



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**SCHOPENHAUER'S PHILOSOPHY OF PESSIMISM ON GEORGE
ELIOT'S CHARACTERIZATION IN *SILAS MARNER* AND
*THE MILL ON THE FLOSS***

MOSTAFA FARSHBAF KHELEJANI

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By

MOSTAFA FARSHBAF KHELEJANI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

August 2009



**To my dearest parents
Ahmad & Fatemeh
And
My beloved wife
Lida
&
My precious son
Ilya**



Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
Fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy presents the world as a dark and evil place where the human being struggles to fulfill the evil and malevolent will's desires. All human selfish desires, urges, and wants which always cause the individual to struggle painfully, have their roots in this over-mastering force. Since the evil will is the base of all human worldly attitudes and actions, the individual is destined to face the bitterest miseries in his/her life's journey.

Since Schopenhauer's pessimism influenced Victorian writers greatly, this textual based research examines and explores how selected characters in both George Eliot's novels, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*, are controlled by the



Schopenhauerian omnipresent will. Further, it highlights the portrayal of the weak victims who struggle to fulfill their selfish desires which bring the great misery to every character in return. Silas Marner, George Eliot's protagonist in *Silas Marner*, who blindly worshipped God at the Lantern Yard, and then his bright guineas, found no peace and contentment, but rather more suffering and pain with them. Maggie Tulliver, a central character in *The Mill on the Floss*, made her every effort to satisfy her inner strong need to be praised and loved. Following to fulfill these intense needs, she went through many crises which brought nothing but misery and pain not only to herself but to those around her as well.

Although the findings show George Eliot's created world as a world of evil where the characters are born to suffer, the study also presents the possibility of transition from this dark and unpleasant world to a world where the will is silenced. Realizing how all their efforts were in vain and how their selfish desires brought misery to everyone, the protagonists of both novels reject all their inner will's worldly needs and desires. Silas Marner finds true peace and contentment by sympathizing with a little, suffering girl who has been ignored by her biological father, while Maggie Tulliver finds it through renouncing all worldly desires and sacrificing herself in order to save others.



Abstrak Tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**FALSAFAH PESIMISME SCHOPENHAUER BAGI PERWATAKAN DALAM
NOVEL' *SILAS MARNER* DAN *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS* OLEH
GEORGE ELIOT**

Oleh

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Falsafah pesimistik Arthur Schopenhauer menyatakan bahawa dunia adalah wadah bagi kejahatan dan kecelakaan, manusia bergelut untuk memenuhi kehendak jahat dan hati yang busuk. Segala keinginan, desakan, dan kemahuan demi memenuhi kepentingan diri yang sering mendorong individu untuk mengharung keperitan berakar umbi daripada kehendak dalaman yang meluap-luap ini. Memandangkan kuasa jahat menjadi asas bagi segala sikap dan tindakan insan duniawi, individu ditakdirkan untuk mendepani penderitaan yang amat pahit dalam perjalanan hidupnya.



Oleh sebab pesimisme Schopenhauer sangat mempengaruhi penulis zaman Victoria, penyelidikan ini mengkaji dan meneroka sejauhmana watak-watak terpilih dalam kedua-dua novel George Eliot, *Silas Marner* dan *The Mill on the Floss*, dipengaruhi oleh kuasa jahat jelata yang diutarakan oleh Schopenhauerian. Selanjutnya, penyelidikan ini juga memberikan gambaran jelas tentang mangsa-mangsa yang lemah yang harus bergelut untuk memenuhi keperluan diri hingga membawa kesengsaraan yang sangat perit sebagai akibatnya pada setiap watak. Silas Marner, watak protagonis George Eliot dalam *Silas Marner*, yang memuja tuhan di Lantern Yard secara membabi buta, dan kemudian guineanya yang cerah, gagal menemui keamanan dan kepuasan, tetapi memperoleh lebih banyak penderitaan dan kesakitan bersama mereka. Maggie Tulliver, satu watak utama dalam *The Mill on the Floss*, mencurahkan segala usahanya untuk memuaskan nafsunya yang meluap-luap untuk dipuji dan disayangi. Akibat daripada usaha untuk memenuhi keinginan yang tinggi ini, dia terpaksa mengalami banyak krisis yang tidak membawa apa-apa kecuali kesengsaraan dan keperitan bukan sahaja kepada dirinya tetapi kepada mereka yang berada di sekelilingnya.

