission to foster industrial harmony. It is not appropriate for workers or capitalists to join labor unions and engage in unnecessary Strife in order to secure their rights. In order to make progress in working life and to halt production, the two sides must reconcile their differences. Strikes and lockouts are considered to be needless. This form of injustice receives tremendous emphasis due to conflict. At the same time, it demonstrates that the lives of workers are completely dismal. They cannot walk with their hands up like a free and equal species of humanity because they are unable to do so. This piece of writing aims to shed fresh light on the revolutionary fervor of ordinary workers in England during the early twentieth century who fought against the ruling classes for their rights and privileges. In addition to this, Galsworthy has the intention of being clean about the hidden realities of the social world in Strife.

### **Conclusion**

Galsworthy offers a critical study of the ethical difficulties that develop as a result of the sharp divides that exist between the working class and the capitalist elite in his novel Strife. Galsworthy uses a brilliant interweaving of the themes of class and morality throughout the novel. Galsworthy explores how both sides of the dispute—the workers and the factory owners—find themselves in moral dilemmas, each depending on the pressures of their respective social and economic circumstances. This is done via the representation of a labor strike to illustrate the struggle. While the workers' struggle for better working conditions stems from a genuine quest for justice, the methods they employ, including potential violence and sacrifice, complicate the assessment of the moral justification of their cause. In contrast, the owners of the factory, despite their commitment to the traditional principles of authority and order, fail to see the underlying inequalities that are intrinsic to the capitalist system that they support. This attitude exemplifies the moral blindness that often comes along with power and privilege. Strife, in the end, encourages the audience to examine the ethical basis of capitalist society, posing a challenge to contemplate the link between social class and morality. Galsworthy's depiction of both the working class and the bourgeoisie brings to light the fundamental contradictions that exist within social institutions. This demonstrates how economic systems have the ability to mold individual morals while also sustaining societal inequities with regard to social status. At the conclusion of the play, it does not provide straightforward answers; rather, it encourages a more profound engagement with the moral difficulties of class conflict. This leaves the audience with the opportunity to contemplate the continuous contradictions between justice and social duty, as well as the moral implications of opposing established power structures.

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