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A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF JOHN GALSWORTHY'S THE MAN OF PROPERTY

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ФЕМИНИСТСКИЙ СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ РОМАНА ДЖОНА ГОЛСУОРСИ «СОБСТВЕННИК»

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Abstract. This research paper applies feminist stylistic analysis to John Galsworthy's novel *The Man of Property*. Using the theoretical framework of feminist literary criticism, this study explores how Galsworthy's language and stylistic choices reinforce themes of possession, gender inequality, and patriarchal control. Through close reading and textual analysis of selected passages, the research focuses on lexical choices, sentence structures, dialogue patterns, and stylistic devices such as metaphor and irony. Drawing on feminist theories of language, this study interprets how the novel critiques the objectification of women, particularly through Soames Forsyte's obsessive control over his wife, Irene. The findings suggest that Galsworthy's narrative style and linguistic structures expose and challenge the fixed gender norms of the time, depicting marriage as a form of ownership rather than partnership. Overall, this research contributes to the intersection of feminist theory, linguistic and literary analysis, highlighting the importance of feminist stylistic approaches in revealing gender roles in literary texts.

Аннотация. Работа посвящена феминистскому стилистическому анализу романа Джона Голсуорси "Собственник". Используя теоретическую базу феминистской литературной критики, исследование рассматривает, каким образом языковые и стилистические приёмы Голсуорси ют темы одержимости, гендерного неравенства и патриархального контроля. Посредством внимательного прочтения и текстового анализа отдельных фрагментов акцент сделан на лексический выбор, синтаксические структуры, особенности диалогов и стилистические средства, такие как метафора и ирония. Основываясь на феминистских теориях языка, исследование интерпретирует, как роман критикует объективацию женщин, в частности, через навязчивое стремление Сомса Форсайта контролировать свою жену Ирэн. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что повествовательный стиль и языковые конструкции Голсуорси раскрывают и ставят под сомнение закреплённые в обществе гендерные нормы, изображая брак скорее как форму собственности, нежели партнёрства. В целом, данное исследование вносит вклад во взаимодействие феминистской теории, лингвистического и литературного анализа, подчёркивая значимость феминистских стилистических подходов для раскрытия гендерных ролей в литературных текстах.

Ключевые слова: феминистский стилистический анализ, Джон Голсуорси, феминистская литературная критика, гендерное неравенство, лексический выбор, стилистические приёмы, метафора, ирония.

Keywords: feminist stylistic analysis, John Galsworthy, feminist literary criticism, gender inequality, lexical choices, stylistic devices, metaphor, irony.

John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* (1906), the first novel in *The Forsyte Saga*, looks into themes of wealth, class, marriage, and the societal expectations that dictate human relationships [1]. At the center of the novel is Soames Forsyte, a man who treats his wife, Irene, not as an autonomous individual but as an extension of his material wealth, his property, something to be possessed. The very title of the novel serves as a metaphor for Soames's obsession with ownership—his need to possess not only property, but also people. Through this metaphor, Galsworthy exposes and critiques the patriarchal structures of Edwardian society, where women were often confined within the structures of marriage as a form of legalized possession.

Galsworthy's style is emotionally descriptive, which helps to effectively capture the psychological toll of male possessiveness on Irene and those around her. His narrative techniques subtly reinforce the era's prescribed gender roles while also shedding light on their inherent injustices. As feminist critic Lois Tyson explains, feminist literary criticism aims to “*understand the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women*” [2, p. 83]. In *The Man of Property* [1], Soames's constant need to control Irene is one of the most vivid examples of these oppressive structures, as he views her as a mere continuation of his property rather than an equal partner.

Sara Mills, a key voice in feminist stylistics, argues that language itself is, in fact, a vehicle of patriarchal ideology: “*Language does not reflect a reality which is independent of the speaker, but instead reflects a version of the world which is shaped by social positioning*” [3, p. 11]. Galsworthy's use of language, particularly his limited access to Irene's internal thoughts, mirrors this restriction. Irene's silence throughout much of the novel is not merely a narrative gap; it is a deliberate stylistic reflection of how women's voices were systematically silenced.