Walaupun penemuan kajian menunjukkan bahawa George Eliot mewujudkan dunia seolah-olah wadah kejahatan dengan watak-watak yang dilahirkan untuk menderita, namun kajian juga memaparkan wujudnya kemungkinan bagi



peralihan daripada dunia kejahatan dan dunia yang tidak menyenangkan kepada dunia yang mengesampingkan kejahatan itu. Setelah menyedari bahawa semua usaha mereka tidak mendatangkan hasil, dan keinginan mereka untuk memenuhi keperluan diri menyebabkan kesengsaraan kepada semua orang, watak protagonis bagi kedua-dua novel menolak semua kehendak dan nafsu duniawi mereka. Silas Marner menemui keamanan sejati dan kepuasan setelah bersimpati dengan gadis kecil yang menderita kerana diabaikan oleh bapa kandungnya, manakala Maggie Tulliver menemui hakikat ini setelah meninggalkan semua nafsu duniawi dan mengorbankan dirinya untuk menyelamatkan orang lain.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 18 August 2009 to conduct the final examination of Mostafa Farshbaf Khelejani on his thesis entitled "Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Pessimism on George Eliot's Characterization in *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*" in accordance with the Universities and university colleges Act 1971 and Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my own 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 any other institution.

(Signature)

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study examines two selected novels of George Eliot's, a major mid-Victorian woman novelist, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*, in relation to Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of pessimism. The Victorian era which is often described as an age of transition and great changes produced writers who tried to depict the Victorian human as wanderer, one who had lost his past and was unable to accommodate to the new changes. This research seeks to analyze the characters' attitudes and actions in the selected texts and link them to Schopenhauer's pessimism (the role of the evil will in human actions).

Background of the study

Searching through the Victorian novelists' views of their society and the world around them reveals the fact that some of them, such as Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, in writing their great works, were influenced by pessimistic views, especially those of the German pessimist philosopher, Schopenhauer. Although Hardy, For example, "himself denied that he was a pessimist" (Abrams 1765),



but some critics such as Mary Ann Gauthier Kelly call him a pessimist and claim that Hardy's pessimism comes not only from his distinct and peculiar view of society and the world around him but also from reading and understanding Schopenhauer's philosophy:

Hardy's pessimism originated in his own temperament and was, no doubt, reinforced by his observation of the world around him, which included the general atmosphere left in the wake of the revolutions on the continent and the poverty and degradation resulting from the industrial revolution. But Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* is the most clearly apparent source of Hardy's later, more refined convictions (Kelly iv).

Before the publication of Schopenhauer's works in English translation, Kelly maintains, Hardy was "familiar with Schopenhauer [s pessimistic ideas] from articles written about him and descriptions of him and his philosophy in encyclopedias" (iv-v). Accordingly, on reading Hardy's novels one witnesses how his novels have been influenced by Schopenhauer's pessimistic views. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for example, shows how joy and pleasure are transitory or how the evil will forces the individual to strive for his or her darker goals.

George Eliot, like her contemporary male novelist, was familiar with Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy too. She, presumably, had read articles on Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy before 1860, because she, as a co-editor of the *Westminster Review*, as Badri Raina claims, had "printed an article



[*Iconoclasm in German Philosophy*] on Schopenhauer by [John] Oxenford in the Westminster Review in 1853" (373). George Eliot herself points to this article in a letter to George Combe, "I am sorry that the article on Schopenhauer, which I think the best in the number, has not apparently attracted his [the reviewer's] notice" (Haight 73-74). This suggests that George Eliot had probably read Schopenhauer's works before she began to write her *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*.

