The Mill on the Floss Study Guide

The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot

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Introduction

The Mill on the Floss, published in 1860, is based partially on Eliot's own experiences with her family and her brother Isaac, who was three years older than Eliot. Eliot's father, like Mr. Tulliver in the novel, was a businessman who had married a woman from a higher social class, whose sisters were rich, ultra-respectable, and self-satisfied; these maternal aunts provided the character models for the aunts in the novel. Like Maggie, Eliot was disorderly and energetic and did not fit traditional models of feminine beauty or behavior, causing her family a great deal of consternation.

By the time Eliot published *The Mill on the Floss*, she had gained considerable notoriety as an "immoral woman" because she was living with the writer George Henry Lewes, who was married, though separated from his wife. Social disapproval of her actions spilled over into commentary on the novel, and it was scathingly criticized because it did not present a clear drama of right and wrong. Perhaps the most offended reader was Eliot's brother Isaac, who was very close to her in childhood but who had become estranged from her when he found out about her life with Lewes; he communicated with her only through his lawyer. In the book, Eliot drew on her own experiences with a once-beloved but rigid and controlling brother to depict the relationship between Maggie and her brother Tom.

Author Biography

George Eliot was the pen name of Mary Anne Evans, born November 22, 1819, at South Farm, Arbury, Warwickshire, England. She was the youngest child of Robert Evans and his second wife, Christiana Pearson, and had four siblings, two by her father's first marriage and two by his second. Eliot was her father's favorite child and was brought up to follow his Protestant beliefs. However, in her early twenties, she told her father that although she admired Jesus and his teachings, she rejected the idea that the Bible was of divine origin, and she refused to go to church. This shocked her family and many others, but she refused to attend services she did not believe in. This emphasis on following her own inner promptings rather than social convention would become a marked feature of her character and her life.

After her father's death in 1849, she had little money and little chance of getting married because she did not fit the contemporary ideal of beauty. A meeting with John Chapman, a family friend, led her to write for the quarterly *Westminster Review*. Through this work, she met the writer George Henry Lewes in 1851. Lewes was married with five children, though separated from his wife, and he and Eliot fell in love and began openly living together, a scandalous act for the times. As a result, Eliot was ostracized by many "respectable" people for most of her life.

In September 1856, Eliot began to write fiction. Her first work, a story titled "Amos Barton," was published anonymously in the January 1857 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine*. More stories followed, and her first novel, *Adam Bede*, was published in 1859. It received immediate critical acclaim as "a work of genius" in the periodical *The Athenaeum* and was called "the highest art" by the writer Leo Tolstoy.

Eliot followed this with the semi-autobiographical *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), which was highly successful, earning her four thousand pounds in one year, a huge sum for the time. In the next ten years, she published *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), and *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866). From 1871 to 1872, she published her masterpiece, *Middlemarch*. This was followed by *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879).

Lewes died in 1879, leaving Eliot griefstricken. In 1880, she married John Walter Cross, who was about twenty years her junior, but she died of a respiratory infection only seven months later, on December 21, 1880, in London.

Eliot's books are notable for their realistic portrayal of preindustrial English society, her interest in scandal and gossip, and her emphasis on political and social reform. They often feature female protagonists who struggle against social convention, but who, in the end, must accept it or be ostracized by their families and friends.

Plot Summary

Book 1: Boy and Girl

The novel begins with a description of the rural area where the action takes place, near the town of St. Ogg's and the River Floss. The narrator reminisces about a February many years ago and begins to tell the story of the Tulliver family.

Mr. Tulliver, who is the fifth generation in his family to own and run Dorlcote Mill on the River Floss, tells his wife that he will send his son Tom to a school where Tom can learn to be an "engineer, or a surveyor, or an auctioneer . . . or one of them smartish businesses as are all profit and no outlay." His wife advises him to ask her wealthier sisters and their husbands for their opinion, but Tulliver says he will do whatever he wants. However, he does decide to ask Mr. Riley, an auctioneer, who is somewhat educated, for his opinion. The two parents discuss their other child, Maggie, who takes after her father. She is as dark as Tom is fair and is clever but headstrong, uninterested in her appearance and in social niceties. True to her nature, Maggie comes to tea late with her hair mussed up, and when her mother urges her to do patchwork, she refuses. Her mother is bothered by the fact that Maggie is nothing like her and by the fact that she is much smarter than a woman "should" be.

Riley visits Tulliver, who says that he wants Tom to have an education but that it should be in a different field from his own, as he does not want Tom to grow up and take the mill away from him. Maggie, hearing this, is quick to defend Tom, and she distractedly drops the book she has been reading, *The History of the Devil*, a surprising choice for a young girl. Tulliver explains to Riley that he bought the book without knowing what it was about, because it had an interesting cover. Maggie discusses the book with them, but when she begins to discuss the devil, Tulliver tells her to leave the room. He tells Riley that she is too smart for a woman—unlike her mother, who is not noted for her intelligence. He tells Riley that he chose her as a wife for this very reason. Stelling for Tulliver and says that Stelling can teach Tom anything he needs to know.

Tom is coming home from his current school, but Maggie is not allowed to go out and meet him. Angered, she dunks her freshly brushed hair in water and then beats up a doll she keeps in the attic. Bored, she heads out to talk to Luke, the miller. He is not interested in her clever talk and reminds her that she has forgotten to feed and water Tom's rabbits while he was gone, and they have all died. This upsets her, but she forgets about it when Luke invites her to visit his wife. They have an illustration of the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son in their home, and she is fascinated with it and happy that his father took him back. However, she is upset when Luke reminds her that perhaps the son did not deserve it.

Tom gives Maggie the gift of a new fishing line and promises to take her fishing. The narrator, in introducing him, mentions that his fresh-cheeked, fair, and open appearance belies his character, which is rigid, inflexible, and unmodifiable. When he goes to see his rabbits, Maggie confesses that she has neglected them. He is angered by this and not affected by her remorse. He leaves her alone to cry, but they soon make up. The next day they go fishing together, and she hopes that they will always be close like this.

Mrs. Tulliver plans to invite her sisters and their husbands over to discuss Tom's education. Mrs. Tulliver wants Tom and Maggie to make a good impression on them, while Tulliver does not care what they think. Tom and Maggie, bored with the visit and all the rules imposed by the presence of their rigid relatives, run off with some pastry that their mother has made for the relatives. Tom heads out to see Bob Jakin, a poor boy who is headed to see a rat-catching at a farm nearby. Bob tosses a coin and asks Tom to call it but then will not hand it over when Tom calls it correctly. They fight, and Bob throws a knife that Tom once gave him on the ground to show his contempt for Tom. When Tom does not pick it up, though, Bob takes it back.

The aunts arrive. Mrs. Glegg complains about others being late, refuses to eat cheesecake, because she never eats between meals, and tells Mrs. Tulliver she should have dinner earlier, as her family has always done. Mrs. Pullet arrives in tears over the death of someone who is not related to the family; this elicits Mrs. Glegg's scorn, as she only cares about immediate relatives. Pullet defends his wife and discusses details of the dead woman's will. Mrs. Pullet and Mrs. Tulliver go upstairs to see a bonnet until Mrs. Deane arrives with her daughter, Lucy. Lucy, who is fair, pretty, and well behaved, is contrasted with the wild, dark Maggie. Mrs. Pullet in particular criticizes Maggie's dark, heavy hair. Maggie, who is sick of hearing her hair discussed, goes upstairs and cuts it off but regrets it when Tom laughs at her and the adults discuss her even more.

When Tulliver reveals his plans for Tom's education, Mrs. Glegg is shocked. Mr. Deane says that Wakem, a prominent lawyer, is also sending his son to Stelling. Mrs. Glegg comments that she has lent money to Tulliver, reminding him that he owes her. They argue, and Mrs. Glegg leaves in a huff.

The Tullivers discuss their debt of five hundred pounds to Mrs. Glegg. Tulliver realizes that the only way he can pay it is to ask his brother-in-law, Moss, to whom he has loaned three hundred pounds, to pay him back. The next day he rides over to Moss's. Moss, who is a poor farmer, is not home, but Tulliver's sister Gritty is. They live in a rundown hovel and have eight children. Gritty speaks admiringly of Maggie and says she hopes Tom will be good to Maggie in the future. This softens Tulliver, reminding him that Gritty is his own sister and he should be good to her.

Moss comes home and Tulliver asks him about the money. Moss says he would have to sell his house and everything he owns to pay it back, but if he must, he will do so. Tulliver says he must, but after leaving them, he thinks twice about it and rides back to tell Gritty that they can forget about the debt. Tulliver is glad he did this and thinks that somehow his example will result in Tom helping Maggie someday.

Maggie visits the Pullets. Maggie and Lucy like each other despite their differences in character; Tom says he likes Lucy more than Maggie. The house is fussy and overly neat, and when Maggie accidentally steps on a sweet cake and spills Tom's wine, her aunt Pullet sends the children outside. Meanwhile, Mrs. Tulliver discusses finances and convinces Mrs. Pullet to ask Mrs. Glegg to forget about the five hundred pounds Tulliver owes her.

Maggie becomes angry at Lucy, who is so perfect and clean and who is getting all of Tom's attention. She pushes her into the mud, and Tom decides that it is only just to throw Maggie in, too. However, he is in trouble, too, because they were not supposed to go anywhere near the mud. In order to save himself, he drops the issue and does not tell the adults on Maggie. Meanwhile, Maggie has disappeared.

Maggie, who has been told often that she looks like a gypsy, runs off to join them. She assumes they will be glad to see her and be enlightened by her education. She finally finds their camp but is not happy there; the gypsies frighten her and steal her silver thimble. One of the gypsy men eventually takes her home on his donkey, and Tulliver pays him for returning Maggie. Maggie regrets her headstrong decision, and Tulliver does not punish her for it.

The narrator describes the town of St. Ogg's, a town that cherishes respectability above all else. The Gleggs live there. Mr. Glegg, a retired wool merchant, spends most of his time in his garden. His wife, who is thrifty like him, is less likable and more prone to arguing. He tells her that she should not make Tulliver pay his debt now, since anyone else who borrows it would not pay as much interest as Tulliver. They argue about this until Mr. Glegg tells her he has left a lot of money to her in his will. The thought of future riches distracts her and pleases her, and she decides to let Tulliver keep the loan for the time being.

Mrs. Pullet tries to convince Mrs. Glegg to let Tulliver keep the money. She succeeds, because Mrs. Glegg has already decided to do so. However, Tulliver has already written to Mrs. Glegg, saying that he will pay the money in the following month. He still needs the money, of course, and he decides to borrow it from a client of his longtime enemy, Lawyer Wakem.

Book 2: School-Time

Tom turns out to be the only pupil of Reverend Stelling, and he is bored without friends. In addition, he is not very bright, so studying Latin and geometry is torture to him. Stelling turns out to be an ambitious man who spends far more than he makes, and he is unable to adapt his teaching to Tom's abilities; Tom is good at business and has common sense. Bored, Tom plays with Stelling's baby daughter and starts to miss Maggie's company.

Maggie visits, and she is very interested in his studies; she shows that she can pick up the topics much more quickly than he can, even though she is a girl. She stays there two weeks and learns Latin and geometry, largely on her own. Despite this, when she asks Stelling if she can study as Tom does, Stelling and Tom both tell her women are too stupid to "go far into anything."

Tom goes for Christmas, but life at home is unpleasant. His father, who likes to argue and sue people, has a new feud going with Pivart: a new neighbor who lives upstream from the mill wants to use water from the Floss to irrigate his fields. Tulliver feels this is an infringement on his own water rights, and he is sure that Lawyer Wakem is behind it. Meanwhile, Wakem is planning to send his son Philip to Stelling. Even though Tulliver hates Wakem, he is secretly pleased about his son having the same education as Wakem's.

Tom meets Philip Wakem. Philip is deformed as the result of a childhood accident. He is shy, well educated, and proud. Tom is disgusted by his deformity and hates him, until he discovers that Philip is a skilled artist, an ability Tom lacks. They begin to talk, and Philip, who is good at Latin, tells Tom stories about the ancient Greeks and Romans. In return, Tom brags about how he beat up all the other boys at his old school.

Tom continues to do poorly at schoolwork, but he is good at military drills, which he practices with the drillmaster, Poulter. Tom is fascinated by Poulter's combat stories and gets Poulter to lend him his sword.

Philip and Tom get into a fight, and Tom calls Philip's father a rogue. Hurt, Philip cries.

Tom assumes his fight with Philip is over, and he acts friendly. However, Philip will not let the insult go. Maggie comes to visit. She is fascinated by Philip, because she has a "tenderness for deformed things." She also admires his ability in music and drawing.

Tom gets out the sword and swaggers to impress Maggie, but he drops the sword and cuts his foot.

Philip is kind to Tom, telling him the injury will not make him permanently lame. After this they become friendlier. Philip asks Maggie if she would love him if he were her brother, and she says yes, she would, because she would be sorry for him. However, this incident makes her realize that Philip cares for her, and she tells him she wishes he really were her brother. She tells her father how she and Tom have become friends with Philip, and Tulliver advises them both not to get too close.

Maggie goes to a girls' boarding school with her cousin Lucy. In the meantime, her father has begun a lawsuit against Lawyer Wakem, so she cannot be too friendly to Philip. Eventually, he loses the suit and must sell everything he owns, including the mill, to pay for it. What is more, when Tulliver received this news, he fell off his horse and has been out of his mind ever since. Tom and Maggie head home, and the narrator notes that "the golden gates of their childhood . . . [had] forever closed behind them."

Book 3: The Downfall

Tulliver looks for someone who will buy the mill and let him run it. He is also troubled because he has already scheduled a sale of his household goods in order to raise the money to pay back Mrs. Glegg's five hundred pounds. He decides to send Mrs. Tulliver to the Pullets to ask them to lend him five hundred pounds.

When Mrs. Tulliver asks her sisters for help, they see Tulliver's failure as a sort of divine judgment against him, and they refuse to help. Tom decides the whole thing is Lawyer Wakem's fault and decides that someday he will make Wakem pay for it.

