

Quality

by John Galsworthy

1. (a) In the light of the short story 'Quality,' answer who were the Gessler brothers and why did the author remember them?

Answers: John Galsworthy in his short story 'Quality' writes about two bootmakers in London. The Gessler brothers, as the author writes, lived in a rented house in the West End. Their shop was situated in Central London, an area famous for its expensive theatres, shops and hotels. Among the many expensive shops, the shop of the Gessler brothers was extremely simple with no attractive display or sign of advertisement to attract customers. The only sign worth remembering them was a board which had their name "Gessler Brothers" written in German.

The Gessler brothers were excellent craftsmen who made customized leather boots for the customers. Their boots though lacking in fashion and designs were high on quality and fitting. The Gessler's were extremely particular about creating the boots with perfection. Boot making was an art to them and they spent considerable time in handpicking the best materials for the customers. They were disciplined in creating the boots to an extent that they devoted their complete time in the creation until they achieved the perfection which they desired. They derived satisfaction by providing excellent services to their customers.

The Gessler brothers were peculiar as they devoted enormous time in creating a perfect pair of boots and therefore they never made boots without an order. Their boots never failed to fit and lasted long enough for customers to visit them infrequently. The author remembers them for their skilled art of bootmaking which to him appeared mysterious and wonderful. He had high reverence for them as bootmakers and always remembered them for their high-quality long-lasting boots.

The author's father was a loyal customer of the Gessler's and swore by their boots. The author ordered boots from them but found very little chance of visiting the Gessler's as their shoes lasted for a long time. In the world of 20th century when mechanization and fashion was ruling the hearts of the buyers, the author lamented the loss of two very skilled craftsmen who failed to adapt themselves to the changing times and succumbed under the pressures of perfect art.

(b) Describe the character of the Gessler brothers with respect to their strengths and failures.

Answers: John Galsworthy introduces to the readers the very humane characters called the

Gessler brothers in his short story 'Quality'. Mr Gessler is a humble bootmaker in Central London famous amongst his customers for creating the perfect pair of boots with the most authentic materials and the best fit. The Gessler brothers aimed to create the perfect 'dream boots' which lasted too long for their customers.

The author revered the Gessler brothers for their skilled craftsmanship in making sturdy boots that lasted quite long for their wearers. Passion and commitment of work are strengths that take every man to the pinnacle of success in life. The Gessler's loved their work and they worked with a passion which helped them to be focused and disciplined in their art. To them boot making was an art of the highest form which required enormous time to create the perfect fit for the customers. Therefore, they believed in creating boots only on orders.

Mr Gessler was particular about choosing the leather of the boots himself. A stubborn perfectionist, he wished to carve every piece of boot himself, trusting no one in the process of his creation. His perfectionism led him to never expand his business and advertise it. He relied only on his traditions, superior service and quality and this cost him his business and ultimately his life. He refused to adapt his business to the trends of the times and it made him suffer a major setback.

Gessler in the name of art inflicted penance upon himself. He claimed that he did not work for money but for the love of the art. He lost customers because people ran out of patience. Gessler failed to see the competition and his disapproval of the big firms led to his eventual ouster from the industry as a leading boot manufacturer. He strove on, only to end life through starvation.

Galsworthy has created the story of Gessler brothers to let the reader understand the strengths and flaws of humans. Our strengths can easily become a weakness if we do not guard ourselves and adapt to situations. The author acts as a social commentator who allows him to pose before the readers the hardships of the artists in modern times. He effectively creates a character perfect in art and human nature but flawed in his judgement.

(c) What does the story reveal about the author?

Answer: John Galsworthy's short story 'Quality' narrates the author's admiration for the Gessler brothers and his relationship with them. Through the story we are let into the life of the author and his characteristics as he spans the lives of the Gessler brothers. The author is an adult, reminiscing about his early childhood in the initial part of the story. From the very beginning, we are made aware that the author is fascinated by the work of the Gessler brothers.

The author is straightforward and does not hesitate to ask questions to the Gessler

brothers. He understands and accepts Mr Gessler's explanation of shoemaking being an art. He even informs Mr. Gessler about the creaking shoe and the wrong fit that he had received from him.

An author is a compassionate person; he is concerned for the well-being of the Gessler brothers as he is attached to them emotionally, since childhood. He orders multiple pairs of shoes despite being in no need of them, ensuring the Gessler's could make their ends meet through some work. He adored the simplicity and humility of the poor bootmakers and appreciated their art and had the highest respect for it.

