



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE IN  
FLAUBERT'S *MADAM BOVARY* AND FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT  
GATSBY***

**MAHDI SHAMSI  
FBMK 2009 25**



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**By**

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**August 2009**

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This study examines the works of two writers F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* in relation to the concept of Schopenhauer's philosophy of the "instinct of sex" as a subjective necessity and "love" as an objective point. The study determines whether the concepts of Schopenhauer, specifically on love, desire, and suffering, influence the life of the major characters in the two novels. This research is based on how Schopenhauer's concept of "love as physical attraction" is portrayed in the characters of two novels. The study also attempts to find out what part the instinct of sex as a subjective point and the elements of desire, suffering and



love as an objective point, plays in the lives of the characters. The research concludes that love among the characters is merely based on physical attraction, which leads them to have a strong desire which in turn, causes them to suffer.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sastera

**FALSAFAH SCHOPENHAUER TENTANG CINTA DALAM NOVEL  
MADAM BOVARY HASIL KARYA FLAUBERT DAN NOVEL THE  
GREAT GATSBY OLEH FITZGERALD**

Oleh

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengaji karya dua pengarang iaitu novel yang bertajuk *Great Gatsby* oleh F. Scott Fitzgerald dan novel bertajuk *Madam Bovary* oleh Flaubert khususnya hubungan kedua-dua hasil karya tersebut dengan konsep falsafah Schopenhauer tentang 'nafsu seks' sebagai matlamat yang subjektif and 'cinta' sebagai matlamat yang objektif. Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa setakat mana falsafah Schopenhauer tersebut dalam cinta, nafsu, dan penderitaan mempengaruhi hidup watak-watak



dalam novel *Great Gatsby* dan juga novel *Madam Bovary*. Kajian ini adalah tertakluk pada bagaimana falsafah Schopenhauer tentang 'nafsu seks' dapat ditunjukkan oleh watak-watak dalam dua novel tersebut. Kajian ini juga berhasrat untuk menjadikan 'nafsu seks' sebagai subjektif yang disertai dengan elemen-elemen seperti nafsu dan penderitaan, serta sebagai objektif yang disertai dengan elemen cinta. Oleh yang demikian, hasil kajian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan bahawa cinta antara watak-watak dalam dua novel tersebut rupa-rupanya hanya cinta atas faktor fizikal seseorang insan yang seterusnya membawa penderitaan kepada watak-watak yang terlibat akibat daripada nafsu mereka yang tidak dapat dipenuhi.

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Sincerely,

Mahdi Shamsi



This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Art.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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Mahdi Shamsi

Date:01 February 2009

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Love has always been a central concern of human life; however there has been a lot of consideration of love by psychologists or other scientists but there is little attempt to explain it as a physical attraction phenomenon. Arthur Schopenhauer, as a philosopher, in his book *The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sex* believes the powerful feeling that man feels towards the opposite sex (“great passion”) is not love but physical attraction or the “instinct of sex”.

We are accustomed to see poets principally occupied with describing the love between the sexes. This is often the leading idea of every dramatic work, tragic, comic, romantic or classic. All these works are nothing more than many sided, short, or long descriptions of the passion in question. In fact, the most successful delineations of love which are among them, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Disgrace* have attained immortal fame. *Romeo and Juliet* one of Shakespeare's most eponymous tragedies begins with a prologue that the



children of two feuding families, Romeo and Juliet become involved in a passionate and hasty love affair, and are forced to keep their love. This leads to the deaths of both characters and emphasizes the strength of their love. The other one, J.M. Coetzee's new novel *Disgrace* also explores the troubling tensions between generations, sexes, and races.

Ali Shariati in his book *Hoboot Dar Kavir* explains that to like a person is much better than to love. Love is an evolutionary phenomenon which is blind and is not by consciousness but like is consciousness and by awareness. According to Shariati love comes from instinct and whatever that arises from instinct is not valuable. But when you like someone you feel a special feeling toward her in your soul that leads you treating her more kindly. In this situation, you know that she is a part of your soul.