Tom and Maggie get home and find the bailiff waiting in the parlor. He has come to sell all their things. Mrs. Tulliver is upset over the impending loss of her belongings. Her sisters are coming to buy a few things but only the ones they want for themselves; otherwise they will not help. Tom says he will get a job and help the family. Maggie is appalled by her mother's emphasis on things and her lack of caring about Tulliver, who is still out of his mind, and she goes to take care of him.

The following day, all the aunts and uncles gather to decide what must be done. They have no sympathy for Mrs. Tulliver's now-destitute state or her desire to keep some of her old things, and they tell her she must make do with a few meager necessities. Tom tells them that if they were planning to leave money to him and Maggie, they could simply give it out now and save the family. Mrs. Glegg refuses to do so, because she would have less to leave after she died and people might think she was poor when they heard of her small legacy. Maggie, angered, asks why they came to interfere if they do not plan to help. Tom is annoyed by her outburst.

Mrs. Moss, the poorest of all the relatives, arrives and tells the children that she has three hundred pounds but cannot repay it without herself becoming bankrupt. Tom tells the other relatives that Tulliver did not want the money back. Mr. Glegg says that if there is any proof of the loan, the authorities will insist that it be paid back anyway. Tom and Mr. Glegg decide to find the loan note and destroy it, leaving the Mosses free of any obligation.

While they search for the note, Tulliver wakes from his coma and is surprisingly lucid. He tells Tom to take care of Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver, verifies that he does not want his loan back, and reminds Tom to make Wakem suffer for the trouble he has supposedly brought to the family. Then he lapses into unconsciousness again.

Tom visits his uncle Deane, a successful businessman for Guest and Company, and asks for a job. Deane tells him that his fancy education is useless and that he is qualified for nothing. He will try to get Tom a job but cannot promise anything. Back at home, Maggie suggests that she learn bookkeeping so she can teach it to Tom. He thinks this is mighty presumptuous for a mere woman and becomes angry at her.

The Tulliver household is finally sold. A visitor appears later that day: Bob Jakin. He shows Tom the knife Tom once gave him and tells Tom it is the only thing anyone has ever given him. In return, he says, he wants to give the family ten sovereigns that he received for putting out a fire at another mill. Tom refuses the money, but Maggie says that if they ever need help in the future, they will call on Bob.

In the meantime, Deane has found Tom a job in a warehouse. Mrs. Tulliver goes to Lawyer Wakem and asks him not to buy the mill, because it will upset her husband. Instead, she asks him to let Deane's company buy the mill. His company, Guest and

Company, is thinking of buying it and letting Tulliver run it. Wakem says he could buy it and let Tulliver run it, but Mrs. Tulliver says her husband would never agree to this. In truth, Wakem never intended to buy the mill, but now he decides it is a good idea to do so.

Wakem buys the mill, and Tulliver, who sees that he has no choice, agrees to run it. Gradually, he becomes strong again, but he chafes under Wakem's ownership. One day he makes Tom write in the family Bible that he has agreed to run the mill for Wakem but that he will never forgive him, that he wishes "evil may befall him," and that one day Tom will make him suffer for it. Maggie says that it is wrong to write such a curse in the Bible, but Tom writes and signs it.

Book 4: The Valley of Humiliation

The narrator discusses the Dodson family and their idea of religion, calling it "simple, semipagan," and noting that they worship "whatever is customary and respectable." They are egotistical people who serve their own interests. The Tullivers are similar but have a little more impetuosity and warmth.

Tom is fully employed at the warehouse, but Maggie, at thirteen, is bored, with nothing to do. She is full of energy and drive, qualities considered deplorable in a girl, but the same qualities make young Tom "manly" despite his emotional immaturity.

Bob Jakin drops by one day. He is a traveling salesman, or packman, and he drops off some books he bought as a gift for Maggie. One is a religious book by Thomas à Kempis, which advocates renunciation and asceticism, and this grabs her imagination. She tries to lead an ascetic, spiritual life.

Book 5: Wheat and Tares

Philip Wakem comes to the mill with his father one day. Although Maggie is home, she does not want to see him with his father there, because she cannot be friendly to him in front of his father. She is now seventeen and is stately and very beautiful. On a walk to the woods near her house, she meets Philip, who has been waiting for her. They agree to meet there periodically. He is in love with her, but as yet she does not think of him that way.

Meanwhile, Tom has done well in his work. He gives all his money to his father, saving up to buy back the mill someday. Bob Jakin tells Tom that he can make much more money if he invests in some goods, which Jakin will give to a sailor friend of his to sell on his voyages. Tulliver is unwilling to give up any money, so Tom borrows fifty pounds from Mr. Glegg to invest in the venture. Mrs. Glegg, who has fallen for Bob Jakin's sales talk, also lends him twenty pounds of her own. By the time Maggie meets Philip, Tom has made 150 pounds and plans to pay off the entire mill debt by the end of the following year.

Maggie and Philip meet some more. He draws her and plays music for her, both of which arouse her love of art and beauty. They agree to keep meeting, even though their families would be against it. Philip is deeply in love with Maggie, even though he knows she feels sorry for him because of his deformity.

A year later, they are still meeting secretly. Maggie returns a book she borrowed from Philip, saying she disliked it because the author, like so many others, had the fair-haired girl win over one who was dark, like Maggie. Philip tells her that one day soon she may triumph over her fair-haired cousin Lucy in love. This annoys Maggie, who had been speaking metaphorically and does not like to think of being Lucy's rival. Philip tells her he loves her, but she says she could never upset her father by returning that love.

One day Maggie's aunt Pullet comments that she has often noticed Philip Wakem in a particular spot in the woods. Maggie blushes, and when Tom sees her, he knows she has been meeting Philip. Tom corners Maggie, asks what she thinks she is doing, and says their father would be driven mad if he knew. He makes her promise that she will never see Philip again. She says she would never promise this for Tom, but in respect for her father, she agrees.

Three weeks later, Tom comes home and tells his father that he has enough money to buy back the mill. Tulliver is thrilled and dreams of the revenge he will have on Lawyer Wakem. He goes to dinner with his creditors and tells them he can pay them off. This fills him with pride, and when he meets Wakem in the street, he tells him he will not work for him anymore and knocks Wakem off his horse and whips him furiously. The next morning, Tulliver asks Tom to try to get Wakem to sell him the mill and tells him to take good care of his mother and Maggie. He dies without forgiving Wakem, and Tom and Maggie promise they will always be good to each other.

Book 6: The Great Temptation

Stephen Guest, son of the main partner of Guest and Company, is courting Maggie's cousin Lucy Deane. He is good-looking and a smooth talker, and he is marrying Lucy largely because she fits a description of the perfect wife: good looking, but not too much; thoughtful of other women, but not too much; gentle and "not stupid." When Maggie visits, he is fascinated with her dark beauty and intelligence. He is attracted to her but acknowledges that she is not the sort of woman he would want to marry.

That night, Maggie cannot sleep, because she keeps thinking of how well Stephen can play music and sing and remembering the passionate way he looked at her. When Lucy asks what Maggie thinks of Stephen, however, Maggie says she thinks he is too self-confident. Lucy says that Philip is going to visit the next day, but Maggie says she cannot see him without her brother's permission. Lucy asks why not, and Maggie tells the whole story of her past connection with Philip. Lucy finds this very romantic and decides that she will find a way to bring them together again.

Maggie goes to visit Tom, who is living at Bob Jakin's house. He agrees to release her from her promise not to see Philip but says she will have to live without a brother if she sees him. Maggie says that she does not want to lose her brother, so she will not love Philip but will only be a friend to him. Tom finally agrees that she can see him.

Uncle Deane tells Tom he has done good work and that he and Mr. Guest are going to give him a share in their business. Tom is grateful but suggests that the company buy Dorlcote Mill and let him run it and eventually buy it from them by working off the price. He says that Wakem may be interested in selling it, because the current manager has been drinking too much. Deane says he will investigate.

Maggie, who is now under Lucy's wing and socializing with the high society in St. Ogg's, is enjoying her new leisure. The men and women of St. Ogg's are all fascinated with her: the men because of her beauty, the women because of her unpretentiousness. One of the men is Stephen Guest, who is understood to be Lucy's fiancé. There is a chemistry between him and Maggie, of which Lucy is unaware.

The following day, Philip comes to visit Maggie and Lucy. He and Maggie are nervous about meeting again but secretly glad. Maggie tells him that Tom has agreed that they can be friends but that she is planning to go away to a "new situation." Stephen arrives, and Philip is annoyed by his presence and by the fact that Maggie is evidently swayed by him.

Later, Deane tells Lucy that his company might buy the mill from Philip's father. Lucy says that if he lets her, she will talk to Philip to get him to convince his father to go along with the deal.

Lucy talks about it with Philip. Philip asks his father to talk to him in his room, where there are several drawings he has made of Maggie. His father asks about them, and Philip explains that he would marry her if he could but that he has never been taught a skill that would allow him to support himself and her. Wakem is enraged that his son wants to marry a Tulliver, and when Philip says that Maggie never got involved in the family feud, Wakem says that it does not matter what a woman does; what matters is whom she belongs to. They argue, but in the end Wakem, thinking about his own deceased wife and the happiness she gave him, agrees to sell the mill and allow Philip to marry Maggie if she agrees.

At a bazaar in St. Ogg's, Maggie attracts a lot of attention because of her looks. There is tension between Maggie, Stephen, and Philip. Maggie thinks she would prefer Stephen as a husband, but she is not sure. Lucy tells her that now that Tom will own the mill, there is no reason why she cannot marry Philip. Maggie reminds her that Tom still hates him.

At a dance at Stephen's house, Stephen kisses Maggie, and she is offended at his boldness. The next morning, she is supposed to visit her aunt Moss. Philip arrives before she leaves and asks if they can ever be together again. She says that Tom is the only factor keeping them apart.

After four days of her visit to Aunt Moss, Stephen visits and asks her to forgive him. She does, and he asks her to marry him. She says no, because he is engaged to Lucy, and he cannot convince her that it would not be wrong. She convinces him that it is time for them to go their separate ways, because she is going away to work.

A few days later, Maggie visits her aunt Pullet, who is having a party to celebrate Tom's purchase of the mill. Aunt Pullet is annoyed that Maggie is going to go away and get a job as a governess, but on the other hand, she refuses to do anything to help her. Lucy gets Tom to take her home from the party and asks him to allow Maggie to marry Philip. Tom refuses to bless their union but says Maggie can do what she wants.

Maggie stays with her aunt Glegg, but Stephen sees her each evening at dinner. They are still interested in each other, although Maggie fights it. Still, she thinks it is harmless if they show their love to each other, because she will soon be leaving anyway. A series of mishaps result in Maggie and Stephen going on a boating trip down the Floss together; although the trip is only supposed to last an afternoon, Stephen does not stop where they had planned to but keeps on going until the tide makes it impossible to return that day. This is crucial, because in their society staying away overnight would ruin Maggie's reputation as a virtuous woman; people will assume that she is loose. Stephen tells her their only alternative is to run away and get married, but Maggie refuses. More mishaps ensue, and Maggie does not get home until five days later.

Tom is angry with her for shaming the family, and he will not let her stay in the mill. Bob Jakin takes her and Mrs. Tulliver in. Bob wonders why Maggie is not married, but he does not ask.

The narrator comments on this state of affairs, saying that if Maggie had gotten married, society would have found it a romantic story. However, since she is not, all the blame falls on her as an unwed woman, and people assume she has been promiscuous and that Stephen then refused to marry her; they do not think badly of him at all, even though the event was his fault. Meanwhile, Stephen has gone abroad and has written a letter to a local clergyman, Dr. Kenn, saying that Maggie is not to blame. The local opinion is not swayed by this. Dr. Kenn thinks Maggie should marry Stephen, but he realizes that Maggie's feelings must be taken into account. He promises to find a job for Maggie.

Aunt Glegg scolds Tom for assuming the worst of his sister; Mr. Glegg takes Lucy's side and is against Maggie; Mrs. Pullet is undecided; and Mrs. Glegg takes Maggie's side and offers to take her in. Maggie thanks her but says she would rather be independent.

Philip writes a letter saying he believes in Maggie's innocence, that she is meant for him, and that he wants to help her in any way he can.

Dr. Kenn has not been able to find a job for Maggie, so he hires her as a governess for his children. However, after a while, rumors fly that he is going to marry her. Lucy visits Maggie, and Maggie tells Lucy that she never meant to deceive her and that Stephen will come back to Lucy eventually. Lucy tells Maggie that Maggie is a better person than she is.

Dr. Kenn finally has to fire Maggie because the gossip about her position in his house has become too slanderous. He tells her it's best if she leaves St. Ogg's. Maggie gets a letter from Stephen, saying he still loves her and wants her, but she resists her desire for him and burns the letter.

Meanwhile, it's been raining for two days, and the river is rising in a flood. Maggie gets into a boat and is swept out in the flood and paddles to the mill, where the water is up to the second story. She rescues Tom, and he finally realizes how paltry and futile their disagreements were. They both drown in the flood, but the narrator notes that, in death, they went down in "an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together."

Book 1: Chapter 1

Book 1: Chapter 1 Summary

The setting for the story is laid out in this chapter. The town is St. Ogg's, and it sits on the banks of the river Floss, which flows into the sea, subject to its tides, but also benefiting from access to the ships that bring goods to the region and provide for the marketing of its own produce. A tributary called the Ripple flows into the Floss here. Dorlcote Mill uses the flow of the Ripple and sits at the juncture of the tributary and the Floss. A "trimly-kept, comfortable dwelling house, as old as the elms and chestnuts that shelter it from the northern blast" adjoins the mill and is occupied by the Tullivers, who have owned the mill for five generations and live in the house.

