

# John Galsworthy

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**John Galsworthy** OM (14 August 1867 – 31 January 1933) was an English novelist and playwright. Notable works include *The Forsyte Saga* (1906–1921) and its sequels, *A Modern Comedy* and *End of the Chapter*. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1932.



John Galsworthy

Galsworthy was born at Kingston Hill in

Surrey, England into an established wealthy family, the son of John and Blanche Bailey (nee Bartleet) Galsworthy. He attended Harrow and New College, Oxford, training as a barrister and was called to the bar in 1890. However, he was not keen to begin practising law and instead travelled abroad to look after the family's shipping business interests. During these travels he met Joseph Conrad, then the first mate of a sailing-ship moored in the harbour of Adelaide, Australia, and the two future novelists became close friends. In 1895 Galsworthy began an affair with Ada Nemesis Pearson, the wife of one of his cousins. After her divorce the pair eventually married on 23 September 1905 and stayed together until his death in 1933.

*From the Four Winds* was Galsworthy's first published work in 1897, a collection of short stories. These, and several subsequent works, were published under the pen name John Sinjohn and it would not be until *The Island Pharisees* (1904) that he would begin publishing under his own name, probably owing to the death of his father. His first play, *The Silver Box* (1906) became a success, and he

followed it up with *The Man of Property* (1906), the first in the Forsyte trilogy. Although he continued writing both plays and novels it was as a playwright he was mainly appreciated at the time. Along with other writers of the time such as Shaw his plays addressed the class system and social issues, two of the best known being *Strife* (1909) and *The Skin Game* (1920).

He is now far better known for his novels and particularly *The Forsyte Saga*, the first of three trilogies of novels about the eponymous family and connected lives. These books, as with many of his other works, dealt with class, and in particular upper-middle class lives. Although sympathetic to his characters he highlights their insular, snobbish and acquisitive attitudes and their suffocating moral codes. He is viewed as one of the first writers of the Edwardian era; challenging in his works some of the ideals of society depicted in the proceeding literature of Victorian England. The depiction of a woman in an unhappy marriage furnishes another recurring theme in his work. The character of Irene in *The Forsyte Saga* is drawn from Ada Pearson even though her previous marriage was

not as miserable as Irene's.

His work is often less convincing when it deals with the changing face of wider British society and how it affects people of the lower social classes. Through his writings he campaigned for a variety of causes including prison reform, women's rights, animal welfare and censorship, but these have limited appeal outside the era in which they were written. During World War I he worked in a hospital in France as an orderly after being passed over for military service. He was elected as the first president of the International PEN literary club in 1921, was appointed to the Order of Merit in 1929—after earlier turning down a knighthood—and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1932.

John Galsworthy died from a brain tumour at Grove Lodge, Hampstead. He was cremated and his ashes were scattered over the South Downs from an airplane. The popularity of his fiction waned quickly after his death but the hugely successful adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga* in 1967 renewed interest in the writer.

A number of John Galsworthy's letters and papers are held at the University of Birmingham Special Collections.

## Adaptations

*The Forsyte Saga* has been filmed several times:

- That Forsyte Woman (1949), dir. by Compton Bennett, an MGM adaptation in which Errol Flynn played a rare villainous role as Soames.
- BBC television drama (1967), dir. by James Cellan Jones, David Giles, starring Eric Porter, Nyree Dawn Porter, Kenneth More, Susan Hampshire, Joseph O'Connor, adaptor Lennox Philips and others, 26 parts
- Granada television drama (2002), dir. by Christopher Menaul, starring Gina McKee, Damian Lewis, Rupert Graves, Corin Redgrave, 13 parts.

*The Skin Game* was adapted and directed by

Alfred Hitchcock in 1931. It starred VC France, Helen Haye, Jill Esmond, Edmund Gwenn, John Longden but is not considered among Hitchcock's best.

*Escape* was filmed in 1930 and 1948. The latter was directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, starring Rex Harrison, Peggy Cummings, William Hartnell. The screenplay was by Philip Dunne.

*One More River* (a film version of Galsworthy's *Over the River*) was filmed by James Whale in 1934. The film starred Frank Lawton, Colin Clive (one of Whale's most frequently used actors), and Diana Wynyard. It also featured Mrs. Patrick Campbell in a rare sound film appearance.