It is said that the Victorian novelists' "observation of world" around them made some of them apt to inculcate and extend pessimistic ideas not only in their minds but also in their novels. The important question to deal with here is, "What made the Victorian novelist view the world pessimistically"? or "What was it in Victorian society that led the writers to stress the bad side of the world rather than the good one"?

The Victorian age which is also called as an age of "transition", can be divided into three phases. The early years are the years of trouble. The mid years are the years of economic and commercial success and religious controversies. The final phase which acted as a bridge between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century is seen as a time in which all traditional and past values have lost their



meaning. Searching through these three phases, one finds that the age is associated with such phrases as 'great changes,' 'rapid growth,' 'innovations' and increasing "political, social, economic, and spiritual anxieties" (Abjadian 308). Therefore, the Victorian age is an age of great social, economic, cultural and even religious change.

England, in those glorious years, surpassed many countries in innovation and became the first country in which the people's lifestyle and working system changed. The new industrial society which was based on manufacturing replaced the agricultural society which was based on the ownership of land. These great changes were not limited just to society but also affected industry and commerce too. The newly invented steam engine, for example, which was exploited in trains and ships, helped traders in exporting their goods and products to universal markets very easily. England's powerful merchant navy gave English traders the opportunity not only to export their goods to other countries but also, in general, to extend their commerce. Thomas Arnold, an English historian, in describing the progressive society of nineteenth century England says "we have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty" (Abrams 927).



Although the new changes brought many advantages to the Victorians, at the same time they also affected the people's past and traditions. In this period traditional close relationships such as the relationship between man and man, man and religion lost their stability. The industrial revolution, as mentioned, changed the agricultural nation to an industrial one overnight. In the case, the people had left their beautiful, calm and clean farms and cottages and started to work on the nasty and noisy factories, or in the dark and "low-ceilinged mine-passages" (Honarvar and Sokhanvar 627).

The overcrowded slums of the big cities where the people "lived like packs of rats in a sewer" (Honarvar and Sokhanvar 627) became their living place. No authorities or no owners of the factories or mines took responsibility or blamed themselves for the wretchedness and the deprivation of the workers and their families. They, for example, didn't regard that the women, even the children are too weak to work daily in the narrow tunnels of the coalmines for sixteen hours a day. In such a selfish society, every one concentrated on advancing their selfish goals. Gaining more wealth and property and getting to a higher social position were the main aims that the Victorian man struggled to get them all. In Striving for such ends, as presented briefly, some of them ignored and even trespassed the rights and welfare of others.



In comparison to previous ages, the Victorian age witnessed the greatest development in the sciences too. Men of science succeed to achieve many new discoveries in this age. These new discoveries, on one hand, led Victorian man to trust science in explaining the truths of the life. On the other hand, these new discoveries, especially those in geology and biology caused some Victorians to doubt and question the base of their forefather's religion. Some of them, like George Eliot, abandoned all their faith in the doctrines of Christianity and refused to "accept the Bible and the Church as sources of authority"(Abjadian 310). Therefore, the so called progress, as described, had been "gained only by abandoning the traditional rhythms of life and traditional patterns of human relationships which had sustained mankind for centuries" (Abrams 928).

Although the Victorian age was an age of great change and great development, but it also was an age of great deprivation and loss. While the industrial life separated the Victorian human from his past, the increase in prosperity and development in economy and science, together with the acquisitiveness, selfishness and self-centeredness of the Victorian human not only made him careless of his fellow-man's pains and miseries but also distanced him from his traditional beliefs. As such, the Victorian is seen as a one who "suffered from an anxious sense of something lost" (Honarvar and Sokhanvar 625) on one hand,



and one who felt a kind of satisfaction which was never fully satisfied on the other hand.