Book 1: Chapter 1 Analysis

We are kept aware of the presence of the river as we read the story. Eliot describes this presence in her opening chapter; with final chapter showing the river on a rampage and taking the lives of the major characters in the story. It's mentioned in various ways in several chapters; so the reader always knows that it is coiled there like a giant poisonous snake, and the likelihood that it will strike is never far from one's mind. In fact, in this first chapter she uses personification (giving human characteristics to non-human objects) as a signal that it will play its own role in the story: "hurrying between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage in an impetuous embrace." And in the very final chapter, we find Maggie and Tom, the two major characters, rushing to a final embrace as they drown in its fury.

Book 1: Chapter 2

Book 1: Chapter 2 Summary

Mr. Tulliver tells Mrs. Tulliver of his plans to send their son, Tom, away to school, and he is trying to decide just where to send him. Mr. Tulliver owns and operates the mill and wants his son to make more of himself than he has. Tom's mother feels that her sisters and their husbands should be consulted in this matter since they are wealthier and more successful. Mr. Tulliver has no intention of consulting them about anything but will ask his friend, Mr. Riley, an auctioneer, for his advice.

Mr. Tulliver believes that Tom is not overly bright and that he takes after his mother's side of the family. However, Maggie, their little girl, is just the opposite. He says, "she's twice as 'cute [acute] as Tom. Too 'cute for a woman, I'm afraid." Maggie is olive-skinned and dark-eyed whereas Tom is fair and blue-eyed, which is considered preferable. Mrs. Tulliver complains about Maggie's behavior. She can't keep a decent-looking pinafore on her, and her hair is dark and straight, and compares Maggie to her sister's daughter, Lucy, who is fair and pretty and has curls and never gets her clothes dirty. She scolds Maggie about going to the river. "You'll tumble in and be drownded some day, an' then you'll be sorry you didn't do as mother told you," she admonishes. Mr. Tulliver laughs at his little daughter and delights in her misbehaviors.

Book 1: Chapter 2 Analysis

It's impossible to read *Mill on the Floss* without seeing in it some early feminist themes. Lucy fits what a woman is supposed to be in that age and in that community. She is docile, sweet, and kind, and she never makes trouble. She fits neatly into the niche that society has laid out for her.

This is not so with Maggie. In the first place, she doesn't have the advantages that Lucy has; but even if she did, she probably wouldn't have fit so easily into the role expected of her. Because she looks different, is brighter than her brother, and is bookish, she is constantly criticized and insulted. When she begins to mature into young womanhood, she doesn't seek a conventional marriage. She does not feel that marrying Philip, who is deformed, would cast a bad light on her because her feelings about him are her feelings about him and are honest-never mind what others say. More than anything, her moral integrity sets her apart. This is admired when her brother exhibits it in standing up for his father and working to pay off his debts. When Maggie demonstrates this kind of integrity rather than yield to what is clearly a deep and abiding love for Stephen, she is destroyed by the very people who have admired Tom. It seems early for such feminist themes, but George Eliot was before her time in many ways.

George Eliot, born Mary Ann Evans (or Marian Evans), she lived with George Henry Lewes, a very successful journalist, from 1851 to 1878 without benefit of marriage. This was not by their choice but because his wife had three children by another man and he couldn't divorce her. Lewes exerted a major influence on her writing, largely by his encouragement.

In this chapter when Mrs. Tulliver worries about Maggie "drownding," the writer is foreshadowing the end of the story, where Maggie does, in fact, drown in an attempt to save her brother in a flood.

Book 1: Chapter 3

Book 1: Chapter 3 Summary

Riley visits Mr. Tulliver to discuss Tom's education. Although only nine years old, Maggie is an avid and accomplished reader, and she discusses *The History of the Devil,* by Daniel Defoe, which she has been reading with the men. She glows under her father's praise.

Riley recommends that Tom study one-on-one with a clergyman named Stelling who comes recommended by the bishop. Mrs. Tulliver is concerned that Tom will not be well-fed or have his clothes looked after, but Riley reassures her that Mr. Stelling is married to a woman from a good family and will see that he gets the necessary attention. Mr. Tulliver questions whether a clergyman will be able to teach Tom what he needs to know about succeeding in business, but Riley sets him straight. He says that a clergyman is better educated than most teachers. Tulliver is convinced because he is dissatisfied with the education that Tom has been receiving.

Book 1: Chapter 3 Analysis

Sometimes Tulliver comes off as somewhat of a buffoon, and this episode where he is seeking to have his son become educated is a case in point. He is completely devoid of an understanding of what it means to get an education or the relationship between education and doing well in the world as he wants Tom to do. Yet he charges ahead, choosing as an advisor Riley, an auctioneer, one who has no reason to be qualified to give advice of this sort, and accepts what he recommends without question. When he finds that his archenemy, the lawyer Wakem, is sending his deformed son to the same school, he feels vindicated in his choice.

From our own standpoint, we can see clearly that there is one child in this family who has extraordinary potential-Maggie. Her father loves her and encourages her precocity, but he has no dreams for her future as he does for Tom. The only school she will attend will be one where she will be taught to fit into the very narrow niche that society has carved out for her-the niche that Lucy accepts so willingly.

Book 1: Chapter 4

Book 1: Chapter 4 Summary

Tom is coming home from school, but Maggie is not permitted to go with her father to pick him up because it is raining, and this makes her angry. Her mother is trying to brush her hair, but she breaks loose and goes and dunks it in a tub of water. She runs to the attic, her retreat when she is frustrated, and beats up an old wooden doll that she keeps for this purpose. By the time she comes down, the sun is out and she goes and visits Luke, Dorlcote Mill's head miller, to tell him that Tom is coming home. Luke reminds her that she has forgotten to feed and water Tom's rabbits as she was supposed to do, and that they have died s a result. She fears Tom's anger when he gets home.

Book 1: Chapter 4 Analysis

Maggie is a handful! She makes her mother's life miserable, but she's a child to be admired and enjoyed in her intense desire to be loved, in her intellectual curiosity, and even in willfulness. At the same time, no one seems to see that some of her resistance comes from the fact that she constantly meets with criticism and rejection-from the aunts, from Tom, and from her mother. Her father may be a little off-target with Tom, but he gets it right with Maggie.

Book 1: Chapter 5

Book 1: Chapter 5 Summary

Tom is described in this chapter as twelve or thirteen years old and in appearance as opposite of Maggie as possible-"a lad with light-brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows." However, the narrator also indicates that underneath that pleasing surface is an inflexible and unmodifiable nature.

Tom has brought his sister a new fishing line - he has foregone sweets to be able to buy it for her. He promises to take her fishing, which makes her even happier. She tells him how much she loves him. He now wants to go and see his rabbits, but Maggie tells him they are all dead. He is very angry and says she can't go fishing with him after all, and crushes her. She runs to the attic, and Mr. Tulliver scolds Tom for not being good to her. Maggie decides to come down; her need for love trumps her hurt. She knows her father will console her and forgive her; however, Tom comes to get her, shares his cake with her, and they make up. The next day, the two children have a very happy fishing trip.

Book 1: Chapter 5 Analysis

This story is about a quest for love, and Maggie is the protagonist. The world conspires to thwart this deeply felt need of hers just to be loved and accepted. Her family constantly tells her that she can't be loved and accepted unless she conforms to everybody's preconception of what she should be. She is boxed in and frustrated at every turn, and Tom's treatment of her is the most damaging of all. We will see as the story progresses that he is the principal obstacle in her search for approval, acceptance, and love. We will also see that her great need for love leads to disaster. The conflicts are between Maggie and the world. .

Book 1: Chapter 6

Book 1: Chapter 6 Summary

Mrs. Tulliver's sisters and brothers-in-law are coming so they may discuss Tom's education.. They are fussy and particular about everything, and the sisters are quick to criticize anything that deviates from their set-in-concrete notions about what is proper. Maggie comes in for a lot of their reproof because she stands out not only by the way she looks but also by her unconventional behavior. The children make a point of being away when the aunts arrive because they don't like being picked at and reproached by them.

Tom meets his friend, a snub-nosed, freckle-faced redhead, Bob Jakin. Tom tells him that his father told him about a flood , and he is planning to build a big boat like "Noah's Ark" and keep a supply of food. He says he would take Bob and would share his food with him at first, but that they would play "heads-and-tails" to see who would get the larger share. So Bob brings forth a half-penny and they play the game. They disagree and it ends up in a fight. Bob tries to give Tom back a horn-handled knife he had given him previously, but Tom refuses to take it.

Book 1: Chapter 6 Analysis

In many ways, the Dodson sisters are caricatures of middle-class women. Arrogant about their own positions in the community, inflexible in their judgments, self-centered and self-serving, stingy, and greedy, they are not what might be called sympathetic characters. We don't like them, and there's no doubt in our minds that this writer does not like them either. Mary Ann Evans grew up in this social class, and she is writing about what she knows. At the same time, there is comedy here. Some of the writings go so far that they are ridiculous, and it's impossible to take them seriously. One suspects that the young Mary Ann found them laughable and grotesque.

Mary Ann's mother was Harriet Poynton and was from a higher social class than her father, Robert, so the Dodson sisters were probably drawn from people she knew. Her father, like Tulliver, was a go-getter who moved up in the world on his own ambition and energy.

Tom's mention of the flood foreshadows the climax of the story and, Bob Jakin plays a role in the flood that ends the action. This seems to be an undercurrent running throughout the book.

Book 1: Chapter 7

Book 1: Chapter 7 Summary

The aunts-Mrs. Glegg, Mrs. Pullet, and Mrs. Deane-arrive and, true to form, criticize the cheesecake and the time of dinner. When Mrs. Pullet cries over the death of someone who is not a member of the family, she is criticized for that. They compare Tom and particularly Maggie unfavorably with Lucy, Mrs. Deane's daughter, who is small, pretty, blonde, and docile. They feel that their sister, Bessy, Mrs. Tulliver, has married beneath herself, and they feel sorry for her because her husband "goes to the law" frequently to settle some dispute or other.

They criticize Maggie's hair as being too thick and too dark - so she takes Tom upstairs, finds scissors, and cuts her hair off. He knows she will get in trouble, but he helps her by cutting where she can't reach. Tom laughs when he sees how she looks, and her feelings are hurt. When she comes down to dinner, her mother is shocked, but her father is amused. She is heaped with reproofs and the aunts feel that she must be punished. When Tom joins in, she runs to her father for comfort..

Mrs. Tulliver asks her husband to tell the others what his plans are for Tom. Mr. Deane says, "Somebody said Wakem was going to send his son-the deformed lad-to a clergyman." Mr. Tulliver takes that as a good sign since Wakem is successful and very astute in business.

Mrs. Glegg reminds Tulliver that she has loaned him money and that he owes her. He gets angry, they quarrel, and she leaves in an angry huff.

Book 1: Chapter 7 Analysis

Tulliver dominates this story from the beginning until the time of his death. He is exasperating in his reactions about minor matters, and we already know that this is going to come to no good end. At the same time, he redeems himself by being generous to a fault and devoted to his family in ways that the Dodsons are not. It is the contrast between Tulliver and the aunts that makes them look so petty and cheap, and this is the characteristic about him that makes him likeable. He is a good father to Tom although he passes along his inflexibility and obtuseness to him in many ways, and he is Maggie's salvation as a child.

Book 1: Chapter 8

Book 1: Chapter 8 Summary

Tulliver is angry at Mrs. Glegg about the 500 pounds he owes her, and decides that the only way he can repay her right away is by asking his sister's husband to pay him the $300 pounds he owes him. Gritty, Mrs. Moss, is Tulliver's only sister. Her husband is a poor farmer; they have eight children, and live miserably. She is glad to see her brother, and he is touched by the family's poverty. She wants to know when Maggie is coming to see her. She loves and admires Maggie, as do the children. Since she seems to be the only one in the family who finds anything to praise in Maggie, he is touched by her feelings. Mr. Moss comes from the fields and Mr. Tulliver tells him he needs to have the money back. He says that he will have to sell everything, including his livestock in order to pay it. Mr. Tulliver does not relent and angrily leaves. He doesn't get far, however, before he turns and comes back. He thinks of Maggie and the fact that she may need to depend on Tom's generosity some day. So he postpones the repayment of the loan.

Book 1: Chapter 8 Analysis

Tulliver is loyal and loving to his only sister in contrast to Tom's later treatment of Maggie. This kind of loyalty to Maggie would have brought a different outcome to the story, but Tom did not learn this lesson. When Tulliver rethinks his decision and comes back, Eliot is also foreshadowing the time to come when Maggie will actually need Tom's generosity but does not get it. It's reasonable to believe that Tulliver would have defended and protected her if he had been alive.

Book 1: Chapter 9

Book 1: Chapter 9 Summary

The hairdresser comes to try to straighten up Maggie's haircut and scolds her for what she has done, which irritates Maggie. Then Mrs. Tulliver and the children go to visit the Pullets at their home, Garum Firs. Lucy is there looking pretty and neat. Maggie likes Lucy, and they are good friends in spite of the carping of the adults. Now Tom is ignoring his sister and paying attention to Lucy, which makes Maggie angry. Mrs. Pullet is obsessed with keeping the children from touching anything or messing up the house. Maggie manages to drop a piece of cake and then step on it; then she hugs Tom so that he spills his cowslip wine, so they are sent outdoors.

Mrs. Pullet points out Mr. Tulliver's deficiencies and expresses her condolences to Bessy (Mrs. Tulliver) for what she must put up with, but also suggests that he should go and make up with Mrs. Glegg.

Book 1: Chapter 9 Analysis

Tom knows how much Maggie depends on his love and acceptance, and he dangles her on a line. She is never secure in his acceptance of her. His male arrogance is responsible for her insecurities for as long as she lives. Tom is not on her side in her search for love and acceptance. He represents the hostile world.

