

# THE STRUGGLE OF THE OTHER: MAGGIE TULLIVER IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*

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## Abstract

*Patriarchal society believes in binary opposition of men as “subject” and women as “other” whose existence is determined by men. Gender or the differentiation of roles between men and women is a social construct that both men and women must conform to in order to be socially accepted. Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot’s novel Mill on the Floss is positioned as “the other” especially in her relation with her brother Tom. All through her life, Maggie struggles against social rules that regard her as “the other” because she is a woman and even “doubly other” for she is different from other female characters in general. Maggie’s struggle in a male dominated world ends when she finally dies at young age.*

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**Key Words:** *subject, the other, gender, social construct*

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## Abstrak

Masyarakat patriarki mempercayai oposisi biner laki-laki sebagai *Subject* dan perempuan sebagai *the Other* atau ‘yang lain’ yang keberadaannya ditentukan oleh laki-laki. Gender atau perbedaan peran laki-laki dan perempuan merupakan konstruksi sosial yang harus ditaati oleh laki-laki dan perempuan agar diterima dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat. Tokoh Maggie Tulliver dalam novel *The Mill on the Floss* karya George Eliot selalu diposisikan sebagai ‘the other’ terutama dalam hubungannya dengan kakak laki-lakinya, Tom. Sepanjang hidupnya, Maggie berjuang melawan aturan masyarakat yang memosisikannya sebagai *the Other* karena ia seorang perempuan dan bahkan *doubly other* karena ia berbeda dari tokoh perempuan lain pada umumnya. Perjuangan Maggie untuk mendapatkan tempat di dunia yang dikuasai oleh laki-laki berakhir ketika dia meninggal dalam usia yang masih belia.

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**Kata Kunci:** *subject, the other, gender, konstruksi sosial*

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## 1. Introduction

Many of the stereotypes about gender – the roles of men and women – derive from 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Therefore, many English literary works produced in Victorian period represent the Victorian images of woman and the notion of gender. One of them is *The Mill on the Floss*, a novel written by George Eliot, a pen name of Mary Ann Evans. Telling a story about a girl named Maggie Tulliver, the novel shows how roles of men and women are prescribed by a given society, and Maggie, the main female character in the novel, has to struggle against the society when she can not entirely conform to the rules.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In her famous book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir proposes the binary of “Self/Subject” and “Other” in which man is the “Subject” while woman is the “Other.” The notion of woman as

the “other” suggests that she is both female and feminized, occupying a secondary place and having the characteristics of immanence, passivity and voicelessness (1953: xvi). *The Second Sex* is integrated around the question, “What is woman?” The initial answer to this question is that woman is defined as not man: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (1953: xix). The notion of woman as the “Other” is the main argument of this book. Man sets himself up as the standard, the One, which immediately puts the woman as the Other. Beauvoir says: “Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other” (1953: xxxiii). That woman is consistently defined as the other by man who takes on the role of the Self constitutes the main thesis of *The Second Sex*: woman is patriarchally forced into an oppressed position and unequal relationship with man through her relegation to being man’s Other.

Beauvoir further proposes the formulation which distinguishes sex from gender: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1953: 301). It suggests that woman gradually acquires her gender, an aspect of her identity, through a socially constructed experience. Living in man dominated world, woman is forced to accept man’s imposition upon her. She rejects the notion that women are born “feminine.” Women are constructed to be feminine through social indoctrination. Women are forced to give up their claims to transcendence and authentic subjectivity. They are severely made to accept their “passive” and “alienated” role to man’s “active” and “subjective” demands.

In line with Beauvoir, Kate Millet argues that “a female is born and a woman is created”. What is determined at birth is one’s sex, whether it is male or female. Gender is a social construct: prescribed sex roles imposed by society that both men and women must conform to (Bressler, 1999: 183). The social prescribed sex roles demand men to be aggressive, self-assertive, and dominant, while women must be passive, submissive, and humble. Those who do not conform to the prescribed sex roles will have problem with their society. Judith Butler even claims that gender is not derived from an inherent set of predetermined characteristics but is a social construction. Furthermore she asserts that gender is not only constructed but is also performed. Gender is a set of stylized, repeated acts that we perform. Therefore, one is always in the process of becoming a gender rather than actually being a gender (1998: 519-20).