Analyzing *The Man of Property* [1] through a feminist lens provides a deeper exploration of how literature can both perpetuate and question gendered stereotypes. Feminist literary criticism, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the marginalization of women in literary discourse, aims to expose how patriarchal ideologies are basically woven into texts and writings. Galsworthy's novel stands as a critical text within this discourse, offering a vivid portrayal of a woman's resistance to a culture that seeks to objectify her.

By applying feminist stylistic analysis, which is a method concerned with how linguistic and stylistic choices convey gendered power dynamics, this study reveals how Galsworthy's narrative voice both critiques and participates in the gender ideology of his time. According to Mills, “*stylistic choices... may either challenge or reinforce dominant power structures*” [3, p. 53]. In *The Man of Property* [1], Galsworthy, quite successfully, simultaneously presents the patriarchal worldview of Soames while also undermining it through narrative irony and symbolic imagery.

This approach not only brings to light the novel's thematic complexity but also aligns with the broader feminist project that seeks gender equality in literature and society. As Tyson puts it, “*Literature is a cultural product that can serve either to perpetuate or to challenge the status quo*” [2, p. 92]. *The Man of Property* [1], through its critique of marital possession and gendered authority, contributes to the latter, encouraging readers to question the normalization of dominance and submission in personal and public life.

John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* [1] has long been the subject of critical analysis, particularly in discussions of class hierarchy, wealth accumulation, and moral conflict. However, its feminist implications have received comparatively less scholarly attention. One promising area of analysis is feminist stylistic analysis, which focuses on how language constructs and deconstructs gender identities in literature.

Feminist stylistic analysis is a relatively recent development within feminist literary criticism, which studies how linguistic choices in texts can either reinforce or challenge dominant gender ideologies. According to Sara Mills, feminist stylistics aims to "*identify the ways in which texts construct and position gendered subjects*" and to analyze the "*subtle workings of power in language*" [3, p. 22].

One scholar who has contributed significantly in this direction is Ellen Moody. Moody writes from a narrative-structural perspective and discusses how Galsworthy's limited access to Irene's thoughts is not an accident. It is a strategic stylistic tool used to reflect the larger cultural narrative that casts women as mysterious, emotional, beautiful, but hard to understand. Men are given complex thoughts, while women are often just gazed upon and admired. Moody argues that this creates a distance that objectifies Irene, even as the novel subtly criticizes this idea [4].

Elizabeth A. Papadopoulou, on the other hand, delivers a critical analysis that hits at the core of Galsworthy's social commentary: *The Man of Property* is not just about wealth or reputation; it is about ownership of people, particularly women. She believes that Irene's symbolic value as "property" is what defines Soames's identity and status, and that Galsworthy uses this to critique the laws and cultural beliefs that enabled such objectification [5].

Thus, the task becomes clear: we read the language, we question the silence. We look for symbolism, and we try to decipher it. And most importantly, we remember that feminist stylistic analysis is not only a tool for breaking down texts but also for building critical thinking. Galsworthy's language is filled with gendered codes, and feminist analysis allows us to see how those codes are both reinforced and challenged in the text. Through metaphor, voice distribution, and narrative, *The Man of Property* becomes more than a mere novel about marriage—it becomes a case study in how patriarchal control operates quietly and often devastatingly.

In sum, the feminist stylistic analysis of *The Man of Property* shows how Galsworthy's language and storytelling reveal and question patriarchal ideas. This work lays the ground for future studies on how language, gender, and power connect in Edwardian literature. Such analysis helps us better understand Galsworthy's novel and supports wider discussions about gender equality in literature.

This study applies a feminist stylistic analysis to John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* to explore how linguistic and narrative techniques reflect and critique gendered power dynamics. Drawing on feminist literary criticism and stylistic theory, the analysis examines how Galsworthy's language choices contribute to the portrayal of patriarchal control and the marginalization of women.

Feminist stylistics, as defined by Sara Mills [3], focuses on how language shapes and sustains societal ideologies, particularly those related to gender. Katie Wales further emphasizes that it investigates how stylistic elements contribute to the construction and perception of gender in literary texts [6, p. 158]. Emerging from feminist literary criticism, which gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the marginalization of women's experiences, feminist stylistic analysis aims to uncover and critique the linguistic mechanisms by which patriarchal ideologies are maintained or contested.

