

HOMELESSNESS, CHARITY, AND SOCIAL WELFARE: REIMAGINING SOCIAL WORK THROUGH JOHN GALSWORTHY'S THE PIGEON

Dr. S. Devi¹, Dr. A. Arun Daves²

¹Principal, Jawahar Science College, Neyveli, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jawahar Science College, Neyveli, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

*Homelessness has remained one of the most persistent social concerns across different historical periods, demanding attention not only from policymakers and social workers but also from literary writers who have documented the experiences of marginalized individuals. John Galsworthy's *The Pigeon* (1912) occupies a significant position in this context by presenting a nuanced portrayal of poverty, displacement, and social exclusion in early twentieth-century Britain. This article examines the play through an interdisciplinary framework that combines literary criticism with contemporary social work perspectives to investigate how Galsworthy critiques prevailing attitudes toward homelessness and welfare. The study argues that *The Pigeon* moves beyond a conventional representation of charity by exposing the structural inequalities that shape the lives of vulnerable individuals. Through characters such as Christopher Wellwyn and Ferrand, Galsworthy highlights the limitations of individual benevolence and draws attention to the broader social conditions that perpetuate poverty and exclusion. The article further demonstrates that the play anticipates several principles associated with modern social work, including respect for human dignity, social justice, social inclusion, and collective responsibility. Employing concepts such as social exclusion, social capital, and the capability approach, the analysis reveals how homelessness in the play functions as both a material and a social condition that restricts participation, recognition, and personal agency. By foregrounding the lived experiences of marginalized people, Galsworthy challenges stereotypes surrounding poverty and encourages a more humane understanding of social welfare. The study contends that *The Pigeon* remains relevant to contemporary discussions of homelessness because it underscores the need for structural intervention rather than reliance on charitable assistance alone. Through its powerful social critique, the play establishes a meaningful dialogue between literature and social work, demonstrating how literary texts can contribute to broader conversations about welfare, human rights, and social responsibility.*

Keywords: John Galsworthy; *The Pigeon*; Homelessness; Social Work; Social Welfare; Social Exclusion; Human Dignity; Social Justice

1. LITERATURE, SOCIETY, AND THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PIGEON

The relationship between literature and society has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of texts that engage with poverty, inequality, and social reform. Literary works often function as cultural documents that preserve the social anxieties, moral conflicts, and political concerns of their historical moments. At the same time, they transcend their immediate contexts by offering insights into enduring human problems. Among the English writers of the early twentieth century, John Galsworthy occupies a distinctive position because of his sustained commitment to exposing social injustice and institutional inadequacies. Although he is best known for *The Forsyte Saga* and the socially conscious drama *Justice*, his play *The Pigeon* remains one of the most compelling literary explorations of homelessness,

poverty, and human dignity. Written in 1912 during a period of significant social transition in Britain, the play presents a nuanced examination of the lives of marginalized individuals and questions the effectiveness of charitable responses to structural social problems. When read through the lens of contemporary social work theory, *The Pigeon* emerges as a remarkably prescient text that anticipates many of the ethical and practical concerns that continue to shape welfare discourse in the twenty-first century.

The emergence of modern social work was closely connected with the social and economic transformations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rapid industrialization generated unprecedented wealth for some sections of society while simultaneously creating conditions of urban poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, and social dislocation for others. Cities expanded at extraordinary rates, attracting individuals seeking employment but often failing to provide adequate housing, health care, or social support. As traditional community structures weakened, increasing numbers of people found themselves vulnerable to economic instability and social exclusion. These developments encouraged both philanthropic initiatives and calls for systemic reform. Social investigators such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree documented the extent of urban poverty, challenging assumptions that economic hardship resulted primarily from personal failings. Their findings contributed to a growing recognition that poverty was frequently rooted in structural conditions beyond individual control.