Thus, the “mixed feeling of satisfaction and anxiety” (Honarvar and Sokhanvar 625) gave rise to a kind of dissatisfaction which, according to Schopenhauer, has its root in a malevolent force which he himself calls evil Will. Schopenhauer sees the blind will as the source of every thing and claims that this strong force penetrates to all things without any purpose. In other words, it becomes the seat of desires, unsatisfied desires, which lead an individual to accomplish his endless goals. To free himself from the mastery of the forceful will, as Schopenhauer advises, every man must abnegate all the will’s endless wants and desires. Secondly he must show some sense of sympathy and benevolence towards his fellow sufferers.

The society of England in those years, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, showed a tendency to accept and extend pessimistic ideas. In the novels of Victorian era, many male writers such as Hardy and also female novelists such as George Eliot were influenced by these pessimistic ideas. Therefore, this study traces Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy in George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*.



Statement of the Problem

On reading both George Eliot's novels, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*, one finds that the characters, especially the protagonists, have little control over themselves. In both novels the characters are mastered by their intense passions, needs, desires, and urges which not only direct them to their unknown and darker goals but, at the same time, bring misery and pain to both themselves and the people around them. Therefore, the need arises to search for the source of the characters' selfish and egoistic attitudes and actions. Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy states that the human beings' worldly desires and wants always give rise to misery and destruction. Therefore, the egoistic and selfish attitudes and actions of the characters in the selected works will be analyzed in terms of Schopenhauer's pessimism.

Searching through published articles, dissertations, and books, one finds that although some studies have been carried out to trace Schopenhauer's pessimism in George Eliot's novels, none have been done to trace Schopenhauer's pessimism in the selfish actions of the characters in the novels selected for this study. Thus, this study seeks to analyze the created characters Silas Marner, Godfrey Cass, Dunstan Cass and William Dane, who go through many



difficulties and much misery in satisfying their inner demands and desires. It also highlights how the blind and evil will forces the characters such as the Dodsons, Mr. Tulliver, and Maggie Tulliver to follow their selfish and egoistic wants and urges in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Although this study mainly seeks to examine the selected characters in both novels in a world where they experience unpleasantness, it also examines the practical ways through which the characters reach their real and true peace and contentment in the end. Thus, this study attempts to show how the characters are controlled by Schopenhauerian blind will and how the characters free themselves from the mastery of the immanent will in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*.

Scope of the Study

Many scholars and students throughout the world have intensely scrutinized Eliot's works. This study, however, is essentially confined to an investigation of the role of the Schopenhauerian evil, blind, and irrational will in leading and directing the selected characters (mainly the protagonists) in the novels *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot. It explores the will as a strong



and unavoidable internal force which masters, controls and leads the characters to pursue their endless and selfish needs and wants which brings nothing but the bitterest of the pains and miseries to them.

In addition, this study aims to bring out how the suffering characters struggle to free themselves from the servitude of the evil force (will) in order to receive true peace and experience the will-less life. To achieve this, this research uses the German philosopher Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy which had the most influence on Victorian writers in the nineteenth century.

Significance of the Study

Although there has been some research conducted on Eliot and her novels, few studies have been done in relation to Schopenhauer's philosophy of pessimism. Previous studies have looked at two of Eliot's novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, but none have been done on the works selected for this study. Lefew in *Schopenhauerian Will and Aesthetics in Novels by George Eliot, Olive Schreiner, Virginia Woolf, and Doris Lessing* (1992) presents Eliot's world as a world of darkness where the character are destined to suffer. It also presents the will as a



motivating force which directs the selected characters in both *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

This study is confined to the scrutiny of two novels, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*, to depict how Eliot views the world with disgust and abhorrence. In addition this research helps us to understand the selected character's weakness in resisting blind and evil will's endless and unlimited needs and desires. Furthermore, it portrays the condition in which the transition takes place from a will-full to a will-less life at the end of the novels selected for this study.

Objectives of the study

This research scrutinizes the actions, attitudes and the relationships of the characters in the selected novels within their blighted and evil world, society, the family, and with other characters. In particular, this study aims to:

1. examine how the characters created by George Eliot in the works selected for study, *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*, are controlled and led by Schopenhauer's evil will.
2. show how the evil force, the will, causes suffering and pain to the characters in the works selected.