Shariati and Schopenhauer have a same idea on the love as a physical attraction. Both emphasize that passing of time will affect your love. The strength of love reduces when your beloved becomes older. Schopenhauer in *The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes* says; if you add twenty years to the age of your beloved at the present then you will find out that you won love her as much as you love her right now.



Schopenhauer *The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes* posits that humans live in the realm of objects and therefore live in the realm of desire, and thus they are eternally tormented by that desire. Humans suffer from their desires because in each individual, the realized desire develops a new desire, and this process is endless.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study examines how the love of the major characters in *The Great Gatsby* and *Madam Bovary* causes them to suffer. This study also tries to determine if love among the characters in both novels is based on physical attraction and desire.

The novels, *Madam Bovary* and *The Great Gatsby*, were selected for investigation because the characters in these novels are influenced by love as a physical attraction, desire and suffering. A reader of the novels might question why love is so destructive in the relations among the major characters. Since the lovers and their beloveds are far from each other and marriage seems impossible, their love grows stronger and deeper. This separation and the attempt to reach the lover encourage readers to follow the novels in the hope of



marriage between them, and this assumption seems particularly plausible, bearing in mind Schopenhauer's belief that love finds meaning in separation.

The whole treatment of love in *The Great Gatsby* and *Madam Bovary*, specifically the love of Charles, Leon, Rodolphe and Justin for Emma in *Madam Bovary* or the love of Gatsby and Tom for Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, is entirely in line with Schopenhauer's views in *The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes*.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this paper is to investigate to what extent the philosophy of Schopenhauer, specifically, love, desire, and suffering reflected in the lives of the major characters. For example, Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, and Charles, Leon, Rodolphe, Justin, and Emma in *Madam Bovary*. This study seeks to uncover the mask of love which is worn by the lovers in *Madam Bovary* and *The Great Gatsby*. It then attempts to investigate the instinct of sex as a subjective point with the elements of desire and suffering and as an objective point with the element of love.



The research also tries to show Schopenhauer's concepts of "love as a physical attraction" and "desire" do influence the lives of the characters in these two novels.

These two novels are selected from two different ages and centuries to show the ugly truth of love in which men fall in love solely because of the women's physical attraction. This truth has persisted since many decades ago until now.

What has made this study excited to focus on an American novel is because of different consideration on a work by Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This novel has been considered in many different objects and Fitzgerald offered up commentary on a variety of themes i.e., justice, greed, betrayal, the American dreams, social stratification, spirituality, or shows the clear delineations between different strata of society: new money, old money, some money, no money and so on. Of all the themes, perhaps none of the readers think of Gatsby's love as a voluptuous love. But a reader maybe innocent of Schopenhauer's concept of love as a physical attraction may find that the love of the male characters in *The Great Gatsby* is very likely to be true. There have been a lot of attempts and works on *The Great Gatsby* that have been demonstrated to tell that Gatsby's love is genuine in the novel. But this study tries to show that also Gatsby is looking for sex instead of love. *Madam Bovary*





by Flaubert is the second selected novels, because it exactly supports Schopenhauer's philosophy of love. The male characters of this novel are exactly seeking for love solely for sex.

## 1.4 Conceptual Theory

### 1.4.1 Love

The conceptual theory utilized in this research comes from Arthur Schopenhauer's idea of love, desire and suffering in his *The Metaphysics of Love*.

For Schopenhauer love is merely an expression of the sex impulse: "all love, however ethereally it may bear itself, is rooted in the sexual impulse alone, nay; it absolutely is only a more definitely determined, specialized, and indeed in the strictest sense individualized sexual impulse" (*The Metaphysics*, 340). Hence, "great passion," for Schopenhauer, "arises, as a rule, at the first glance" (*The Metaphysics*, 365).