It was within this social environment that Galsworthy developed his literary vision. His works consistently reveal a deep concern for individuals who are marginalized by dominant institutions and social conventions. Unlike many writers who approached poverty from a paternalistic perspective, Galsworthy sought to represent disadvantaged individuals as complex human beings possessing dignity, aspirations, and emotional depth. His dramatic method encourages audiences to confront uncomfortable social realities rather than dismissing them as distant or inevitable. In *The Pigeon*, this commitment is particularly evident in his treatment of homelessness. Rather than portraying homeless individuals as threats to social order or objects of sentimental pity, he presents them as victims of social circumstances that expose the inadequacies of existing systems of support.

The social significance of homelessness in Edwardian Britain cannot be overstated. Although economic prosperity characterized certain sectors of society, substantial numbers of individuals remained trapped in cycles of deprivation. Homelessness represented not merely the absence of shelter but also the loss of social belonging and economic security. Individuals without stable housing frequently encountered discrimination, suspicion, and exclusion from mainstream social life. Public discourse often framed homelessness as evidence of moral weakness, reinforcing stereotypes that justified social neglect. Against this backdrop, Galsworthy's decision to focus on the experiences of homeless and impoverished characters acquires considerable political and ethical significance. His play challenges dominant narratives by encouraging audiences to recognize the humanity of those whom society had rendered invisible.

At the center of *The Pigeon* stands Christopher Wellwyn, an artist whose generosity and compassion define his interactions with others. Wellwyn represents a figure deeply troubled by human suffering and determined to alleviate it whenever possible. His home functions as a sanctuary for individuals experiencing hardship, symbolizing an ethical commitment to hospitality and care. Yet Galsworthy's treatment of Wellwyn is far from simplistic. While the character's benevolence is admirable, the play gradually reveals the limitations of relying upon personal charity as a response to systemic social problems. Wellwyn repeatedly encounters situations that exceed the capacity of individual goodwill to resolve. His efforts provide temporary relief, but they do not alter the broader conditions that generate poverty and homelessness. Through this tension, Galsworthy invites audiences to reflect upon the relationship between individual morality and collective responsibility.

The distinction between charity and social welfare constitutes one of the most significant themes in the play. Charity traditionally operates through voluntary acts of generosity directed toward individuals perceived as deserving of assistance. While such actions may alleviate immediate suffering, they often leave underlying structures untouched. Social welfare, by contrast, seeks to establish institutional mechanisms capable of addressing the causes of social inequality. Contemporary social work emphasizes the importance of moving beyond emergency assistance toward interventions

that promote long-term stability, empowerment, and social inclusion. Although *The Pigeon* predates the development of modern welfare states, its dramatic logic points toward this broader understanding of social responsibility. The recurring presence of individuals in need suggests that acts of kindness, however sincere, cannot substitute for systemic change.

One of the play's most compelling characters is Ferrand, an impoverished foreign artist whose circumstances illustrate the precariousness of life at the social margins. Ferrand's experiences challenge simplistic explanations of poverty that attribute economic hardship to laziness or moral deficiency. He is neither irresponsible nor inherently incapable. Instead, he finds himself trapped within conditions that restrict his opportunities and undermine his security. His status as both an outsider and a poor man intensifies his vulnerability, exposing him to forms of exclusion that remain recognizable in contemporary societies. Galsworthy's portrayal of Ferrand anticipates modern understandings of intersectionality, which emphasize how multiple forms of disadvantage can combine to produce heightened vulnerability.

Ferrand's struggles resonate strongly with contemporary social work perspectives on homelessness. Current research consistently demonstrates that homelessness rarely results from a single cause. Instead, it emerges through the interaction of economic pressures, social isolation, inadequate support systems, housing insecurity, and broader structural inequalities. Individuals experiencing homelessness often possess histories marked by unemployment, displacement, family breakdown, discrimination, or mental health challenges. By presenting Ferrand as a multidimensional human being rather than a stereotype, Galsworthy encourages audiences to recognize the complexity of social problems. His characterization undermines simplistic moral judgments and directs attention toward the broader social context within which individual lives unfold.