Galsworthy was a modernist who tries to evoke sympathy for the protagonist "Mr Gessler". Yet despite the tragic end meted out to the old bootmaker, Galsworthy tries to underline the importance of changing ourselves with the times. His relationship with the Gessler brothers adds colour and perspective to the narrative.

Long Questions and Answers

1. How is 'Quality', an apt title for Galsworthy's story?

Answer: 'Quality' is a touching story of two brothers who are expert shoemakers. The narration focuses on their love and commitment towards their art. In fact, they sacrifice everything including their lives to maintain the quality of their work; hence the title is the most suitable.

The story is a first-person narration and Galsworthy reminisces about his meetings with the Gessler brothers, especially the younger one who is more articulate of the two. The narration brings out the basic character of the shoemaker as a man of integrity and devotion to work.

Gessler's make leather boots of fine quality. They make shoes purely on order. They want the shoes to be custom fit to each individual, according to the form of the customer's foot. One day, the narrator walked into the shop wearing boots from a big business house and Gessler commented that such shoes got buyers because of clever marketing and advertisements and no quality. He complained that such big business houses take away businesses from quality workers.

Ironically, he loses business to big business and had to sacrifice half of his shop to them. In spite of that he went on with his work with quality, dedication and the same painstaking work. He loved his work unconditionally.

But quality requires time and that was what made the Gessler's lose their business. The younger brother, Mr. Gessler, would spend hours and hours pouring so much love and care over the shoes that he never thought of economic losses incurred. He was willing to

sacrifice everything to attain perfection. His love for leather is shown by the way he handled it with tender care and how he used to shape it according to the shape of foot of his customer. He took pride in the work he was doing, and was contemptuous of the factory-made stuff and even critical of the people who bought such stuff.

Even when the man became weak with hunger and hard work, he never stopped work, but spent hours and hours to carve the shoes to perfection. He forgot time and never lit fire and died of near starvation. Such workers are rare in this age of the money-minded and profit-oriented world that never cares for quality and high craftsmanship. The whole story revolves around the quality of the leather, of the shoes made out of it, of the craftsmanship and the shoemaker himself. Such work is rare; such people are rare. So, the title 'Quality' is most apt for the story.

2. Attempt a character sketch of Mr Gessler.

Answer: Mr Gessler is a master craftsman. He does wonders with footwear. He is a man of integrity and shows utmost devotion to his craft. The problem is that he never allows quality to suffer before practical necessities and that spells his doom over his successful profession.

Obviously, the Gessler brothers never believed in showing off. The shop has a simple board and a display of just a pair of shoes in the window; so 'mysterious and wonderful'. There is no claim of catering to a royal family. When the author asks the younger brother, whether it is hard work to craft shoes, he simply says it is a work of art. One can never enter the shop without feeling a sense of grandeur. It is like entering a church.

The man takes pride in his craftsmanship but it is only a healthy pride; not arrogance. The high-quality leather he uses and the wonderful shoes he makes is ample proof of his love for his art. It is shown by the way he looks at them and passes his fingers over them. Surely, he understands the 'soul of boots'.

Being a man of integrity, Gessler is honest to his profession, so when once the writer complains that a pair of boots creaks, he offers to take them off the bill. He is also a man of few words, and goes through all the hardships without complaining. The author comes to know about his difficulties only when he gives vent to his feelings; that too only once, "Dey dake it away from us, who lofe our boods". Only then the author notices the lines on his face caused by bitter things, bitter struggle, and the grey hair that has appeared suddenly in his red beard.

The man is also not willing to sacrifice quality for business. He does not employ anyone to help him; he does all the work himself, takes a long time to deliver the boots, never takes orders in bulk and takes care of the finest details to ensure that his shoes are a perfect fit.

Finally, one has to concede the man is an anomaly in this profit-oriented world, where even values can be traded for money. Ironically, it is his penchant for perfectionism that brings his downfall at the worldly level, but one cannot say that at an artistic level he is a failure. In fact, he triumphs over as a colossal in his field. Who knows, he may have died a happy man knowing his last work is a masterpiece, the best shoes he has ever made for the author!

So at the end, art triumphs when opposed with worldly success, quality triumphs over mediocrity and the man triumphs over hardcore professionalism.