In the case of love, man has the illusion that the consummation of his passion will bring him great happiness. "It is voluptuous illusion which leads the man



to believe he will find a greater pleasure in the arms of a woman whose beauty appeals to him than in those of any other; or which indeed ... firmly convinces him that the passion of her will ensure him excessive happiness" (*The Metaphysics*, 349). Schopenhauer also believes that pleasure is negative; merely the absence of pain and that love drives a great number of people into the lunatic asylum.

Schopenhauer believes that love is what people feel when they are attracted to what they see. "It is only a man whose intellect is clouded by his sexual impulse that could give the name of the fair sex to that undersized, narrow shouldered, broad hiped, and short legged race; for the whole beauty of sex is bound up to with this impulse" (*Essay on Schopenhauer*, 46). Schopenhauer sees love as an element which grows by physical attraction, and he says, "Let men recognize the snare that lies in women's beauty and the absurd comedy of reproduction will end" (*The Story of Philosophy*, 447).

The course of love of the major characters illustrates perfectly the philosophical assumption behind Schopenhauer's idea that love is simply a specialized form of the sex impulse. For Schopenhauer, the sex impulse itself is what man perceives, through ideas of the *Ding an sich*, the reality beyond the world of



phenomena, which Schopenhauer calls the “will” or “the will to live.” The sex impulse in general is the expression of the will to live, and love (the sex impulse directed to a specific individual) is the expression of the will to live in the form of the child who will be created by the mating of the lovers (*The Metaphysics*, 342). The will to live causes a man to love a woman in order to form a child (*The Metaphysics*, 343). Man is serving the species, not himself, when he falls in love. Since the will to live cannot rely on man’s consciousness to serve the needs of

...Nature can only attention its ends by implanting a certain illusion [of love] in the individual, on account of which that which is only good for the species appears to him the species, it endows him with an instinctive illusion that he is serving himself, although actually he may be destroying all his personal goals in the service of the species: as a good for himself, so that when he serves the species he imagines he is serving himself; in which process a mere chimera, which vanishes immediately afterwards, float before him, and takes the place of a real thing as a motive (*The Metaphysics*, 346-347)

Schopenhauer believes that what manifests itself in the individual consciousness as the instinct of sex in general, without being concentrated on any particular individual, is very plainly in itself, in its generalized form, the will to live. On the other hand, that which appears as the instinct of sex directed



to a certain individual is in itself the will to live as a definitely determined individual. In this case the instinct of sex very cleverly wears the mask of objective admiration, although in itself it is a subjective necessity. Man tries to cover up his instinct of sex as a subjective necessity by wearing a mask of love, and is, therefore, deceptive. Nature needs these stratagems in order to accomplish her ends.

In *The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes*, Schopenhauer points out that love flourishes by physical attraction. Women are principally won by the strength of the man, and the courage which is connected with this. Then he continues “Women often love ugly men, but never an unmanly man” (*Essay of Schopenhauer*, 123). According to Schopenhauer, the force that determines love is entirely beyond reason and totally indifferent to the temperamental and intellectual compatibility of the parties involved.

#### **1.4.2 Desire**

According to Schopenhauer’s definition, desire is the motivating force behind all human activities. “The will is the only permanent and unchangeable element in the mind...it is the will which,” through continuity of purpose, “gives unity



to consciousness and holds together all its ideas and thoughts, accompanying them like a continuous harmony” (Schopenhauer, 37). Will is the source of desire and thought. “Consciousness is the mere surface of our minds, of which, as of the earth, we do not know the inside but only the crust” (*The Metaphysics*, 27). Under the conscious intellect is the will, a striving, persistent vital force, a spontaneous activity, a will of imperious desire.