The emotional power of *The Pigeon* derives in large measure from its insistence upon the dignity of those living in poverty. Human dignity occupies a central place within contemporary social work ethics. Professional codes emphasize the inherent worth of every individual regardless of social status, economic condition, or personal history. This principle challenges approaches that reduce vulnerable populations to passive recipients of assistance. Galsworthy similarly resists representations that strip poor individuals of agency and individuality. His characters possess distinct voices, aspirations, and emotional lives. They are not merely symbols of social problems but fully realized human beings whose experiences demand recognition and respect.

This emphasis on dignity becomes especially significant when considered alongside prevailing attitudes toward poverty during the early twentieth century. Public discourse frequently distinguished between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, rewarding some forms of hardship while condemning others. Such distinctions often reflected moral judgments rather than objective assessments of need. Individuals who failed to conform to dominant expectations risked being denied sympathy and support. Galsworthy challenges these assumptions by depicting poverty as a social condition rather than a moral verdict. His characters evoke empathy not because they meet predetermined standards of worthiness but because they are human beings confronting circumstances that threaten their well-being and autonomy.

The title of the play provides an important symbolic framework for understanding its ethical concerns. The pigeon traditionally symbolizes gentleness, vulnerability, and innocence. By invoking this image, Galsworthy encourages audiences to reconsider their perceptions of marginalized individuals. The metaphor suggests that those who occupy vulnerable positions within society deserve care and protection rather than suspicion or contempt. At the same time, the title functions as an implicit critique of social arrangements that permit human beings to exist in conditions of insecurity and exclusion. The symbolism reinforces the play's broader argument that social responsibility extends beyond private acts of kindness to encompass collective obligations toward vulnerable populations.

The concept of social exclusion offers a particularly useful framework for interpreting the experiences represented in *The Pigeon*. Social exclusion refers to processes through which individuals or groups are prevented from participating fully in economic, social, cultural, and political life. It encompasses more than material deprivation, including barriers related to discrimination, stigma, isolation, and limited access to resources. Contemporary social work recognizes social exclusion

as both a cause and consequence of vulnerability. Individuals who lack meaningful connections to institutions and communities often face increased risks of poverty, homelessness, and marginalization. Galsworthy's play vividly illustrates these dynamics. The homeless characters do not suffer solely because they lack financial resources; they also experience forms of invisibility that diminish their capacity to participate in society on equal terms.

Christopher Wellwyn's interactions with marginalized individuals reveal the tensions inherent in efforts to combat social exclusion through personal relationships alone. His willingness to welcome strangers into his home reflects a profound commitment to human solidarity. Yet the play repeatedly demonstrates that inclusion at the interpersonal level cannot fully compensate for exclusion at the structural level. Individuals may encounter kindness from particular people while remaining vulnerable to broader systems that perpetuate inequality. This insight aligns closely with contemporary social work theories that emphasize the need to address both individual circumstances and social structures. Effective intervention requires not only compassion but also advocacy, policy reform, and institutional change.

Galsworthy's dramatic realism enhances the social impact of these themes. Rather than presenting abstract ideological arguments, he embeds social critique within everyday interactions and recognizable situations. The audience encounters poverty through the experiences of specific individuals whose lives possess emotional and psychological complexity. This approach encourages a form of ethical engagement that differs from detached observation. Readers and spectators are invited to imagine themselves in relation to the characters, fostering empathy and critical reflection. Such imaginative engagement remains one of literature's most valuable contributions to interdisciplinary scholarship. By enabling individuals to perceive social issues from multiple perspectives, literature complements the analytical frameworks employed within social work and related disciplines.

Another significant aspect of *The Pigeon* concerns its exploration of responsibility. The play consistently raises questions about who bears responsibility for addressing poverty and homelessness. Is responsibility primarily individual, resting upon the goodwill of compassionate citizens? Or does it belong to society as a whole, requiring collective action and institutional support? Galsworthy does not offer simple answers, yet the trajectory of the drama suggests skepticism toward approaches that rely exclusively upon private charity. Wellwyn's efforts, though admirable, repeatedly encounter limits that reveal the necessity of broader social interventions. This perspective anticipates later developments in welfare policy and social work practice, both of which increasingly emphasized structural solutions to social problems.