## **Selected works**

- *From The Four Winds*, 1897 (as John Sinjohn)
- *Jocelyn*, 1898 (as John Sinjohn)
- *Villa Rubein*, 1900 (as John Sinjohn)
- *A Man Of Devon*, 1901 (as John Sinjohn)
- *The Island Pharisees*, 1904

- *The Silver Box*, 1906 (his first play)
- *The Forsyte Saga*, 1906-21, 1922
  - *The Man Of Property*, 1906
  - (interlude) *Indian Summer of a Forsyte*, 1918
  - *In Chancery*, 1920
  - (interlude) *Awakening*, 1920
  - *To Let*, 1921
- *The Country House*, 1907
- *A Commentary*, 1908
- *Fraternity*, 1909
- *A Justification For The Censorship Of Plays*, 1909
- *Strife*, 1909
- *Fraternity*, 1909
- *Joy*, 1909
- *Justice*, 1910
- *A Motley*, 1910
- *The Spirit Of Punishment*, 1910
- *Horses In Mines*, 1910
- *The Patrician*, 1911
- *The Little Dream*, 1911
- *The Pigeon*, 1912
- *The Eldest Son*, 1912
- *Moods, Songs, And Doggerels*, 1912
- *For Love Of Beasts*, 1912
- *The Inn Of Tranquillity*, 1912

- *The Dark Flower*, 1913
- *The Fugitive*, 1913
- *The Mob*, 1914
- *The Freelands*, 1915
- *The Little Man*, 1915
- *A Bit's Love*, 1915
- *A Sheaf*, 1916
- *The Apple Tree*, 1916
- *Beyond*, 1917
- *Five Tales*, 1918
- *Saint's Progress*, 1919
- *Addresses In America*, 1912
- *The Foundations*, 1920
- *In Chancery*, 1920
- *Awakening*, 1920
- *The Skin Game* , 1920
- *To Let*, 1920
- *A Family Man*, 1922
- *The Little Man*, 1922
- *Loyalties*, 1922
- *Windows*, 1922
- *Captures*, 1923
- *Abracadabra*, 1924
- *The Forest*, 1924
- *Old English*, 1924
- *The Show*, 1925
- *Escape*, 1926



- *Verses New And Old*, 1926
- *Castles In Spain*, 1927
- *A Modern Comedy*, 1924-1928, 1929
  - *The White Monkey*, 1924
  - *(Interlude) a Silent Wooing*, 1927
  - *The Silver Spoon*, 1926
  - *(Interlude) Passers By*, 1927
  - *Swan Song*, 1928
- *Two Forsyte Interludes*, 1927
- *The Manaton Edition*, 1923-26  
(collection, 30 vols.)
- *Exiled*, 1929
- *The Roof*, 1929
- *On Forsyte Change*, 1930
- *Two Essays On Conrad*, 1930
- *Soames And The Flag*, 1930
- *The Creation Of Character In Literature*,  
1931 (The Romanes Lecture for 1931).
- *Maid In Waiting*, 1931
- *Forty Poems*, 1932
- *Flowering Wilderness*, 1932
- *Over the River*, 1933
- *Autobiographical Letters Of Galsworthy:  
A Correspondence With Frank Harris*,  
1933
- *The Grove Edition*, 1927-34 (collection,  
27 Vols.)

- *Collected Poems*, 1934
- *End Of the Chapter*, 1931-1933, 1934 (posthumously)
  - *Maid In Waiting*, 1931
  - *Flowering Wilderness*, 1932
  - *One More River*, 1933 (originally the English edition was called *Over the River*)
- *Punch And Go*, 1935
- *The Life And Letters*, 1935
- *The Winter Garden*, 1935
- *Forsytes, Pendyces And Others*, 1935
- *Selected Short Stories*, 1935
- *Glimpses And Reflections*, 1937
- *Galsworthy's Letters To Leon Lion*, 1968
- *Letters From John Galsworthy 1900-1932*, 1970

## External links

- The Forsyte Chronicles at eBooks@Adelaide
- John Galsworthy's Gravesite
- Works by John Galsworthy at Project Gutenberg
- The Man of Property LibriVox recording

## **Nobel Prize in Literature: Laureates (1901–1950)**

1926: Deledda | 1927: Bergson | 1928: Undset |  
1929: Mann | 1930: Lewis | 1931: Karlfeldt |  
1932: **Galsworthy** | 1933: Bunin | 1934: Pirandello |  
1936: O'Neill | 1937: Martin du Gard | 1938: Buck |  
1939: Sillanpää | 1944: Jensen | 1945: G. Mistral |  
1946: Hesse | 1947: Gide | 1948: Eliot |  
1949: Faulkner | 1950: Russell

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*Complete List | Laureates (1901–1925) | Laureates  
(1951–1975) | Laureates (1976–2000) | Laureates  
(2001—)*

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