This research contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how Galsworthy's stylistic choices influence the depiction of women as passive or resistant figures within a patriarchal

social order. Building on the work of Sara Mills, Deborah Cameron [7], and others, the analysis is grounded in the belief that language both reflects and shapes social realities, particularly concerning gender and power dynamics.

The research is based on a qualitative close reading of selected passages from the novel, focusing on the following stylistic features:

- Lexical Choices: The adjectives, metaphors, and descriptive language used for male and female characters, with particular attention to the portrayal of women, especially Irene, in terms of appearance and emotionality. These are contrasted with the active agency often attributed to male characters.

- Dialogue Patterns and Voice Distribution: Conversations, particularly between Irene and Soames, are analyzed to understand who dominates the dialogue, who speaks more, and how silences or interruptions reflect power dynamics within relationships.

- Stylistic Devices: The use of metaphor and irony is examined to reveal how Galsworthy critiques societal norms surrounding marriage, property, and gender roles.

Primary data consists of selected excerpts from *The Man of Property* [1]. Secondary sources include foundational texts in feminist literary criticism and stylistics, notably works by Lois Tyson [2], Sara Mills [3], Elizabeth A. Papadopoulou [4], Ellen Moody [5], Katie Wales [6], and Deborah Cameron [7].

This feminist stylistic analysis of *The Man of Property* focused on three interrelated stylistic categories: lexical choices, stylistic devices, and dialogue patterns. The findings consistently reveal a gendered asymmetry in how language is used to portray male versus female characters, particularly in the characterization of Irene and Soames Forsyte.

In terms of lexical choices, Irene is repeatedly described through language that emphasizes physical beauty, sensuality, and emotional restraint. Adjectives like “pretty,” “soft,” “alluring,” and metaphors comparing her to art objects or passive beings dominate her portrayal. She is fragmented into body parts—eyes, lips, hair—and her beauty is often narrated from the perspective of male characters.

When examining dialogue patterns, the imbalance becomes even more noticeable. Irene has significantly fewer lines of direct speech compared to Soames. Her silences dominate key emotional scenes, and when she does speak, her words are hesitant, fragmented, or met with resistance. Soames, on the other hand, speaks with certainty, commands conversations, and often disregards or ignores Irene’s words. In several scenes, Irene’s silence serves as a protective mechanism rather than submission, but within the narrative structure, it also functions as symbolic marginalization.

Additionally, metaphor and irony serve as key stylistic tools in Galsworthy’s narrative. The metaphor of marriage as property is repeated across the text, most notably through Soames’s internal monologues and the commentary of other male characters. Galsworthy’s use of irony, particularly in climactic scenes, destabilizes the patriarchal worldview, hinting at its emotional emptiness and eventual collapse. Irene’s resistance, although often silent or symbolic, is framed within this ironic contrast between societal expectations and emotional realities.

These findings, taken together, illustrate how Galsworthy’s stylistic choices contribute to a gendered discourse of possession and silencing, while also planting the seeds of critique within that same structure.

Analysis: Lexical Choices

In *The Man of Property*, John Galsworthy’s lexical choices play a crucial role in shaping gender dynamics, particularly in the portrayal of Irene. Through a stylistic lens, Galsworthy’s

descriptions of Irene are soaked in language that objectifies and idealizes her physical appearance, reducing her to a passive object of male desire. One such passage illustrates this vividly:

"She was a pretty woman—a little too pale, but her figure, her eyes, her teeth! Too good for that chap Soames! The gods had given Irene dark brown eyes and golden hair, that strange combination, provocative of men's glances, which is said to be the mark of a weak character. And the full, soft pallor of her neck and shoulders, above a gold-coloured frock, gave to her personality an alluring strangeness" [1, p. 35].