The limitations of individual charity become increasingly apparent when the play is examined in relation to broader debates about welfare and social justice. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Britain witnessed growing dissatisfaction with philanthropic approaches that treated poverty as an isolated personal problem. Social reformers, economists, and political thinkers increasingly argued that social conditions themselves contributed significantly to human suffering. Galsworthy's dramatic imagination reflects this intellectual climate. Rather than celebrating charity as a complete solution, *The Pigeon* exposes the inadequacy of responses that fail to address the systemic roots of deprivation. The play repeatedly suggests that poverty persists not because individuals lack compassion but because social arrangements produce and reproduce inequality.

The figure of Ferrand occupies a central position within this critique. His circumstances reveal how economic vulnerability can undermine personal autonomy and social participation. Although he possesses talent, sensitivity, and self-respect, these qualities alone prove insufficient to secure stability within a society structured by unequal opportunities. Ferrand's experiences challenge meritocratic assumptions that success depends exclusively upon individual effort. His predicament illustrates a reality that contemporary social work scholars continue to emphasize: personal capacities are meaningful only when supported by access to resources, opportunities, and supportive social environments. Individuals who lack such support frequently encounter barriers that cannot be overcome through determination alone.

Ferrand's status as a foreigner adds another dimension to his marginalization. Throughout history, migrants and outsiders have often faced heightened vulnerability because of cultural differences, restricted social networks, and limited access to institutional support. Modern social work literature recognizes migration as a factor that can increase exposure to

poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. Galsworthy's treatment of Ferrand anticipates these concerns by portraying him as a man whose outsider status compounds his economic difficulties. His struggles reveal how exclusion operates through multiple mechanisms simultaneously. Poverty, displacement, and social isolation interact to create circumstances that are far more difficult to escape than any single disadvantage considered in isolation.

The emotional texture of the play derives largely from Galsworthy's refusal to romanticize either poverty or charity. The poor are not idealized as morally superior, nor are benefactors depicted as flawless heroes. Instead, the drama presents human relationships in all their complexity. Wellwyn's generosity emerges from genuine compassion, yet his actions sometimes expose tensions between sympathy and effectiveness. He wishes to help those in need, but the scale of suffering he encounters exceeds what any individual can reasonably address. This tension encourages audiences to consider the distinction between good intentions and meaningful social change. Contemporary social work similarly recognizes that compassion, while essential, must be accompanied by strategies capable of addressing structural inequalities.

The concept of structural inequality provides a useful framework for understanding the social vision of *The Pigeon*. Structural inequality refers to patterns of disadvantage embedded within social institutions, economic systems, and cultural norms. These patterns shape access to resources and opportunities, often producing outcomes that disadvantage particular groups regardless of individual effort. Galsworthy's play repeatedly directs attention toward these larger forces. The homeless and impoverished characters do not simply make poor choices; they occupy positions within a social order that restricts their possibilities. By highlighting these constraints, the drama shifts responsibility away from individuals and toward the structures that shape their lives.

This emphasis on structural factors aligns closely with contemporary approaches to social work. Modern practitioners increasingly recognize that effective intervention requires attention to the social conditions that influence individual well-being. Issues such as affordable housing, employment opportunities, health care access, and social support networks play crucial roles in determining life outcomes. Interventions focused exclusively on personal behavior often fail because they overlook these broader determinants. Galsworthy's portrayal of homelessness anticipates this insight. His characters' difficulties cannot be resolved solely through changes in attitude or effort because the obstacles they face are embedded within the social environment itself.

The relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital becomes particularly evident in this context. Bourdieu argues that social relationships constitute valuable resources that influence access to opportunities and support. Individuals possessing strong networks often benefit from assistance, information, and institutional connections that facilitate social mobility. Conversely, those who lack such networks may find themselves excluded from opportunities that others take for granted. The homeless characters in *The Pigeon* exemplify this predicament. Their marginalization is intensified by limited access to social connections capable of providing stability and support. Galsworthy's representation of these dynamics underscores the relational dimensions of poverty and exclusion.