Book 1: Chapter 10

Book 1: Chapter 10 Summary

Tom is being particularly obnoxious outdoors, deliberately ignoring Maggie and playing with Lucy. He takes Lucy to the lake although they are forbidden to leave the garden. When Maggie follows, he tells her to go away, that she wasn't invited to come with them; so Maggie, true to form, pushes Lucy into the mud. Tom takes the little girl to the house and hands her over to the maid, telling her that it was Maggie who pushed her into the mud. Mrs. Pullet, of course, points out that she has been saying that the Tulliver children, particularly Maggie, were going to come to no good end. Mrs. Tulliver sends Tom to get Maggie, but she is nowhere to be found. Thinking she might have gone on home, they have the carriage brought so they might look for her on the way.

Book 1: Chapter 10 Analysis

Tom has gone too far this time, and Maggie is running away from home - something most children do at least once in their lives. This may foreshadow her running away with Stephen later in the story although it was not of her own volition that time, and it was aborted by her acting on her own conscience. Maybe she remembers that being with the gypsies was not as satisfying as she had dreamed it would be when she finds herself on the run with Stephen.

Book 1: Chapter 11

Book 1: Chapter 11 Summary

Maggie, meanwhile, has gone to look for gypsies. She has always been told that she looks like one, so she decides to just abandon her family and find a gypsy family she can live with. She has dreams of teaching them and sharing her knowledge with them. She is lost, but she keeps walking because she knows of a field where they tend to camp. She does, at last, find a gypsy family and carries on a conversation with them, trying to impress them with her superior knowledge. She asks where the gypsy queen is. She suggests that if that queen should die, she, Maggie, would like to take her place. The men come soon and they go through Maggie's things and return them, all except her little silver thimble.

They try to feed her, but she finds the food unpalatable and tells them that it will be dark soon and she thinks she must go home. One of the men puts her on a donkey and takes her home, riding behind her. They meet her father, who is coming from the mill and doesn't know she has run away. He gives the man five shillings and puts her on his horse. He tells her she must not do this again because he couldn't get along without her. She tells him she ran away because she was so unhappy-Tom was so angry she couldn't bear it. When he gets home, he speaks his mind to both Tom and Mrs. Tulliver, so Maggie gets no reproach from anyone.

Book 1: Chapter 11 Analysis

Her dangerously wrong behavior is the result of her frustrated desire for Tom's love and acceptance, a force that continually drives her. The disapproval and rejection of the aunts, her mother, and Tom make her world a very unreliable place.

Book 1: Chapter 12

Book 1: Chapter 12 Summary

The town is described in more detail here as being very old with warehouses to store the goods that come in on the boats. The town hall was built by the Normans. The church has a remnant of the original chapel dedicated to St. Ogg, the patron saint of the town. The history of the town includes terrible floods that wiped away everything, including humans and animals.

This chapter focuses on Mr. and Mrs. Glegg. He is a wool merchant but is retired now, and it vexes him when his wife quarrels with anyone, so he's disturbed by her argument with Mr. Tulliver. The Gleggs argue with each other, but he knows how to pacify her. He tells her that he is leaving her well fixed, which improves her frame of mind, and she decides that she will not ask for the five hundred pound loan back right now. Besides, she is getting five percent from him whereas she would only get four if she would put it on a mortgage.

Book 1: Chapter 12 Analysis

The setting is described as having a long history that has been uprooted from time to time by floods, which reverberates in the characters and in the story. Established custom rules. Stability comes from keeping everything the way it has always been. The disruptions are what cause the pain and misery. In trying to bring Maggie, the disruptive one, in line, the good citizens are trying to control the variations they can control, unlike the floods. The other side of the coin is that this ancient town is obviously stagnant, and it is this stagnation that Maggie resists.

Book 1: Chapter 13

Book 1: Chapter 13 Summary

Mrs. Pullet tries to mediate between Mrs. Glegg and Mr. Tulliver, telling her sister that it would look bad if it became known that about a quarrel in the family. She is too late, however, Mrs. Glegg has already decided not to ask for the money back right now. Mrs. Glegg is too late because Mr. Tulliver already decided to borrow it from someone else, who happens to be client of Mr. Wakem's, the lawyer who is his enemy.

Book 1: Chapter 13 Analysis

These matters loom so large in this family, yet we as readers know that they are trivial. However they are what fill the vacuous lives of these self-absorbed characters.

Book 2: Chapter 1

Book 2: Chapter 1 Summary

Poor Tom is not having a good time. He is Reverend Stelling's only student, and his lessons consist of Latin grammar and Euclid, which he not only doesn't like but doesn't understand.. We find that Mr. Stelling is offering to take students because he and his wife live beyond their means. He is particularly severe with Tom because he needs to establish his reputation as a teacher.

Mr. Tulliver is well pleased with himself because of what he is doing for his son. He wants Tom to become a match for the lawyers because he often has no idea what they are talking about even though he frequently uses their services to take someone to court.. Mrs. Tulliver is happy because she is convinced that Mrs. Stelling sees the important matters of food and clothing for Tom in the same way that she does.

Before long, however, Maggie goes to visit her brother while Maggie assures Tom that she'll help him with his studies. She goes with him to the study and is delighted with all the wonderful books. She is there only a fortnight but picks up much of the Latin and geometry quickly, much more quickly than Tom has. Even so, Mr. Stelling tells her that girls can pick up a little bit of everything, but it's superficial, and they can't "go far into anything." They're quick and shallow is his assessment. Maggie is horrified and depressed at his attitude. Even so, Tom did learn better while Maggie was there, and he misses her when she goes home. At last the half-year is over, and he is delighted to be at home again.

Book 2: Chapter 1 Analysis

This book was published in 1860, a period when opportunities for women were extremely limited. Eliot was a very successful author and writer and became comfortably wealthy from her writing. In creating Maggie, she is, no doubt, expressing her frustration at the limited opportunities available to women, another example that supports the view that this is an early feminist protest. The education that Tom got was wasted on him. If Maggie had had this advantage, she would have flourished.

Book 2: Chapter 2

Book 2: Chapter 2 Summary

Christmas is a special celebration in the Tulliver home with many traditions that involve the children. However, Mr. Tulliver is in a black frame of mind because he has a new neighbor, Pivart, whose lands are above the mill and is going to use the water from the Floss to irrigate his land. Mr. Tulliver believes that this infringes on his rights and is convinced that Wakem has something to do with it. He is planning to sue. We find in this chapter that Philip Wakem, the son of the lawyer, will be attending Sterling, the Reverend Stelling's school, as Tom's classmate. Mr. Tulliver feels vindicated now in his choice of a school for Tom because, whatever else he thinks of Wakem, he respects his good judgment.

Book 2: Chapter 2 Analysis

Irony of ironies-Tulliver needs the confirmation of his enemy that he has made a good choice for Tom's education. It becomes even more ironic when it becomes apparent that the education he receives contributes nothing to his eventual success. Tulliver, in his ignorance, is unable to understand that what Tom requires to accomplish what his father wants him to has no relationship to the education he is going to get from Mr. Stelling. Yet to the end of his days, Tulliver is proud of the advantages he has given his son.

Book 2: Chapter 3

Book 2: Chapter 3 Summary

Tom is back at school now, and he meets Philip Wakem, a hunchback caused by an injury early in his life. Philip is interested in drawing, and Tom is curious about this. Drawing is a skill that Tom has no acquaintance with. He's curious about why Philip is here and reveals his own ignorance rather quickly because Philip has already learned many of the things that Stelling is teaching Tom. However, Philip hides his amusement and offers to help him. Philip tells him stories about the ancient Greeks, and Tom likes this. Tom is not quite fourteen and Philip is already fifteen.

Book 2: Chapter 3 Analysis

Tom's relationships with boys in the past have involved frequent fights. He must make adjustments and accommodations in this relationship with Philip, and he must accept that Philip, although deformed, has many accomplishments that are beyond his own capabilities. He has a natural repugnance to Philip because he is deformed, which says a lot about this character. He is narrow-minded, arrogant, and not overly bright. Unfortunately, this is the person on whom Maggie depends for love and acceptance, and he continually fails her.

Book 2: Chapter 4

Book 2: Chapter 4 Summary

Tom is not entirely won over by Philip; he still remembers that he is the son of a rascal. He enjoys Philip's stories, however, and appreciates the help he gives with his lessons. Tom is now studying drawing, but he is disgusted because he is not drawing figures but "brooks and rustic bridges and ruins." Mr. Tulliver is not entirely satisfied with what Tom is studying, and suggests that it would be a good thing for him to learn skills that would enable him to become a draftsman.

Mr. Poulter, the village schoolmaster who has also been a soldier, is employed to teach Tom drills. He asks his instructor to please bring his sword and do a sword exercise. Tom is excited and goes to summon Philip, who is offended at the interruption, and they quarrel. Tom goes a little too far and calls Philip's father a rogue. He goes back to Mr. Poulter and persuades him to loan him the sword for a few days. Mr. Poulter is reluctant; he is afraid he will hurt himself or someone else, but Tom bribes him with a crown-piece and promises to be careful.

Book 2: Chapter 4 Analysis

This is about the only instruction that has interested Tom since he has been studying with Mr. Stelling. It is, again, revealing this character. The excitement and drama of the military is much more to his liking than the knowledge that comes from books.

Book 2: Chapter 5

Book 2: Chapter 5 Summary

Maggie comes to visit again and is curious about Philip. She has a soft spot for deformed things, so she is ready to be kind to him. Tom tells her about the quarrel with Philip. When he can stand it no longer, he takes Maggie to his room to show her the sword. He makes her close her eyes, gets the sword out of the closet, and strikes a pose before he allows her to look. She is frightened when he draws the sword. In trying to go through the drill, he swings it downward and slashes his foot. Maggie screams, Tom faints, and Mr. Stelling comes running.

Book 2: Chapter 5 Analysis

Mary Ann had an older brother, Isaac, who was the favorite of her father. He taught him his own business and gave him responsibilities for parts of it when the boy was still an adolescent. Perhaps Mary Ann is writing about her own desires to be the favorite of her father in this novel. There is some similarity between the real Isaac and Mary Ann and the Tom and Maggie of our story in that she is interested in books, he in more active pursuits that don't involve book learning.

Book 2: Chapter 6

Book 2: Chapter 6 Summary

Philip follows the doctor out, makes certain that Tom is not going to be made lame, and then goes back to reassure him. Tom asks him to come and sit with him while he heals and tell him and Maggie stories. Maggie and Philip become very close. Philip tells her he is very fond of her and will think of her after she goes home. Mr. Tulliver warns them not to become too fond of or too close to Philip because of who his father is, and Tom takes that warning to heart.

Book 2: Chapter 6 Analysis

Philip is much more compassionate toward Tom than Tom is toward Philip, who is concerned that Tom not be lame as the result of his foolhardiness. Philip is willing to treat Philip decently when he has something he wants, echoing the lessons he has learned from his self-serving aunts. The fondness of Maggie and Philip on this visit foreshadows the role they will play in each other's lives later.

Book 2: Chapter 7

Book 2: Chapter 7 Summary

Tom continues on at King's Lorton, where Mr. Stelling's school is located, for a full five half-years, and Maggie goes to a girls' school with her cousin Lucy. Tom is sixteen now and tall and no longer awkward. Any friendship between Philip and either Maggie or Tom is not possible with the lawsuit going on between Mr. Tulliver and Pivart, who is represented by Philip's father. Maggie, at 13, has grown tall also and now wears her hair braided and coiled.

The children are called home because their father lost the lawsuit. Maggie goes to King's Lorton to give Tom the bad news and to tell him that they will lose everything-the mill, the land, everything. Then she gives him the worst news-their father has fallen off his horse and seems to recognize no-one except Maggie.. They go home.

Book 2: Chapter 7 Analysis

There have been an abundance of clues that Mr. Tulliver is going to come to disaster. He is rash in judgment and his eagerness to sue for every imagined slight just sets him up for it. The author's father, Robert, kept a voluminous diary of everything that went on in his life, particularly in his business. There are several records of lawsuits. He was a successful businessman and did not accept such things as non-payment of debts without suing, so Eliot writes from experience here.

Book 3: Chapter 1

Book 3: Chapter 1 Summary

Now we get the story of Mr. Tulliver's accident. He had received word that his mortgage was already owned by Mr. Wakem. He had been on his horse when he got the message, had fainted and fallen off. He asked for Maggie, so she had come home and then had gone to get Tom as recorded in Book 2: Chapter 7. When he gets home he vows to make Wakem pay.

Book 3: Chapter 1 Analysis

Eliot's father appears to have been a healthy and robust man. In the diary of his sixtieth year, he was still doing the work of several men. She had lived with him and looked after his household from the time her mother died until his death in 1849. He was dependent on his daughter in his later years, and, remembering that the book was published in 1860, it's reasonable to suppose that she may have been drawing on her experience with her father for this part of the book.

Book 3: Chapter 2

Book 3: Chapter 2 Summary

The bailiff, who is going to sell all their belongings, is already there when Tom and Maggie get home. They find their mother in the room where she keeps her special linens and household items. The aunts are coming to buy some of the things to keep them in the family. Mrs. Tulliver is distraught and laments that she had tried to tell him not to sue people. The children go to their father's room and cry together.

Book 3: Chapter 2 Analysis

The point of view of this novel is Maggie's and is third person omniscient. This is necessary because we must know what's going on in her mind and what she's feeling in order to understand the message of the book-that denial of love and acceptance is painful.

Book 3: Chapter 3

Book 3: Chapter 3 Summary

The aunts arrive, Mrs. Deane ostentatiously in her new carriage. Then the Gleggs and the Pullets arrive. They show little sympathy for their sister's plight, telling her that she just must reconcile herself to reality. Mrs. Tulliver had been hoping they might be willing to buy the nice things she made for her future home when she was a girl, especially those things that have the family name on them. The Dodson family is not going to put itself out to help her. They want Maggie and Tom in the room to hear what they have to say. They scorn Tom's education and tell Maggie that she won't have servants now; she'll have to work. They very unkindly point out that Bessy has disgraced the family by marrying a man that brought her to beggary.

Tom confronts her and suggests that if she is going to leave money to him and Maggie, she should give it now when the family needs it. Mr. Glegg reminds him that his aunt would lose the interest on the money, but Tom says he would work and pay that. They are not interested in helping and refuse to put themselves out.