This passage is marked by a male gaze that fragments Irene into aesthetic parts: eyes, teeth, hair, shoulders, each of them getting admired for its sensual appeal. Such descriptions resonate with what Mills identifies as the *foregrounding of the female body*, which is *"central to the objectification process in patriarchal discourse"* [3, p. 82]. The words used to describe Irene as *"pretty," "provocative,"* and *"alluring strangeness"* suggest that Irene is mainly positioned as an object designed for male visual consumption. The focus on her *"golden hair"* and *"dark brown eyes,"* which are called a *"strange combination,"* makes her beauty seem both attractive and questionable at the same time. Moreover, pairing beauty with *"provocative"* traits and the implication that such a combination signals *"weak character,"* draws on a long-standing tradition where women's physical attractiveness has been directly linked to moral ambiguity or danger, subtly implying that being beautiful can be seen as a flaw. Also, as we can notice from the passage, the description lacks any references to Irene's thoughts, emotions, or actions. Her personality is not explored through interiority or dialogue but is instead derived solely from her appearance.

A similar lexical pattern emerges in another passage: *"James felt quite warm towards her...he kept examining her figure, from her bronze-coloured shoes to the waved gold of her hair. She was leaning back in an Empire chair, her shoulders poised against the top—her body, flexibly straight and unsupported from the hips, swaying when she moved, as though giving to the arms of a lover. Her lips were smiling, her eyes half-closed"*[1, p. 137].

Here, Galsworthy uses a romanticized, almost sensual diction to describe Irene's posture and physical form. Words like *"swaying," "unsupported,"* and *"giving to the arms of a lover"* evoke imagery of passivity and surrender. Deborah Cameron argues that such representations contribute to *"a linguistic framework that makes women appear naturally subordinate and emotionally driven"* [7, p. 47]. Irene's agency is erased through these lexical constructions, supporting the patriarchal idea that women mainly exist for men's pleasure and admiration.

Furthermore, Irene is often described in ways that emphasize visual pleasure, aligning with what feminist theorists like Laura Mulvey call the male gaze, in which women are seen as passive objects rather than active subjects [8]. This phenomenon is not just visual; it's also linguistic. Galsworthy's word choices continually present Irene as a silent, beautiful object rather than a fully formed individual. Even in moments where she is present and described in motion, the language emphasizes her body's relation to male desire rather than her own inner voice or autonomy.

The lexical emphasis on Irene's appearance sharply contrasts with the language used for male characters, who are described through action, intellect, or authority. This aligns with what Mills calls *"lexical asymmetry,"* a term used to describe how language systematically privileges male agency while marginalizing female presence [3, p. 107].

Dialogue and Voice Distribution

Example 1: *"She was ever silent, passive, gracefully averse; as though terrified lest by word, motion, or sign she might lead him to believe that she was fond of him"* [1, p. 52].

When it comes to dialogue and voice distribution, this passage becomes one of the most powerful illustrations of how Galsworthy constructs Irene's character through the absence of speech, of action, and self-assertion. Rather than describing Irene through what she says or does,

Galsworthy defines her through negation and restraint. The repeated adjectives or what we call tricolon, “*silent, passive, gracefully averse,*” are states of being rather than verbs of action, reducing Irene to a static figure, lacking presence in her own life. As Sara Mills notes, women in patriarchal narratives are frequently depicted “*in terms of how little they do or say, reflecting their marginalization in both social and textual structures*” [3, p. 59].

The structure of the sentence focuses on Irene’s fear of misinterpretation. The passage says “*as though terrified lest by word, motion, or sign she (Irene) might lead him to believe,*” suggesting that even the smallest form of expression could lead to consequences completely unwanted by Irene. It is quite obvious that her behavior is a mere survival tactic when faced with Soames’s possessiveness. She remains silent not out of submissiveness, but as a form of self-protection in a world where any form of communication could be misunderstood or misread as consent.

This imbalance in voice distribution is key to Galsworthy’s feminist critique. As Deborah Cameron argues, “*the right to speak is not equally distributed; some voices are given authority, others are denied credibility*” [7, p. 47]. Irene’s silence is a direct result of this imbalance as it is forced, while Soames’s voice dominates the narrative. The silence becomes a kind of enforced absence, a space in which male authority can thrive unchecked.