The play also resonates strongly with Amartya Sen's capability approach, which defines development in terms of people's ability to lead lives they have reason to value. According to Sen, poverty involves more than insufficient income; it reflects a deprivation of substantive freedoms and capabilities. Individuals who lack opportunities to pursue meaningful goals experience forms of disadvantage that cannot be measured solely in economic terms. Ferrand's experiences exemplify this broader understanding of deprivation. His poverty restricts not only his material circumstances but also his capacity to realize his artistic aspirations, maintain independence, and participate fully in social life. Galsworthy's portrayal therefore anticipates contemporary efforts to conceptualize well-being in multidimensional terms.

An important feature of *The Pigeon* is its exploration of the psychological consequences of exclusion. Homelessness affects more than physical security; it can also erode self-esteem, social identity, and emotional well-being. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that prolonged marginalization often generates feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and diminished self-worth. Galsworthy captures these effects with considerable sensitivity. His characters struggle not

only against material hardship but also against the emotional burdens imposed by social invisibility. The experience of being overlooked, dismissed, or treated as a problem rather than a person contributes significantly to their suffering.

The play's emphasis on recognition and respect reflects concerns that remain central to social work ethics. Effective practice requires acknowledging the humanity and agency of those seeking assistance. Individuals experiencing poverty are not merely recipients of services; they are participants in relationships that should be characterized by mutual respect. Galsworthy's dramatic treatment of marginalized characters reinforces this principle. He grants them complexity, voice, and emotional depth, resisting representations that reduce them to stereotypes or social categories. Such portrayals encourage audiences to move beyond abstract discussions of poverty and engage with the lived experiences of those affected by it.

The ethical dimension of *The Pigeon* becomes particularly apparent when considered in relation to theories of care. Care ethics emphasizes the importance of relationships, empathy, and responsiveness to human vulnerability. Rather than viewing individuals as isolated actors, this perspective highlights interdependence and mutual responsibility. Wellwyn's actions embody many of these values. His willingness to open his home to strangers reflects an understanding that human beings flourish through supportive relationships. Yet the play simultaneously demonstrates that care must extend beyond personal interactions to encompass social structures. Genuine concern for vulnerable individuals requires creating conditions that enable them to live with dignity and security.

This insight remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions of homelessness. Across the world, increasing housing costs, economic insecurity, and social inequality continue to place individuals at risk of displacement. While charitable organizations play a vital role in providing emergency assistance, researchers and practitioners increasingly emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies that address root causes. Housing-first initiatives, community-based support systems, and policies aimed at reducing inequality reflect efforts to move beyond crisis management toward long-term solutions. Galsworthy's critique of purely charitable responses anticipates many of these developments by drawing attention to the limitations of addressing symptoms while leaving underlying structures unchanged.

The relationship between homelessness and public perception constitutes another important theme within the play. Societies often construct narratives that explain poverty in ways that reinforce existing power relations. Such narratives may portray disadvantaged individuals as irresponsible, dangerous, or undeserving, thereby legitimizing social exclusion. Galsworthy challenges these assumptions by presenting homelessness from the perspective of those who experience it. His characters are not defined by their poverty; they are human beings whose circumstances reveal the fragility of social security. This perspective encourages audiences to question stereotypes and recognize the structural dimensions of social problems.

Literature possesses a unique capacity to perform this critical function because it engages both intellect and emotion. Statistical data can demonstrate the prevalence of homelessness, but it cannot fully convey the subjective experience of exclusion. Dramatic representation enables audiences to encounter social issues in personal and emotionally resonant ways. Through identification with characters, readers and spectators gain insights that extend beyond factual knowledge. This capacity to foster empathy has significant implications for social work education and practice. Exposure to literary texts can deepen understanding of the human dimensions of social problems, encouraging practitioners to approach clients with greater sensitivity and awareness.

The interdisciplinary significance of *The Pigeon* therefore extends beyond its historical context. The play provides a valuable resource for contemporary discussions about poverty, social justice, and welfare. Its exploration of homelessness anticipates concerns that continue to shape policy debates and professional practice. Moreover, its emphasis on dignity, recognition, and structural inequality aligns closely with core values within social work. By bringing literary analysis into conversation with social work theory, scholars can illuminate aspects of social experience that might otherwise remain overlooked.