Maggie says, "Why do you come, then, talking and interfering with us and scolding us, if you don't mean to do anything to help my dear mother-your own sister-if you've no feeling for her when she's in trouble?" Mrs. Moss comes and offers the $300 they owe although it will ruin them. The Dodsons feel that Mrs. Moss should pay it even if it does ruin her and her family, but Tom speaks up and says his father didn't want them to pay the money.

Mr. Glegg's ears perk up. He says that unless the note is destroyed, the Mosses will lose everything in the bankruptcy anyway - they look for the note.

Book 3: Chapter 3 Analysis

The statement this book makes about the morality of the middle class is harsh. These are extremely unattractive, unsympathetic characters. There is little to redeem them. Their smug self-righteousness and cruel lack of sympathy only adds to the misery that Maggie experiences in her deprivation of kindness and affirmation.

Book 3: Chapter 4

Book 3: Chapter 4 Summary

They are looking for the note in Mr. Tulliver's room when he awakens and seems lucid. He tells Tom that he doesn't want to take the money from the Mosses and that he is to make Wakem pay.

He also tells Tom that he will need to take care of his mother and sister and that Luke had put $50 into the business that must be paid back. He says that the note they are looking for is in a box. He becomes angry thinking about what has happened and lapses again into a coma.

Book 3: Chapter 4 Analysis

Eliot's skill in drawing memorable characters is evident in this story. Tulliver has been shown to be an energetic, hard-working man who has had some business success but whose emotions are not well under control. He feels that he is being taken advantage of and he tries to right the wrongs by suing all too often. At the same time, his emotions are easily touched by the needs of his sister's impoverished family, which makes him more attractive to the reader. Now we find that he wants to make certain that justice is done regarding his employee, Luke. These are many of the characteristics that are passed on to Tom, who wants to do the right thing. Ironically, Tom fails to show the concern for his sister that his father showed him.

Book 3: Chapter 5

Book 3: Chapter 5 Summary

Tom goes to visit his Uncle Deane the following morning and vows that he will find a way to buy the mill and land back. His uncle tells him that his education will not do him any good. Tom says he wants to do what Mr. Deane has done, start at the bottom and work his way up. Mr. Deane says he needs to know something about bookkeeping and reminds him that he is only sixteen and has had no preparation to earn his living at anything. He doesn't promise that he will do anything for him, but he doesn't tell him that he won't. Tom is disappointed that his uncle has no confidence in him.

He tells Maggie about the interview, and she wishes she could teach him bookkeeping, that doesn't help his spirits at all. He complains that she always sets herself up above him and everyone else. She says he is always so harsh with her. She is also hurt and dejected.

Book 3: Chapter 5 Analysis

We have come to not expect support from the Dodson family, so Mr. Deane's insensitive treatment of Tom is not surprising. He has succeeded; why wouldn't he want to help a young man like Tom, his own relative, also succeed? Again, this is a statement about middle-class morality that is so repugnant to this writer.

Maggie only wants to help, but Tom is defensive about the one area where she is superior to him-book learning. She is feeling the instability that her father's downfall has brought on just as much as Tom is, but she is denied any opportunity to help solve the problems.

Book 3: Chapter 6

Book 3: Chapter 6 Summary

It takes two days to sell all of the furniture; meanwhile, Mr. Tulliver is not better, and they decide that they should keep him there even during the sale rather than risk moving him. After the sale, Bob Jakin, Tom's old friend, shows up. As he and Tom converse, Maggie comes in. Only now does she realize that even the books are gone. Bob has come to offer ten sovereigns he was given for putting a fire out at a mill. He has decided to become a packman, a door-to-door salesman, and assures Tom that he can spare the sovereigns; he knows they're going through bad times. Maggie and Tom assure him that they appreciate his kindness, but they cannot take them. Maggie tells him that if they ever need help, they'll know they can depend on him and will come to him.

Book 3: Chapter 6 Analysis

Eliot includes several second-level characters in this story that are admirable and sympathetic and provide a contrast to the narrow-minded middle-class people who make up the society of St. Ogg's. Bob Jakin is one. We like and admire him. Later, we will see that the Rector of the church is also admirable and likeable and rises above the pettiness of the citizens of the town.

Book 3: Chapter 7

Book 3: Chapter 7 Summary

Mr. Tulliver is improving; Mr. Deane has brought Lucy home so she can comfort Maggie, and he has found Tom a job in the warehouse. There is bad news, though. Mr. Tulliver is, in fact, bankrupt, which means that he is unable to pay his creditors. This shame is the most difficult thing for Tom and the family to bear.

Mrs. Tulliver, who has already been pictured as not being overly bright, decides to help by going to Wakem to try to persuade him not to buy the mill but to let Mr. Deane's company, Guest & Co., buy it and allow Mr. Tulliver run it. She feels that if she reminds him that they knew each other when they were young and that if she uses the influence of her family name, he will help out in this way. In fact, Mr. Wakem had not intended to buy the mill until she came to him and raised the possibility in his mind that he can own it and force Mr. Tulliver to work for him. Mr. Tulliver is not as significant to Mr. Wakem as Mr. Wakem is to Mr. Tulliver; even so, he has been a thorn in his side, and he doesn't hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity to take revenge.

Book 3: Chapter 7 Analysis

In this period of time, women did not interfere in men's business, and Mrs. Tulliver's well-intentioned attempt to use the influence of her family is extremely ill-advised. The fact that she has grown up feeling that her family is important and should have influence has damaged her judgment, which we have already seen is not too acute at best. She is making a bad situation much worse by her interference. She has only brought on one more disaster. We will see later that Lucy also tries personal intervention to sway the Wakems, but she is successful. In her case, she understands the dynamics much better.

Book 3: Chapter 8

Book 3: Chapter 8 Summary

Mr. Tulliver is ready to come downstairs at last. Mr. Wakem offers to let him run the mill and continue to live in the house. The Dodsons, of course, feel that this is the best course. Mr. Tulliver could continue to provide for his family, and they would not need to put themselves out to help them. They feel no need to be concerned for Tulliver's humiliation.

The house has only the very basic furniture now that everything has been sold, so Mr. Tulliver is shocked when he comes downstairs; but finding that he is bankrupt is an even greater shock. Tom tells him that he will work and pay everyone back. Bessy tells him that Wakem owns everything but that he has offered him the opportunity to run the mill for a wage and the privilege of continuing to live in the house. He agrees to do it and goes back upstairs a broken man.

Book 3: Chapter 8 Analysis

In a strange way, Tulliver's investment in Tom is paying off. He has someone he can lean on now. However, the investment that is of value here is not the "education" he has bought, but his own value system that calls for using one's own resources to enforce convictions regarding what is right. The bankruptcy not only leaves the family destitute, it makes them somehow morally suspect, and Tom is committed to fixing that.

Book 3: Chapter 9

Book 3: Chapter 9 Summary

Tulliver runs the mill, but he resents working for Wakem. One evening, he has Tom come into the parlor and orders him to write in the family Bible that Edward Tulliver took service under John Wakem, the man who helped ruin him, because he promised his wife and he wanted to die in the place where he was born and his father was born, but that he doesn't forgive Wakem; he will serve him honestly, but he wishes evil may befall him.

Book 3: Chapter 9 Analysis

While he can't take vengeance on Wakem and get back at him for putting him in the position he is in, he can vent it by putting it in the Bible. After all, if it's in the Bible, it's written in stone and will come about.

Book 4: Chapter 1

Book 4: Chapter 1 Summary

which even calamity does not elevate." "Here," she writes, "one has conventional worldly notions and habits without instruction and without polish." She calls it proud respectability without being fashionable. "Worldliness without side-dishes," she calls it.

She considers their concept of the Unseen as more pagan than Christian. Hereditary custom seems to rule, and it creates a stifling environment. She calls the families "these emmet-like [ant-like] Dodsons and Tullivers." As to responsibility to family, the right thing is to correct them severely if they are an embarrassment. Self-centered, self-serving, and egotistical, their lives are lived to protect and serve their own self-interests.

Book 4: Chapter 1 Analysis

Eliot takes time out from the story to make clear what her feelings are about communities like St. Ogg's. She does not like them, and her reasons are specific. They are stupidly proud and ignorantly cruel. They are so driven by conventions that their minds no longer function to process the facts they're making decisions about. When one of the sisters is crying for the death of a friend, she is scorned; that kind of emotion is reserved for family, the other sister tells her. However, they don't even seem to have normal emotional attachments to their own family. This is a story about love, and Eliot gives us these examples to drive her point home. The Apostle Paul says it best in I Corinthians 13: Love suffers long, is kind, does not make a show of itself. The people described in this chapter are proud of their Christianity, but they fall far short when it comes to practicing it.

Book 4: Chapter 2

Book 4: Chapter 2 Summary

While Tom is working hard at his job and becoming more grown-up under his new responsibilities, Maggie is bored and has very little going on in her life. Mrs. Tulliver is numbed by living without things and without servants, but she does the housework and will not permit Maggie to do any of the menial work. Mr. Tulliver is no longer his jovial, gregarious self. He hurries home from work at the end of the day. They all feel heavily burdened by the debt. Although Mr. Tulliver still has tender feelings toward Maggie, he does not express them, so she no longer has the feedback from father and brother that has made her life meaningful in the past. They have few visitors, even from the family.

Book 4: Chapter 2 Analysis

Maggie is suffering, and no one is paying attention. Her desire for love and affirmation has never been more acute, and even the minimal reinforcement she has had from her father and Tom are gone. As readers, we wonder why her mother did not find ways to allow her to participate in keeping the family going. In a day when the only worthwhile thing a young woman can do is marry and have a family, there is nothing for her at this time. She can only marry if her social status is secure, and she has lost even that with her father's disastrous failure.

Book 4: Chapter 3

Book 4: Chapter 3 Summary

Bob Jakin comes by one day to bring Maggie some books. He suggests that she get a dog like his dog "Mumps." He would give her "Mumps" except that he can't do that because the dog's heart would be broken to go away from him. Bob is working as a peddler now, and his visit and generosity brighten her day and her mood. Up to now, the only books remaining in the house are Tom's school books, so she has been studying Latin and Euclid. One of the books that Bob has brought is a religious one by Thomas À Kempis, and she begins to read it and be swayed by its recommendations of a life of self-denial; and her previously sad, frustrated demeanor becomes one of resignation.

Book 4: Chapter 3 Analysis

One person cares-the one we already know truly cares about Tom and Maggie. He knows she is suffering, if no one else does. He puts some thought into the contribution he makes to her welfare-he brings books. He has paid attention to her needs. He again provides a sharp contrast to the other characters in the story. He is the real thing. He is genuinely caring and loving. Others may be presented as being more intelligent, but he is the one who figures out what needs to be done.

Unfortunately, while the Kempis book helps her find a solution to her misery and unhappiness, it is not the healthiest one for her at this time. Its emphasis on poverty, chastity, obedience, simplicity, humility, and devotion give her one way out of her mental state, but it is no more wholesome than the one it displaced.

Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) attended the "Mrs. Wallington School at Nuneaton," a boarding school, where she was taught a way of life and belief very much like the one proposed by Kempis. She was a very religious person until she got out into the world and became acquainted with more freethinking and radical scholars. In 1842, she told her father that she could no longer go to church, which made him furious. The compromise they reached was that she would show up at church respectably but would continue to think on her own.

Book 5: Chapter 1

Book 5: Chapter 1 Summary

Maggie is doing needlework one day when she sees Mr. Wakem coming to go over the books with her father. He is accompanied by Philip, so she goes upstairs to avoid being there when they arrive. It's not that she wouldn't like to see Philip; it's just that she doesn't want to be present for the possibly unpleasant exchange between the fathers.

Maggie takes daily walks in the Red Deeps, her favorite spot. On one of these walks, she encounters Philip, who has made it a point to come and meet her. He has been observing her habits and has arranged his walk to coincide with hers. Both say they have thought of the other often since their time together at the school. Philip takes drawings of Maggie from a case he is carrying. He tells her that she is even more beautiful now than she was when he drew the portraits. Both wish they could be friends but accept that there are obstacles. She tells him how she is dealing with her unhappiness by living an ascetic life.

They express their need for each other, and he gives her a book he has brought for her. Philip promises to continue to come until he catches her there in the woods again.

Book 5: Chapter 1 Analysis

Philip, who is physically deformed, is admirable mentally, emotionally, and morally. He provides a contrast to Tom, who is so proud of his own physical attributes. Philip is able to truly care about Maggie and be concerned about her needs. He gives her the confirmation that she needs.

Book 5: Chapter 2

Book 5: Chapter 2 Summary

Both Tom and his father are putting everything they can scrape together in a savings box toward the payment of all the debt, and Tom is working hard and doing well at his job.

One day, Bob Jakin, who is keeping in touch and keeping an eye on Maggie and Tom, offers Tom an opportunity to buy some goods and ship them to another market for a profit. Tom needs some money to buy the goods, but it is so painful for his father to dip into their savings that he goes to his Uncle Glegg and asks him to venture twenty pounds at five percent. While there, Bob goes to work on Aunt Glegg and demonstrates his sales skill by masterfully manipulating her to buy some goods from him but also to invest in Tom's venture. The venture pays off, and Tom continues to work with Bob until he has 150 pounds and intends to pay off the entire debt by the end of the following year.

Book 5: Chapter 2 Analysis

Bob Jakin is an interesting character. He is pivotal in this story in so many ways. In the first place, he is smarter than anyone else even though his social standing and education are minimal. He functions confidently within a value system that is real and right without regard to what everyone else is doing, saying, or thinking. He provides an extraordinary contrast to the major characters. He shows them for what they are. Tom values the wrong things. The sisters refuse to help out of their abundance; Bob helps out of his meager resources. He constantly steps in out of the purest of motives to help these two people he loves and without expectation of reward.