Additionally, Galsworthy’s narrative style reinforces Irene’s lack of dialogue. Her inner thoughts are rarely shown directly, and she is seldom given the opportunity to express herself in conversation. In feminist stylistics, it is called *symbolic erasure*. As Katie Wales explains, when female characters are denied speech or inner perspective, they are “*ideologically silenced*” [6, p. 185]. As a result, Irene’s silence becomes a symbol for the social suppression of female agency.

By examining this passage through the lens of dialogue and voice distribution, we can better understand that Irene’s silence is not mere quietness; it is an expression of fear, resistance, and gendered constraint. Through language choices, Galsworthy shows the emotional cost of living in a society where women must constantly modulate every gesture, every word, and even their silence, despite it sounding absurd, to survive male scrutiny.

Example 2:

Soames was silent for some minutes; at last he said:

*“I don’t know what your idea of
a wife’s duty is. I never have known!”*

He had not expected her to reply, but she did.

*“I have tried to do what you want; it’s not my fault that I haven’t been able to put my
heart into it.”*

“Whose fault is it, then?” He watched her askance.

*“Before we were married, you promised to let me go if our marriage was not a success.
Is it a success?”*

Soames frowned.

“Success,” he stammered—“it would be a success if you behaved yourself properly!”

“I have tried,” said Irene. “Will you let me go?”

Soames turned away. Secretly alarmed, he took refuge in bluster.

*“Let you go? You don’t know what you’re talking about. Let you go? How can I let
you go? We’re married, aren’t we? Then, what are you talking about? For God’s sake,
don’t let’s have any of this sort of nonsense! Get your hat on, and come and sit in the
Park.” [1, pp.158-159].*

In this passage, Soames’s language is forceful and dominating, embodying the patriarchal authority he believes marriage entitles him to. He speaks with authority, like a judge, accusing Irene of failing to fulfill her expected role as a wife. His words suggest a very firm belief that she is

neglecting her marital duties. Rhetorical questions such as “Whose fault is it, then?” and “How can I let you go?” suggest that Soames is placing the entire blame for the failure of the marriage on Irene.

Irene’s response, however, is calm and resigned as she explains that she has made efforts, yet her inability to offer genuine affection is beyond her control. Her words are soft and somewhat vague, reflecting the emotional distance and exhaustion that have worn her down over time. Moreover, rather than demanding and asserting, she uses soft and non-confrontational language like “I have tried to do what you want” and “Will you let me go?”, yet again proving Irene’s limited ability to express herself in the relationship.

Furthermore, the narrative description surrounding the dialogue reinforces this imbalance. Soames’s internal emotions as stated in the passage “secretly alarmed” are acknowledged, giving depth to his position, while Irene’s inner world remains inaccessible to the reader. Her thoughts and feelings are implied rather than expressed, thus, showing her ideological silencing within both the text and her marriage.

Galsworthy’s portrayal of their dialogue stylistically dramatizes the gendered dynamics of voice and power. Irene’s minimal speech acts as both a survival strategy and a symbol of her constrained agency, while Soames’s dominant voice represents the societal forces that prevent women from fully participating in their narratives. In this way, the passage not only depicts an emotionally abusive relationship but also critiques the broader societal norms that silence and marginalize women’s experiences.

Stylistic Devices

Metaphor “The core of it all,” he thought, “is property, but there are many people who would not like it put that way. To them it is ‘the sanctity of the marriage tie’; but the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent on the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the family is dependent on the sanctity of property” [1, p. 157].

In this passage, Galsworthy uses a layered metaphor that equates marriage, family, and love with property. Through the internal thoughts of Young Jolyon, the author exposes the deep-seated materialism of Edwardian society, where personal relationships are controlled by legal and economic interests. The repeated use of the word sanctity, which is usually tied to religious or moral purity, is ironically paired with property to show the hypocrisy behind how marriage is idealized.

This metaphor is central to Galsworthy’s critique of patriarchal capitalism. As Sara Mills notes, metaphor in literature is often used “to naturalize ideological perspectives,” especially when describing abstract concepts like marriage or gender roles [3, p. 142]. But here, Galsworthy destabilizes this idea in a very clever way: instead of accepting marriage as a property-like institution, he exposes its flaws and moral emptiness.