Galsworthy's dramatic achievement lies not simply in identifying social problems but in revealing their moral implications. The play challenges audiences to consider what obligations individuals and communities owe to those who occupy vulnerable positions within society. It suggests that indifference is itself a social choice, one that contributes to the perpetuation of suffering and exclusion. At the same time, it warns against the assumption that goodwill alone can overcome systemic injustice. Effective responses require both compassion and structural transformation. This dual emphasis constitutes one of the most enduring aspects of Galsworthy's social vision.

As the drama unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that homelessness functions as a lens through which broader questions about society are examined. The treatment of vulnerable individuals reflects underlying values concerning citizenship, responsibility, and human worth. A society's response to homelessness reveals much about its conception of justice. Galsworthy invites audiences to evaluate these questions critically, encouraging reflection on the social arrangements that determine who enjoys security and who remains exposed to hardship. In doing so, he transforms a specific social issue into a broader meditation on ethical community and collective responsibility.

The continuing relevance of these questions becomes particularly evident when *The Pigeon* is examined against the backdrop of contemporary welfare debates. Despite significant advances in social policy since the early twentieth century, homelessness remains a persistent global concern. Economic restructuring, housing shortages, precarious employment, migration, and widening income disparities have contributed to the growth of vulnerable populations in many societies. Governments, charitable organizations, and social work professionals continue to grapple with the challenge of developing effective responses. In this context, Galsworthy's play retains remarkable significance because it directs attention toward the human consequences of social exclusion while simultaneously exposing the inadequacy of responses that fail to address structural causes.

One of the most striking aspects of the drama is its anticipation of contemporary critiques of residual welfare models. Residual approaches tend to view assistance as a temporary measure reserved for those who are unable to meet their needs through the market or family support. Such models often emphasize personal responsibility and may treat welfare recipients as exceptions to the norm. In contrast, contemporary social work increasingly supports developmental and rights-based perspectives that recognize access to housing, security, and social participation as fundamental components of human well-being. The tension between these approaches can be detected within *The Pigeon*. The play acknowledges the value of personal generosity while revealing its limitations, thereby encouraging audiences to consider broader forms of collective responsibility.

The idea of housing as a human right provides a particularly useful framework for understanding the play's modern relevance. Contemporary social work scholarship frequently emphasizes that stable housing constitutes a prerequisite for many other aspects of well-being. Without secure shelter, individuals often face difficulties accessing employment, education, health care, and social support. Housing insecurity can therefore generate a cycle of exclusion that becomes increasingly difficult to escape. Although the language of human rights had not yet achieved its contemporary prominence when Galsworthy wrote *The Pigeon*, the ethical concerns embedded in the play anticipate later arguments regarding the social importance of housing. The drama repeatedly underscores the vulnerability produced by insecurity and displacement, encouraging audiences to view shelter not merely as a commodity but as a foundation of human dignity.

The relationship between dignity and welfare remains one of the most important themes connecting *The Pigeon* to social work. Professional codes of ethics consistently emphasize respect for the inherent worth of every individual. This principle challenges policies and practices that stigmatize those seeking assistance or reduce them to passive objects of intervention. Galsworthy's portrayal of homelessness reflects a similar commitment. His characters are never presented as mere statistics or social problems. Instead, they are depicted as individuals possessing histories, aspirations, emotions, and identities. Their experiences demand recognition not because they satisfy particular criteria of deservingness but because they are human beings entitled to respect.

This emphasis on dignity also challenges utilitarian approaches that evaluate social policies solely according to economic efficiency. Contemporary welfare debates often focus on costs, budgets, and measurable outcomes. While such considerations are undoubtedly important, they can sometimes obscure the human realities underlying social issues. Literature serves as a valuable corrective by foregrounding lived experience and moral complexity. Through the experiences of Ferrand and other marginalized characters, Galsworthy reminds audiences that social policies affect real individuals whose lives cannot be reduced to numerical indicators. The play therefore contributes to a broader understanding of welfare that integrates ethical, emotional, and social dimensions.