Book 5: Chapter 3

Book 5: Chapter 3 Summary

The visit with Philip has brought a ray of sunshine into Maggie's sad life, but she feels that they shouldn't meet clandestinely. However, Philip persuades her to continue meeting him and letting him bring her books. She still thinks of him in brotherly terms, but he is in love with her.

Book 5: Chapter 3 Analysis

This will be the best time in Maggie's short life. It will be the only time when she will have the love she seeks and needs. She and Philip truly love each other. If they had married at this time, the outcome of the story would be very different. Her brother, who is supposed to love and care for her, stands in the way. Today, she would have told him she was going to live her own life and would have made the only good choice for herself, but in the Victorian era, this was not possible. With Stephen, later, she will again have her own needs thwarted by the conventions of a narrow-minded, vicious community that does not include in its value system the happiness and fulfillment of individuals.

Book 5: Chapter 4

Book 5: Chapter 4 Summary

Philip and Maggie have been meeting in the woods for a year now. Maggie brings a book back to Philip only partly finished because she didn't want to read about a pretty blonde girl and all her admirers. In a deliberate foreshadowing, Eliot has Philip tell Maggie that the day will come when she will carry away all the love of all the young men of St. Ogg from Lucy. "She is sure to have some handsome young man of St. Ogg's at her feet now," he assures her. He tells Maggie that she would overshadow her fair little cousin. Then he declares his love for her. She doesn't know how to respond. This is new territory for her. She tells him that she couldn't do anything that would hurt her father, and that his own father might not approve either. She kisses him, and she goes home with the awareness that a new era has begun for her.

Book 5: Chapter 4 Analysis

This relationship that began when they were children and was based on their mutual need and interests has blossomed as they have become young adults. It's appropriate that they should now plan a future together, but alas, it is not to be.

Book 5: Chapter 5

Book 5: Chapter 5 Summary

Aunt Glegg comes to tea on a Sunday. Maggie is wearing her aunts' hand-me-downs, but Mrs. Glegg is surprised at how pretty she has become. She never thought she would be so good-looking, she says, in her usual deprecating manner. She is gossiping about the young people who were at church that day and mentions Philip. Maggie's blush gives her away to her observant brother, who is horrified that his sister might be involved with a deformed man, especially the son of her family's enemy.

Later, he sees Philip heading for the Deeps and goes home to find Maggie coming out the front door. He confronts her and wants to know how long she has been seeing Philip. She tells Tom that she and Philip have confessed their love for each other. He forces her to agree not to meet him again, and she agrees but only on the condition that she can see him one more time to tell him.

Tom has the money now to pay off all the debts, and he is indignant that while he has been working so hard for the honor of the family, she has been consorting with the son of the enemy. He insists on going with her to meet Philip, and he is obnoxiously insulting about Philip's deformity. Philip tells them both that he would not do anything that would harm her, but that he feels she needs a friend for life who would cherish her, "who would do her more justice than a coarse and narrow-minded brother."

Maggie agrees to give Philip up not because Tom has demanded it but out of concern and love for her father. She is devastated but at the same time relieved to let go of the secret.

Book 5: Chapter 5 Analysis

Lest there be any doubts about whether anyone in her family is concerned for her welfare, those doubts are cleared up here. Tom knows what is important, and Maggie's needs are not included. It's admirable, of course, that he has worked to redeem his father's name and for the right reasons, but he is not entitled to deny his sister the one opportunity she has for happiness. His bigoted attitude toward Philip's deformity reveals him for what he is-as Philip points out, coarse and narrow-minded.

Book 5: Chapter 6

Book 5: Chapter 6 Summary

It's springtime, and Tom has the money to pay off the debts. He comes home to bring the good news to his father, who has been unaware of his business successes. He wants his father to hand it over. Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, Tom, and Maggie celebrate with some brandy Mrs. Tulliver has hidden away.

Book 5: Chapter 6 Analysis

The family members can now hold their heads up in the community, which is all-important, particularly to Tom and his father. We get no feeling that it is so meaningful to Maggie.

Book 5: Chapter 7

Book 5: Chapter 7 Summary

The victory dinner is held, and Mr. Tulliver makes a speech about his own honest principles; in typical fashion, he condemns the rascals who robbed him of his livelihood. Mr. Deane also speaks briefly and praises Tom for his general character and conduct. Tom speaks briefly and is roundly applauded, so his father feels entitled to tell everyone about the money he spent on his son's education.

Mr. Tulliver gets on his horse and is on his way home when he meets Mr. Wakem. He angrily tells him that he is quitting his job and forces Wakem's horse to unseat him. Mr. Tulliver gets off of his horse and is going to attack Wakem physically, but Maggie has come out of the house and restrains him. Wakem leaves; Mr. Tulliver is led into the house by his daughter, and he takes to his bed. The next morning, he has given up and calls all of them in. He tells Tom to try and get the mill back, to compensate his mother for the grief he has caused her, and to take care of Maggie. He dies and Maggie and Tom console each other.

Book 5: Chapter 7 Analysis

There is some resolution in this chapter in that the conflicts between the Tullivers and the debt are concluded. The Tullivers are on their way back to respectability now, thanks to Tom's hard work and the sacrifices all have made. But Tulliver ends his life as he has lived it, continuing to mess up because of his intractable ego. If he had ever learned to settle his differences in ways other than the vengeful ones he has chosen, his life and that of his family would have been very different. To some extent, the aunts are justified in their disgust with him. He was an unsuitable husband for their sister.

Book 6: Chapter 1

Book 6: Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter, we are reacquainted with Lucy, Maggie's cousin. She is being courted by the son of the main partner of Guest and Company (her father's employer), Stephen Guest. He is wealthy, attractive, and has leisure time to spend with Lucy. Their banter lets us know that she suits him because she has not too much of any of the qualities he desires in a woman-prettiness, thoughtfulness, or gentleness. She tells him that Maggie is coming to visit and she wants him to meet her.

We also learn from their conversation that Tom is moving up in the company because of the way he has performed and that Mrs. Tulliver is now the housekeeper in the Deane house.

Book 6: Chapter 1 Analysis

Maggie and Lucy have always had a good relationship-a loving one-in spite of the obstacles thrown in front of it by the family. Lucy has always been a bit too perfect in contrast to Maggie's "imperfections." Even so, the girls have risen above it and treasure their relationship with each other. In a way, Maggie has received the acceptance from her cousin that she has so craved from her brother and her father. It's also interesting that Lucy, the next generation of the Dodsons, is so unlike them. Perhaps Eliot is saying that there is hope that some of the characteristics that are so destructive in the society of that period will pass away-that things will change, that there is hope.

Book 6: Chapter 2

Book 6: Chapter 2 Summary

Lucy tells Maggie that she and Stephen are not engaged because she is not ready to think of getting married yet. Maggie's clothes are old and shabby as compared to Lucy's, but Maggie is spending what money she has on lessons rather than on clothes so she can improve her chances of a better situation. She has been teaching in a girls' school. Philip is a friend of Lucy's and will be coming to visit while Maggie is there.

Stephen meets Maggie and is captivated with her. Lucy is involved in an upcoming bazaar, and Maggie reveals that she has had to sew to make money, which embarrasses Lucy. However, to Stephen, it adds to Maggie's attractiveness.

Lucy and Aunt Pullet go to work on a suitable wardrobe for Maggie.

Book 6: Chapter 2 Analysis

Maggie is thrust into a world she is not prepared for. The matter of the wardrobe signals this. The only contact she has had with young men has been with Philip. She doesn't know the rules of the game. She doesn't know what to expect or what is expected of her. And she doesn't fit in. She is accepted because she is pretty and because she is Lucy's cousin, but even her prettiness will complicate things for her.

Book 6: Chapter 3

Book 6: Chapter 3 Summary

Maggie has trouble sleeping that night, thinking of the way Stephen looks at her. Lucy tells her that Philip will be coming with Stephen the next day, and Maggie tells her that she can't see him unless Tom agrees to it, and she tells Lucy the whole story.

Book 6: Chapter 3 Analysis

She has never had a man look at her in this way before, and her reaction is to be expected. He is the utmost of desirability as a possible mate for life, and he is attracted to her. We know him to be a rather superficial young man already because of his reasons for choosing Lucy for a wife. However, we will come to see that his attraction to Maggie is real, and he is changed by it. She would be very good for him. His life would consist of more than drawing-room entertainment if she were in it.

Book 6: Chapter 4

Book 6: Chapter 4 Summary

Tom is rooming in Bob Jakin's house. Bob is married now and is doing well in business. Maggie goes to Tom's room and asks him to absolve her from her promise regarding Philip. She wants to see him. She assures him that there will never be anything secret between them again. She tells him that she will not see him alone but only with Lucy and others. He tells her that if she has a love relationship with Philip, he will never see her again.

In another foreshadowing, Tom says, "I have no confidence in you, Maggie. You would be led away to do anything."

He reminds her that he had wanted her to live with her Aunt Pullet until he could provide for her until she was married but that she will not submit to be guided. She tells him that he doesn't understand how different she is from him. She says she will only see Philip as a friend because she does not want to lose her brother. He agrees that she can see Philip.

Book 6: Chapter 4 Analysis

This discussion between Tom and Maggie demonstrates how the Victorian lifestyle constrains women and again signals that Eliot intends to make a feminist statement. She is displaying the inequality that exists for women and the effects it has on their lives. What about Maggie's happiness? It is not a consideration as far as her narrow-minded, bigoted brother is concerned.

Book 6: Chapter 5

Book 6: Chapter 5 Summary

Tom is twenty-three now, and he has quit himself so well at Guest and Company that he is being offered a share in the business. Tom thanks his Uncle Deane but asks him instead to buy the mill and let him run it and live in the old home place. Deane agrees to look into it.

Book 6: Chapter 5 Analysis

Tom is on his way. Even though his education has been of little use to him, the qualities his father taught him have served him well. He's still very young, so we don't know whether he will also go the way of his father in handling his affairs. We do know that he is stubborn and inflexible.

Book 6: Chapter 6

Book 6: Chapter 6 Summary

At 19, Maggie is cutting quite a swath in her first introduction to the higher society of St. Ogg. She is enjoying the good life-getting up in the morning when she wants and having no one pointing out all her deficiencies. She can play the piano at her leisure, and she is getting much attention from the young men. Philip had not come as expected-he had gone on a trip to the coast. She and Stephen hit it off, and Lucy does not notice that the attraction between them is so strong.

Lucy is out one evening working on the bazaar, leaving Maggie home alone. Stephen comes bringing some items for the bazaar. The meeting between the two is highly charged, with Maggie avoiding looking into his eyes. He persuades her to take his arm and go for a walk in the garden, but she abruptly leaves him and goes back into the house. He is preoccupied with thoughts of her and ponders what it would be like to have her.

Book 6: Chapter 6 Analysis

As readers, we can feel the growing intensity of feeling between these two characters, and we know that a crisis is building. Maggie is just confused. She has never had these feelings before because she has been so hidden away and protected. This is a different thing than her feelings for Philip, which were able to develop slowly from their friendship. It's exciting, and she doesn't know what to do about it. We would expect that Stephen, being older and more experienced, would rein it in, but he, too, is being driven by a passion that he did not expect.

Book 6: Chapter 7

Book 6: Chapter 7 Summary

Philip comes to visit, and Lucy leaves him alone with Maggie. She tells him that they can only be friends, and that she is going soon to a new situation because she can't bear to have her brother look after her. Philip accuses her of going back to the patterns of denial and renunciation he had helped her break away from before in the Deeps.

Lucy and Stephen come in, and the tension between Stephen and Maggie is so palpable that Philip is aware of it.

Mr. Deane reluctantly tells Lucy that the company is looking into buying the mill from Mr. Wakem so Tom can run it and move back home because he doesn't want the word to get out for fear it might jeopardize the deal. She says that she will not tell anyone but will ask Philip to persuade his father to sell it to Guest and Company.

Book 6: Chapter 7 Analysis

The attraction continues to build between Stephen and Maggie. Lucy does not notice it, but Philip does. He no doubt understands what is going on-that Maggie is not prepared to deal with such feelings.

Lucy's decision to ask Philip to persuade his father to sell the company reminds us of poor Mrs. Tulliver's disastrous attempts to persuade Wakem not to buy it. We have much more confidence that Lucy knows what she's doing here, but we're conditioned already for bad outcomes.

Book 6: Chapter 8

Book 6: Chapter 8 Summary

Philip discusses his feelings about Maggie with his father, which angers him. However, Philip tells him that she was never involved in the feud. His father answers, "What does that signify? We don't ask what a woman does-we ask whom she belongs to." He relents and when Philip asks him to sell the mill, he agrees, remembering how happy he had been with Philip's mother.

Book 6: Chapter 8 Analysis

Eliot keeps getting her feminist licks in. Wakem, successful lawyer, has the typical attitude about women even though he has had a happy marriage. Wakem comes off as a fairly sympathetic character because of his love for his deformed son.

Book 6: Chapter 9

Book 6: Chapter 9 Summary

Maggie helps out at the bazaar, and she is the belle of the ball. Everyone is paying attention and homage to her because she is so pretty. Her booth is sold out first because the men have been eager to buy from her. Lucy is not offended or jealous; besides, Stephen is devoting himself entirely to her. After the bazaar, Maggie tells Lucy that she is going to visit her Aunt Moss right away and that she will be going to a new situation shortly after that. Lucy's feelings are hurt, but she reminds Maggie that there is a dance tomorrow.

Book 6: Chapter 9 Analysis

As far as we can tell, Maggie is not affected by all the attention she gets, nor does Lucy feel threatened by it. Is Stephen feeling guilty and trying to make things right with Lucy or is he just putting on a show? We have no way of knowing at this time. The point of view in this story is omniscient only as far as Maggie's thoughts and feelings, so we must guess about the motives and feelings of the other characters by their actions and dialogue.