Moreover, the metaphor serves to further reveal Soames’s character. His obsession with Irene is not rooted in emotional intimacy but in legal and social control. As Cameron argues, “language is a key site where power relations are enacted,” and metaphors like this “show how deeply ideological power is embedded in everyday concepts like love or family” [7, p. 92]. Soames’s idea of marriage is shaped less by human connection and more by ownership, seeing Irene as part of his estate, a reflection of his status, another property that makes others jealous.

The metaphor also reinforces the broader theme of possession in the novel. By metaphorically collapsing marriage into property, Galsworthy critiques the commodification of women and relationships. This stylistic choice invites readers to question the moral foundations of institutions like marriage, which are presented not as sacred bonds but as extensions of wealth and male dominance.

Irony. "The forces underlying every tragedy — forces that take no denial, working through cross currents to their ironical end, had met and fused with a thunder-clap, flung out the victim, and flattened to the ground all those that stood around" [1, p. 235].

In this passage, Galsworthy uses irony as a stylistic device to critique the patriarchal values that dominate the Forsyte family and society at large. The description of the tragic events as being driven by "forces that take no denial" and leading to an "ironical end" highlights the tension between the Forsytes' idealized views of control and the unpredictable consequences of their firm materialistic beliefs. The irony here lies in the fact that Forsytes attempt to control their lives, emotions, relationships, especially marriage and family, but ultimately compromised and weakened by forces beyond their grasp, leading to a tragic and ironic outcome.

The ironic nature of this passage is further emphasized by the metaphor of a "thunder-clap" followed by the victim (Philip Bosinney) being "flung out" and "flattened", a sudden, destructive force that destroys the illusion of control and stability the Forsytes have so carefully constructed. The language itself, with its violent and unpredictable imagery, contrasts with the ideal of marriage and family that the Forsytes uphold. Their desire for control, order, and social respectability ultimately leads to emotional devastation, exposing the irony that their attempts to secure their lives through domination and ownership (especially of women) result in chaos and loss.

Galsworthy uses irony in this passage to show the contradictions in the Forsytes' beliefs. They focus on controlling women and accumulating wealth, but this leads to the collapse of the values they hold dear. This critique highlights a society that prioritizes property and social status over authentic emotions and genuine human connections. Through this ironic twist, Galsworthy reveals the flaws in patriarchal beliefs, showing that they do not provide true stability or fulfillment.

Conclusion

John Galsworthy's *The Man of Property* offers a profound critique of patriarchal structures through its portrayal of marriage, ownership, and gendered power dynamics. By focusing on Soames Forsyte's obsession with ownership, the novel exposes how women, particularly Irene, are treated as property within both legal and social frameworks. Through a feminist stylistic lens, the novel's linguistic and narrative techniques reveal the mechanisms by which women's agency is systematically suppressed and male authority is normalized.

The analysis of lexical choices demonstrated how Galsworthy's descriptions objectify Irene, reducing her to a beautiful, silent figure, while attributing action and control to male characters. Examination of dialogue patterns and voice distribution further highlights the imbalance: Irene's silences dominate the text, serving as both a survival strategy and a symbol of ideological erasure, whereas Soames's speech asserts dominance and entitlement. Galsworthy's use of metaphor, especially the connection of marriage to property, critiques the objectification of personal relationships, while his use of irony destabilizes the very values that Edwardian society sought to uphold.

By uncovering how Galsworthy's stylistic strategies both reinforce and challenge patriarchal ideologies, this study contributes to feminist literary criticism and stylistic analysis. While the novel depicts a world that attempts to silence and control women, it also plants seeds of resistance through narrative irony, symbolic imagery, and the powerful, meaningful silences embodied by Irene.

Ultimately, *The Man of Property* remains a pivotal text for understanding the complex intersections of language, gender, and power. Galsworthy's subtle yet sharp critique invites readers not only to witness Irene's struggle but also to question the societal norms that seek to confine women to lives of enforced silence and submission.

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