The significance of recognition extends beyond individual interactions to encompass cultural attitudes and public discourse. Social exclusion is sustained not only through material deprivation but also through narratives that portray certain groups as inferior, dangerous, or undeserving. Such narratives influence public opinion and can shape policy decisions. Homeless individuals are frequently subjected to stereotypes that obscure the structural conditions contributing to their circumstances. Galsworthy's dramatic method actively resists this tendency. By presenting marginalized characters from within rather than from a distance, he encourages audiences to question assumptions that normalize exclusion. His work thus functions as a form of cultural intervention, challenging dominant perspectives and promoting greater social awareness.

The play's critique of social indifference remains especially relevant in an era characterized by increasing economic inequality. Across many societies, wealth has become concentrated in the hands of relatively small segments of the population, while housing affordability and economic security have deteriorated for others. These developments have renewed interest in questions concerning distributive justice and social responsibility. Social work practitioners frequently encounter the consequences of these inequalities in their daily work with vulnerable individuals and communities. Galsworthy's drama offers a literary perspective on similar issues, demonstrating how structural disparities affect human relationships and life opportunities. The continuity between the concerns of *The Pigeon* and contemporary social realities underscores the enduring value of literary engagement with social questions.

Another important contribution of the play lies in its exploration of community. Modern social work increasingly emphasizes community-based approaches that recognize the importance of social connections, participation, and collective action. Individuals are not isolated entities but members of networks and communities that influence their well-being. Homelessness often involves the disruption or absence of such connections, contributing to feelings of alienation and exclusion. Galsworthy's portrayal of vulnerable individuals highlights the importance of belonging and mutual recognition. The hospitality extended by Wellwyn reflects an attempt to create spaces of inclusion within a society that frequently excludes those on its margins. Although these efforts are limited in their capacity to resolve structural problems, they nevertheless affirm the significance of human connection.

The relationship between individual agency and structural constraint constitutes another theme that links *The Pigeon* to contemporary social work theory. Effective practice requires balancing recognition of personal responsibility with awareness of the social factors shaping individual choices. Overemphasis on agency can lead to victim-blaming, while excessive focus on structure may overlook the capacities and resilience of individuals. Galsworthy navigates this tension with considerable sophistication. His characters possess agency and make choices, yet their options are constrained by circumstances beyond their control. This balanced perspective aligns with contemporary ecological and person-in-environment approaches that view human behavior as emerging from the interaction between individuals and their social environments.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, *The Pigeon* demonstrates the value of integrating literary analysis with social work scholarship. Literature offers insights into subjective experiences, moral dilemmas, and cultural meanings that complement the empirical focus of social science research. Social work, in turn, provides conceptual tools for analyzing social problems and evaluating potential interventions. Bringing these disciplines into dialogue enables a more comprehensive understanding of issues such as homelessness and poverty. Literary texts illuminate the human

dimensions of social problems, while social work theories help explain the structural forces shaping those experiences. The result is a richer and more nuanced account than either discipline could produce independently.

The educational implications of this interdisciplinary approach are significant. Social work education increasingly recognizes the importance of developing empathy, critical thinking, and cultural competence alongside technical knowledge. Literary texts can contribute to these goals by exposing students to diverse perspectives and encouraging reflection on ethical questions. *The Pigeon* provides an especially valuable resource because it combines emotional resonance with social critique. Students encountering the play are invited to consider not only the circumstances of marginalized individuals but also the broader social arrangements that contribute to vulnerability and exclusion. Such engagement can foster a deeper appreciation of the ethical foundations of professional practice.

The enduring significance of Galsworthy's work also lies in its capacity to challenge complacency. Social problems often become normalized through familiarity, leading societies to accept conditions that would otherwise appear intolerable. Literature disrupts this process by making the familiar strange and the invisible visible. Through its portrayal of homelessness, *The Pigeon* compels audiences to confront realities that might otherwise remain overlooked. The play insists that poverty and exclusion are not natural or inevitable conditions but consequences of social choices and institutional arrangements. This insistence remains profoundly relevant in contemporary contexts where homelessness is frequently treated as an unavoidable feature of urban life.