Book 6: Chapter 10

Book 6: Chapter 10 Summary

The dance is at the Guest mansion, and Stephen's sisters are the hostesses. Maggie is reluctant to dance because it has been so long since she has done so. Stephen has tried to find a way to ask her to dance, and when he finally does, he takes her to the conservatory instead. He impulsively kisses her arm over and over, which makes Maggie angry. She tells him to go away and never come near her again.

She and Philip meet briefly the next day and discuss their future. She tells him that the only reason she would not marry him would be Tom's feelings about it.

Book 6: Chapter 10 Analysis

In more modern times, what Stephen does might not seem so objectionable, but he is way over the line for his day. Even touching her would be considered an insult, and he gets carried away here. The fact that Maggie doesn't know how to dance is an indication of how much out of her element she is in this social realm.

Book 6: Chapter 11

Book 6: Chapter 11 Summary

Maggie is at her Aunt Moss's when Stephen comes to visit and asks her to forgive him, which she agrees to do. He kisses her and asks her to marry him, but she tells him it's impossible because of Lucy. He confronts her with their love for each other, but she responds that she cannot seek her own happiness by sacrificing that of others.

Book 6: Chapter 11 Analysis

It's important to remember that what has driven Maggie for her entire life is her need for love and acceptance. That it comes in a form that she cannot accept only adds to her misery. She is not made happier because she and Stephen have fallen madly in love with each other. It is one more case where her needs are unmet and only leads to unhappiness and frustration.

Book 6: Chapter 12

Book 6: Chapter 12 Summary

The sale of the mill to Guest and Company is final, and the family holds a celebration. Maggie is staying with her Aunt Pullet for a short time, so she is there when the party is held. The aunts don't approve of Maggie's plan to work for a living. Lucy tries to persuade Tom to accept a relationship between Maggie and Philip, but to no effect. He holds himself to be bound by his duty to his father's memory and could never accept a marriage between Maggie and Philip Wakem.

Book 6: Chapter 12 Analysis

The aunts find something to approve of at last in Tom's success, but they still disapprove of Maggie. They don't care whether she needs to work; they are only concerned about what people will say about their family. The benevolent Lucy is still trying to make things work for her cousin.

Book 6: Chapter 13

Book 6: Chapter 13 Summary

Maggie is staying at her aunt Glegg's, but she has dinner with her mother and Lucy at the Deanes' every day, so she sees Stephen regularly.

One day, Lucy has connived to make it possible for Maggie and Philip to go out in the boat together. However, Philip doesn't make it, but Stephen does. They ostensibly go for a boat ride, but they just keep on going, not entirely with Maggie's consent-more out of her inability to register what is going on around her. He plans for them to dock at Torby, but he decides that he will flag a ship going for Mudport and ask them to take them on board. Stephen has become convinced now that Maggie will be his. A bed is made for Maggie on a couch. Their absence will be a scandal now whether or not they decide to elope together.

Book 6: Chapter 13 Analysis

This is a disaster in Maggie's quest for love. She hasn't done anything wrong except to go along with Stephen's headlong rush to calamity. This is a situation where there is no going back to where things were before they left. The time they have already spent together will be a scandal in St. Ogg's and in the Dodson family. They can't fix it.

Book 6: Chapter 14

Book 6: Chapter 14 Summary

Stephen at length rolls himself up in a piece of tarp and lies down on the floor near Maggie and sleeps. Maggie wakes and is now in control of herself, and she knows that she must go home. She knows that she has already hurt Lucy and Philip, but she can't go through with an elopement. Stephen pleads but without success. She refuses to do what she knows is not right even though her return will be painful not only to her but to others. She leaves him and catches a coach to go home. She encounters many obstacles, and it takes her five days to get there.

Book 6: Chapter 14 Analysis

There seems no end to the difficulties. She hasn't just been gone overnight; she has been gone five days-plenty of time for the scandal to come to full blaze back home. She has tried to do what's right, and it will not come right for her. We already know that. This is not the climax of the action in this plot, but it is moving quickly toward it.

Book 7: Chapter 1

Book 7: Chapter 1 Summary

Tom is furious; he says that she has used Philip Wakem as a screen to deceive Lucy and has been carrying on a clandestine affair with Stephen. She tries to explain, but he will not listen. She wants to come home, but he will not have it, so her mother goes with her. Before they go, Tom gives his mother money and tells her she will always be welcome to come back home. They go to Bob Jakin's house and take up the rooms that Tom had occupied before he moved back to the mill. Bob had seen Maggie and Stephen disembark at Mudport and had come home and told Tom about it. She is the subject of gossip on the part of everyone in St. Ogg's, even "grooms and errand-boys."

Nevertheless, Bob takes them in without knowing the whole story. He can't believe that Stephen would have let her go-Bob, himself, has been in love with Maggie for most of his life. When her mother goes back to the mill to see about household matters for Tom, Bob comes in. He only asks whether she was ill-treated by anyone, and she assures him that she was not. She cares for the Jakins' new baby, and it comforts her, and Bob brings Mumps to stay with her to console her.

Book 7: Chapter 1 Analysis

Tom behaves according to type. We have no reason to expect that he will be concerned for Maggie's welfare. He has enough capital now in the community that his support might have been meaningful, but there's no question that he will rise above his petty assumptions and look after her now when she needs it the most.

It's ironic that the one person in the book who is honest, sincere, and caring, and who puts himself out for his friends is this lower-class peddler. There's no doubt that Eliot wrote Bob Jakin to show by contrast how mean-spirited, self-absorbed, greedy, and arrogant the upper-class inhabitants of St. Ogg's are. His behavior is exemplary, but he is not religious. He expresses Eliot's feelings about what is right and what is wrong in the world. Just as it's typical of Tom that he will behave badly, it's typical of Bob that he will react sensitively and sympathetically. He can rise above all the petty concerns of Tom and the community and see things as they actually are. If Maggie has been mistreated, he will make it right. If Maggie needs refuge, he will provide it. If Maggie needs comforting, he will use whatever means are at his disposal such as his baby and his dog to help meet that need.

Book 7: Chapter 2

Book 7: Chapter 2 Summary

If they had run away and gotten married, St. Ogg's would have forgiven them and taken them back. As it is, Maggie is an outcast. She has disgraced her family and herself. Even though Stephen has written a letter telling his father the facts, which letter was reported to the entire community, they prefer to treat her like a fallen woman.

She goes to see the Rector, Dr. Kenn, and tells him everything. His attitude is that the Church should be supportive of her. He tells her that her inexperience of the world prevents her from anticipating how unjust people can be. He tells her of Stephen's letter and how it vindicates her. He also tells her that Lucy has seen the letter. He says he would hope that the letter would prevent false impressions, but he knows better. She is in for a bad time. He suggests that she take a situation elsewhere.

She says first of all she will not go away just because people say false things about her. Besides, she has no heart right now to begin a strange life again. She just wants him to help her find work she can do here in St. Ogg's so she can make her own way.

Book 7: Chapter 2 Analysis

The Rector is yet one more character who stands out because of his genuineness and his rejection of the community narrow-mindedness. He serves an important function here because he not only feels a genuine desire to help Maggie; he is objective about what has happened to her and how the community has responded.

Book 7: Chapter 3

Book 7: Chapter 3 Summary

Mrs. Glegg wants Maggie to come and live with her because she feels that the family should stand by one of its own. She scolds Tom for not standing by his sister. She says Maggie can live with her, and she will defend her. Maggie turns the offer down and asks her mother to thank her aunt. The only person she can see right now, she says, is Dr. Kenn.

Her concern now is about Philip, and no one seems to know what is going on with him. His father is not talking. At last she gets a letter from him, in which he reveals that he had figured out that there was strong feeling between her and Stephen but that regardless of what others say, he has faith in her and that she has been a blessing to him, and he wants to help her if he can.

Book 7: Chapter 3 Analysis

Even in her willingness to support Maggie, Mrs. Glegg does it for typical reasons. It's a way to let the world know that the family is united and a way to protect the family's reputation since Maggie is not actually guilty of wrongdoing.

Philip is still Philip after everything. There is still hope that she can have a life with him except that her brother will stand in the way.

Book 7: Chapter 4

Book 7: Chapter 4 Summary

Dr. Kenn is unable to convince his parishioners of Maggie's innocence, and he is unable to find her employment, so he hires her as a governess for his own children. However, now the gossip is about Maggie and the good Rector. Lucy comes to see her secretly although her parents have forbidden it. Lucy understands and forgives. Maggie assures her that Stephen will come back eventually and marry her.

Book 7: Chapter 4 Analysis

Maggie has no intention of trying to pursue a life with Stephen for the same reasons that she deserted him and came home. Her conscience will not permit her to be unfaithful to those who have loved her.

Book 7: Chapter 5

Book 7: Chapter 5 Summary

The day after Lucy's visit, the weather changes, and the rains come. Dr. Kenn has been forced to let her go because of the gossip. Then she has a letter from Stephen begging her to change her mind. He tells her that he will never love anyone else.

The water is coming into her room now, and she wakes Bob and lights a candle for him. The boats crash into the house, and she and Bob try to free them and decide what to do, but before they can do anything, the boat she is in breaks loose and is driven out into the water. Once she gets her bearings, she takes the oars and resists the rapids to try to get to the mill to rescue Tom and her mother.

When she gets to her old home, the water has reached the upstairs window, and she calls out. Her mother has gone to her sister's house, but Tom is there and gets in the boat and takes the oars. She tells him they must go and see if Lucy is safe, and then they will try to help the rest. They cannot get out of the current, and a great pile of debris hits the boat, demolishing it, and Tom and Maggie are gone.

Book 7: Chapter 5 Analysis

This is the climax of the action. Maggie's struggle to find love and acceptance, which is introduced early in the story in the relationship between her and Tom, is over now. That struggle has come through one brief year when she finds that love in Philip only to have it dashed by her brother. The struggle reached fever-pitch in her relationship with Stephen where his love for her had to be denied because of its illegitimacy. She lost the battle. She lived a life of misery and deprivation because she was never able to find what she so longed for and sought. This is not a story with a happy ending. It's a sad story with a sad ending, but it has an important message. People should be supported in their search for love and acceptance, and superficial obstacles should not thwart that search. Love is the most important reason for living in a miserable and hostile world.

Book 7: Conclusion

Book 7: Conclusion Summary

Dorlcote Mill has been rebuilt, and Maggie and Tom, who had been found with their arms clasped around each other, are buried in a single grave in the churchyard next to their father. Both Stephen and Philip visit the grave and eventually Stephen visits it with Lucy. The tombstone reads: IN THEIR DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED.

Book 7: Conclusion Analysis

This is the denouement-the unraveling. That Maggie and Tom die in each other's arms simply signifies that their troubled relationship and Tom's thick-headed obstinacy led to the final disaster. If Maggie had been with Philip or even Stephen, she would not have died in the flood. That they were clasped in an embrace is symbolic of the struggle of Maggie's life.

Characters

Lucy Deane

Lucy, Maggie's cousin, is her opposite: as fair as Maggie is dark, well-behaved, quiet, and proper where Maggie is boisterous. The Dodson sisters all consider her to be the perfect little girl, but surprisingly, Maggie likes and admires her instead of hating her. She is not stupid, but neither is she notably intelligent. However, she is kindhearted, innocent, and sweet, never seeing evil in anyone. Even when Maggie and Stephen are obviously interested in each other, Lucy trusts that they are merely friends.

Mr. Deane

Mr. Deane is a shrewd businessman, who is proud of himself and scornful of frivolous learning, such as the Latin and geometry Tom studies; he believes in the value of hard work and useful skills such as bookkeeping. He began as a lowly worker and rose to his present position as a new partner in the firm of Guest and Company. He gives Tom a warehouse job and lends him money, which allows Tom to invest in a scheme that makes enough money for him to buy back the mill.

Mrs. Deane

Mrs. Deane is the third Dodson sister; she values propriety and appearances. Her character is not well defined, but she is respected by all because her husband, Mr. Deane, is a wealthy businessman. At first, her sisters thought she was marrying beneath her, but time has shown her to have been the most successful, at least in terms of marital prosperity.

Mr. Glegg

Mr. Glegg is a retired businessman who did well but who now spends most of his time working in his garden and trying to figure out the puzzling ways of women.

Mrs. Glegg

Of all the Dodson sisters, Mrs. Glegg is perhaps the most rigid and strict; she is obsessed with proper behavior and the way things look. She is the oldest and demands that the other sisters live up to her standards, which are impossible to meet and often senseless. She is the most interested in money of all the sisters and is not noted for her charity or understanding, but in the end she values her family over the opinions of other people. When Maggie is disgraced at the end of the book, Mrs. Glegg offers to take her in.

Luke

Mr. Guest is the main partner of Guest and Company, a wealthy trading firm. He has recently taken Mr. Deane on as a partner.

Stephen Guest

The son of a wealthy businessman, Stephen is good-looking, self-assured to the point of being somewhat cocky, and rather thoughtless. He is unofficially engaged to Lucy Deane, but that does not stop him from flirting with Maggie and, eventually, trying to run off with her. He does not seem to have much drive and ambition, and his main prospects in life derive from the fact that his father has already made a fortune, which he will inherit. Stephen falls in love with Maggie, but he is thoughtless and impetuous in his courting of her, not stopping to think about the consequences of running away or to consult with her before he takes her down the river. He is selfish but is somewhat redeemed by the fact that he is truly in love with Maggie; when she refuses him, he suffers intensely.

Bob Jakin

Bob Jakin has known Tom since childhood, when they occasionally played together. He grows up to be an amusing talker and canny trader who travels with a pack, selling items door to door. He is generous and kind and, unlike Tom who can carry a grudge forever, never forgets a kindness. He is often kind to others, offering to give Tom all his money, bringing books to Maggie, and setting Tom up with a lucky investment opportunity. After Maggie's disgrace, he and his wife take her in when Tom refuses to.

Dr. Kenn

Dr. Kenn is an Anglican clergyman. He believes that Maggie should marry Stephen after their disgraceful disappearance, but when he talks to her, he realizes the situation is too complex to fit simple rules of right and wrong. He shows kindness in taking her in but is overwhelmed when the tide of social opinion turns against him. In the end, he has to let her go from her post as governess to his children.