Schopenhauer believes that desire is under the control of the will, that is, the center of desire is the will. On the other hand, the center of the will is the reproductive organs. “We do not want a thing because we have found reasons for it, we find reasons for it because we want it; we even detailed philosophies and theologies to cloak our desires” (*The Story of Philosophy*, 405). Hence Schopenhauer calls man the “metaphysical animal”; other animals desire without metaphysics. “Nothing is more provoking, when we are arguing against a man with reasons and explanations, and taking all pains to convince him, than to discover at last that he will not understand, that we have to do with his will” (Schopenhauer III, 443). Observe how long we remember our victories, and how soon we forget our defeats; memory is the menial of will (*Essay of Schopenhauer*, 126).



### 1.4.3 Suffering

According to Schopenhauer, for every desire that is satisfied there remains ten that are denied. Desire is infinite; fulfillment is limited. "It is like the alms thrown to a beggar, that keeps him alive today in order that his misery may be prolonged tomorrow [...] As long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are subject to willing, we can never have lasting happiness or peace" (Schopenhauer I, 253). Fulfillment never satisfies; nothing is so fatal to an ideal as its realization. "The satisfied passion oftener leads to unhappiness than to happiness. For its demands often conflict so much with the personal welfare of him who is concerned that they undermine it" (Schopenhauer III, 368). In each individual, the realized desire develops a new desire, and this process is endless. "At the bottom this results from the fact that the will must live on itself, for there exists nothing besides it, and it is a hungry will" (Schopenhauer I, 201). As the phenomenon of will becomes more complete, suffering becomes more and more noticeable. The more the will becomes complete the greater will the suffering be.

Schopenhauer says, want and boredom are indeed the twin poles of human life. Finally, it remains to be mentioned that, “with man sexual gratification is tied to a very obstinate selectivity which is sometimes intensified in to a more or less passionate love. Thus sexuality becomes for man a source of brief pleasure and protected suffering” (*On the Suffering of the World*, 8).

The conceptual theory utilized in this research comes from Arthur Schopenhauer’s idea of love, desire and suffering in his *The Metaphysics of Love*. Below is a conceptual diagram which summarizes the concepts of Schopenhauer on love, sex, desire, want and suffering. According to Schopenhauer for love the main core is instinct of sex. You have a picture of the person you love in your mind and desire because you want her and you will bring reason for it. The last surface is suffering for requited love or unrequited love, each in different shape.



## 1.5 Scope of the Study and Limitations

This research is limited to the examination of Schopenhauer's concept of love, desire and suffering as depicted by the major characters in *Madam Bovary* and *The Great Gatsby*.

Bearing in mind Schopenhauer's theories, one would not find it difficult to forecast the ultimate outcome of the lovers in *Madam Bovary* and *The Great Gatsby*. The expectations or desires, of course, are simply an illusion, a "chimera"; that love will vanish as soon as the will of sex has achieved its subjective end. For Schopenhauer, the fulfillment of desire cannot conceivably bring happiness because pleasure is negative, merely the absence of pain, and pain and yearning, are the fundamental conditions of life. "No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification" (Schopenhauer I, I62). Certainly Emma and Gatsby's loves bring only a fleeting gratification that keeps them bound to their beloved through long years of mutual suffering. This suffering can be predicted by Schopenhauer's theory that no fulfilled desire can bring happiness.

At any rate, the central incidents of *The Great Gatsby* and *Madam Bovary* seem entirely illustrative of Schopenhauer's view of the love in which individuals are





swept into the love relationship in spite of their rational desires, their personal welfare and all individual considerations under the illusion that their love will bring them happiness. All their striving for joy is in vain, for “so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace” (Schopenhauer I, 162).

To limit the scope of study research focus on women’s physical attraction for men among the four elements of Schopenhauer’s concept of love, “will of life”, “possession”, “women’s physical attraction for men”, and “men’s physical attraction for women”.

## **1.6 Methodology**

This research analyses the concept of love and sex in the characters of two selected novels *Madam Bovary* and *The Great Gatsby*. It also tries to find out if the love among the characters is based on physical attraction.

It further explores the relationship between the instinct of sex, love, desire, and suffering among the characters in the chosen texts. In other words, this study