The ethical vision underlying the play ultimately extends beyond specific policy prescriptions. Galsworthy does not offer a detailed program for social reform. Instead, he encourages audiences to cultivate forms of awareness and responsibility that make reform possible. His drama asks readers and spectators to recognize the humanity of those who are marginalized, to question narratives that justify exclusion, and to reflect upon the structures that shape social life. These questions remain central to social work, which seeks not only to alleviate suffering but also to promote social justice and human dignity.

The interdisciplinary reading developed in this study demonstrates that *The Pigeon* occupies an important place within discussions of homelessness, welfare, and social responsibility. The play challenges simplistic explanations of poverty by revealing the complex interactions between individual lives and social structures. Through characters such as Ferrand and Christopher Wellwyn, Galsworthy explores the possibilities and limitations of charity while anticipating later debates concerning welfare, rights, and social inclusion. His portrayal of marginalized individuals reflects principles that would eventually become foundational to professional social work, including respect for dignity, commitment to social justice, and recognition of structural inequality.

More than a century after its publication, *The Pigeon* continues to speak to contemporary audiences because the issues it addresses remain unresolved. Homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion persist despite significant social and economic transformations. The play's enduring relevance lies in its ability to illuminate these problems while reminding readers that social conditions are neither inevitable nor immutable. By foregrounding the experiences of vulnerable individuals and exposing the limitations of purely charitable responses, Galsworthy advocates a vision of society grounded in responsibility, compassion, and justice. His dramatic exploration of homelessness therefore transcends its historical moment, offering insights that remain valuable for literary scholars, social work practitioners, and policymakers alike.

Viewed through the lens of contemporary social work, *The Pigeon* emerges not merely as a social problem play but as a profound reflection on the ethical foundations of community. It reveals that homelessness is not simply the absence of shelter but a manifestation of broader failures of recognition, inclusion, and responsibility. At the same time, it affirms the possibility of a more humane social order founded upon respect for human dignity and collective commitment to the well-being of all. In bringing literary imagination into dialogue with social welfare concerns, Galsworthy creates a work that continues to challenge, inspire, and educate. The play's lasting achievement lies in its insistence that the measure of any society can be found in the manner in which it responds to those who stand at its margins. That insight

remains as urgent today as it was in 1912 and ensures the continuing relevance of *The Pigeon* within interdisciplinary conversations about literature, social work, and social justice.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241–58.
- [2] Dominelli, Lena. *Green Social Work: From Environmental Crises to Environmental Justice*. 2nd ed., Polity Press, 2018.
- [3] Galsworthy, John. *The Pigeon: A Fantasy in Three Acts*. Duckworth and Co., 1912.
- [4] Healy, Karen. *Social Work Theories in Context: Creating Frameworks for Practice*. 3rd ed., Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.
- [5] Jones, Chris. *Poverty and Social Work*. Routledge, 2021.
- [6] Mullaly, Bob, and Vicki Mullaly. *The New Structural Social Work*. 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2019.
- [7] Payne, Malcolm. *Modern Social Work Theory*. 5th ed., Oxford UP, 2020.
- [8] Richardson, John G., editor. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood Press, 1986.
- [9] Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford UP, 1999.
- [10] Shaw, Ian, et al., editors. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Work Research*. Sage, 2010.
- [11] Taylor, Imogen, and Ruth Patrick, editors. *Social Work and Poverty*. Policy Press, 2024.
- [12] Thompson, Neil. *Understanding Social Work: Preparing for Practice*. 5th ed., Red Globe Press, 2020.
- [13] Trevithick, Pamela. *Social Work Skills and Knowledge: A Practice Handbook*. 4th ed., Open University Press, 2021.
- [14] Watts, Beth, et al. *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2024*. Crisis, 2024.
- [15] Webb, Stephen A., editor. *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Social Work*. Routledge, 2019.
- [16] Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton UP, 2011.