Mrs. Moss is Mr. Tulliver's sister. She is married to a poor farmer; they have eight children, and her kindness and warmth is shown by the fact that despite their poverty, she is still sad over the loss of her twins who died in infancy. She is honest and responsible, and when Mr. Tulliver comes to her asking her to pay back three hundred pounds he lent her, she does not become angry at him but resignedly says that her family will have to sell everything they have, but they will do it.

Mr. Moss

Mr. Moss is a poor farmer who lives with his large family in a decrepit hovel. He works hard but never seems to do well.

Mr. Pivart

Mr. Pivart moves into a farm upstream from Tulliver's mill and gets into a legal battle with Tulliver when Tulliver learns that Pivart will be using river water to irrigate his fields; Tulliver believes this infringes on his own right to use the water in his mill, but he loses the case.

Mr. Poulter

Mr. Poulter is Tom's drillmaster at school. He is fond of recounting war stories and impressing Tom with his military action. Foolishly, he lets Tom have his sword for a week in exchange for a small fee, and Tom wounds his foot with it.

Mr. Pullet

Mr. Pullet is a gentleman farmer who farms as a "hobby"; he is thin and is described mainly in terms of his memory for his wife's many prescriptions and his liking for lozenges.

Mrs. Pullet

Mrs. Pullet, one of the Dodson sisters, is Mrs. Tulliver's sister. Like her sisters, she is insistent on propriety and traditional codes of behavior. She is very careful of her personal belongings and also tends to be somewhat morbid and hypochondriacal.

Reverend Walter Stelling

Reverend Stelling is a clergyman who lives far above his means; he is ambitious but not very intelligent. He is unable to adapt his program of Latin and geometry to Tom's needs or to see that Tom, although not bright at these subjects, has other talents. He is shallow and not particularly spiritual despite his position.

Bessy Tulliver

Mrs. Tulliver, like her older sisters, values appearances, propriety, and tradition, but she is not very intelligent. She does not know what to do with Maggie, who is extremely smart and energetic and who does not fit the traditional expectations of female appearance or behavior.

Edward Tulliver

Mr. Tulliver, who is the fifth generation of his family to own Dorlcote Mill, is a hardheaded, stubborn man who remembers every slight and fiercely holds on to grudges. However, he is warm with his family. He is not very bright and has little insight into any character, including his own. He is continually becoming caught up in petty arguments that eventually escalate into lawsuits. He chose his wife because she was not very intelligent, and he is puzzled by Maggie because she is so smart and because she does not fit the traditional ideals of feminine appearance and behavior. He is not very close to his sister, Mrs. Moss, but occasionally he realizes how important family is and tries to be kind to her; this reminds him to tell Tom and Maggie to remain close and take care of each other.

Maggie Tulliver

Maggie is more like her father's family than her mother's. She is impetuous, warm, and highly intelligent, but she is also forgetful and impulsive. She has olive skin and untidy black hair, traits that upset her mother's family, and she is continually bothered by their obsession with her looks.

Unlike Tom, she is not sure of herself, and other people can easily make her feel bad about herself. When her father goes bankrupt, she is so ashamed that she turns to an ascetic life, where she can hide from the world that has been so cruel to her family. However, her sensitivity extends to other people's feelings as well. It leads her to become close to Philip Wakem, because she feels pity for his deformity. Philip, who is as interested in books and music as Maggie is, gets her interested in life again. She reenters the social world, where she meets Stephen Guest, and her urge to avoid hurting either Stephen or Philip by choosing between them leads her to make many mistakes.

Tom Tulliver

Maggie's older brother Tom is very much like his mother's family, the Dodsons. He is bossy and convinced that he always knows what's good for everyone else, traits he displays in childhood and continues throughout the book. He is not very concerned about other people's feelings as long as he's satisfied with himself, and if other people are hurt by his actions, he believes that's their fault for not adhering to the standards he has set. He is ambitious, but not very intelligent; although he studies geometry and Latin, he does not retain them and is more interested in "cutting a fine figure" in front of other people than in learning. He has a very high opinion of himself but does not stop to think how he will impress other people without skills or knowledge, so when he goes to get a job, he is surprised that he is suitable only for the most menial labor.

Like his father, Tom is stubborn and unyielding, and the more other people argue with him, the more tenaciously he clings to his own opinion. He never lets go of a grudge, is not forgiving, and does not comprehend what love or kindness is. When his father tells him to take care of Maggie, he thinks of this purely in the monetary sense, not in the sense of loving her. Just before he and Maggie die in the flood at the end of the book, he realizes that his view of life has been too narrow and that he has not loved her as he should have, but by then it's too late: after this realization, they die together.

Lawyer Wakem

Lawyer Wakem is Mr. Tulliver's archenemy because in the past he has been involved in many lawsuits that brought trouble to Tulliver, who habitually takes others to court. The enmity grows when Wakem is hired by Mr. Pivart to mediate a water dispute, and the case is decided in favor of Pivart. When Wakem buys Tulliver's mill, this brings Tulliver's hatred to a high pitch. However, Wakem is not as evil as Tulliver believes he is: when his son Philip explains that he loves Maggie Tulliver, Wakem remembers his own happy relationship with his deceased wife and tells Philip that he can marry Maggie if she will have him.

Philip Wakem

of his birth resulted in his having a deformed back; as a result of this injury and his difference from most other people, he is sensitive, kindhearted, and aware of suffering. He is also a talented artist and musician. When Tom injures his foot while playing with a sword, Philip is the only one who understands Tom's fear that he will be crippled forever, and Philip reassures him despite their previous fights. Of all the characters, Philip is the most sensitive to other people and their needs and has the greatest insight into others' behavior. Philip and Maggie have an affinity through their mutual love of books, music, and art, but Philip's isolation, and the fact that he has not been taught any kind of useful occupation, makes him unsuitable as a husband. Indeed, the other characters often consider him effeminate and weak.

Themes

Ordinary People's Lives

At the time of its publication, *The Mill on the Floss* received critical attention, both good and bad, because it was one of the first novels to consider the lives and problems of middle-class English country people and to present their lives in great detail. Some readers of the time found this fascinating; others were repelled by the amount of time Eliot spent exploring the lives of "common" people. For example, Leslie Stephen, writing in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1881, wrote that no other writer had so clearly presented "the essential characteristics [of quiet English country life]" and that she "has shown certain aspects of a vanishing social phase with a power and delicacy unsurpassed." On the other hand, W. L. Collins, writing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1860, wrote that the novel was drawn "from the worst aspect of the money-making middle class—their narrow-minded complacent selfishness, their money-worship, their petty schemes and jealousies."

What all critics agreed on, however, was that Eliot drew a very accurate portrait of middle-class country people. No one in the book is wealthy, with the exception of Lawyer Wakem and Mr. Guest, and the characters' money is derived from their own work, not passed down from upper-class parents. Bob Jakin, the lower-class packman, is vividly portrayed, largely through his entertaining dialogue, but also through his generosity. When Eliot describes the Tullivers sitting down to tea or a conference of all the aunts and uncles, she shows them

Philip is the son of Lawyer Wakem and thus an archenemy of the Tulliver family, according to Tom and Mr. Tulliver. An accident around the time interacting and lets readers hear their conversation, which is presented with great wit and accuracy and sums them up by noting:

There were particular ways of doing everything in [the Dodson] family: particular ways of bleaching the linen, of making the cowslip wine, curing the hams, and keeping the bottled gooseberries. . . . Funerals were always conducted with peculiar propriety in the Dodson family: the hatbands were never of a blue shade, the gloves never split at the thumb, everybody was a mourner who ought to be, and there were always scarfs for the bearers. . . . A female Dodson, when in 'strange' houses, always ate dry bread with her tea, and declined any sort of preserves, having no confidence in the butter, and thinking that the preserves had already begun to ferment for want of the sugar and boiling.

Later, she describes the materialistic and shallow people of St. Ogg's:

One sees little trace of religion [among these people], still less of a distinctively Christian creed. Their belief in the Unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather of a pagan kind; their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom.

Eliot also portrays the life of the countryside: farmers, like the Mosses, working to survive; Luke, the simple miller; housewives buying goods from packmen like Bob Jakin; more prosperous people building up their businesses; and boatmen on the river.

Individual versus Society

Maggie Tulliver is an extremely intelligent and energetic girl who by nature is perpetually at odds with the narrow-minded, conservative, and restrictive culture she lives in. Throughout the book, she is torn between resisting social conventions and obeying them. Even as a child, she does not fit the model of the proper girl: she is untidy, disobedient, hot-tempered, and highly intelligent. There's really no place for her; her mother is embarrassed by her and despairs of ever getting her to behave like other girls, and, as Mr. Tulliver makes clear, most men want to marry a woman who is, if not exactly stupid, at least not intelligent enough to challenge them. Both her parents regard her as somewhat "unnatural" because of her unusual traits.

Maggie's brother Tom is the personification of the family and social values Maggie struggles against. She tries to reconcile her own personal freedom and inner nature with Tom's narrow and controlling ideas about what is right for her and thefamily. Unlike her brother, she is interested in books and learning and is sensitive to music and art. However, these interests are not much encouraged by her family or others.

When Maggie visits Tom's school, she asks Reverend Stelling if she could study geometry and Latin, as Tom is doing. Although it's obvious to the reader that she has a natural gift for learning and is much more intelligent than Tom, Stelling says scornfully that although women "have a great deal of superficial cleverness . . . they couldn't go far into anything." Maggie is crushed by this comment, and Tom is triumphant. Maggie is also confused because she has been called "quick" all her life and has thought this quickness desirable but now, because of Stelling's remark, thinks that perhaps this "quickness" is simply a mark of her female shallowness and inferiority of mind: she's doomed never to succeed. Eliot writes, "Maggie was so oppressed by this dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort."

Later in the book, Maggie gets into trouble because of her deep desire to love and be loved. No one in her family, least of all Tom, truly understands her or loves her unconditionally, so she is deeply gratified by the attention Philip and Stephen give her. However, she is also conflicted about their attention because her relationship with Philip is considered shameful by her family and, in the case of Stephen, it's considered scandalous by everyone.

By the end of the book, she is so trapped by these conflicting urges—to give in to others, do what they want, and live an unfullfilling life, or to do as she pleases and lose her family and friends—that there is seemingly no way out except death. When she dies in the flood, the conflicts are over, and she is united with her brother again. However, this is not a real solution; if she had survived the flood, it's obvious that her unity with Tom could never have lasted.

Style

Dialect

A notable feature of Eliot's writing is her use of local dialect in dialogue to express her characters' educational and social class. For example, Mr. Tulliver tells his wife, "What I want is to give Tom a good eddication.... I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholard, so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish." Mr. Riley, who is an auctioneer and somewhat better educated, does not use dialect when he tells Tulliver, "There's no greater advantage you can give him than a good education. Not that a man can't be an excellent miller and farmer, and a shrewd sensible fellow into the bargain, without much help from the schoolmaster."

Bob Jakin, who is of an even lower class than the Tullivers, uses more marked dialect; for example, when he is discussing a reward he received for putting out a fire, he says, "It was a fire i' Torry's mill, an' I doused it, else it 'ud ha' set th' oil alight; an th' genelman gen me ten suvreigns—he gen me 'em himself last week." floor i' the sunshine an' plait her hair an' sing to herself like a Bedlam creatur.' "

However, Eliot shows the reader that Maggie is actually acutely intelligent. Maggie never uses dialect, even in the beginning of the book when she is very young, is not yet educated, and would be expected to talk like her parents. Her first comment in the book, after her mother asks her to sit and sew, is "Oh, mother, I don't *want* to do my patchwork." She adds, "It's foolish work—tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again. And I don't want to do anything for my aunt Glegg—I don't like her." This clarity of expression in such a small child is clearly meant to show Maggie's notable intelligence as well as her difference from her family.

Dialect was often used by writers in Eliot's time, but as Lynda Mugglestone wrote in *Review of English Studies*, Eliot's use of dialect to characterize speakers is particularly notable for its accuracy, subtlety, and clarity.

Foreshadowing

Throughout the novel, Eliot repeatedly refers to the river, reminding the reader of its power and hinting at the catastrophic flood to come in the final chapters. She describes its many moods and repeatedly cautions that the river has flooded before and may flood again; when the flood does occur at the end of the book, it is almost expected.

In the book's first sentence, Eliot describes the river "hurrying between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage in an impetuous embrace." The contrast between the placid countryside and the power of the river, which runs the mill where much of the action is centered, makes the reader aware that the river is tamed, but perhaps not perfectly.

Later, Eliot mentions "the rushing spring-tide, the awful Eagre, come up like a hungry monster," and describes how Maggie thinks of "the river over which there is no bridge" described in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a symbol of death. In addition, in this chapter, Mrs. Tulliver fears that Maggie has drowned when she is late coming home.

Eliot also presents a legend of the patron saint of St. Ogg's, a boatman who operated a ferry on the Floss. One stormy night, a woman carrying a child wanted to cross the river, but no one would take her because of the danger. Ogg ferried her across, and when she reached shore, her clothes became flowing white robes and she was revealed to be the Blessed Virgin. She blessed Ogg, giving him the ability to save many lives when the river flooded. When he died, his boat floated out to sea, but his ghost could still be seen during floods, ferrying the Blessed Virgin over the water. However, Eliot notes that the people of St. Ogg's have largely forgotten this tradition, as well as their faith; they are more interested in money and image. This implies that they have also forgotten how dangerous the river is and in their arrogance assume that nothing can touch them.

Later, Eliot writes that the river "flowed and moaned like an unresting sorrow." This hints at the sorrow to come.

Near the end of the novel, when Stephen has taken Maggie too far down the river to respectably return without being married, he tells her, "See, Maggie, how everything has come without our seeking—in spite of all our efforts.... See how the tide is carrying us out—away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us—and trying in vain. It will carry us on.... and [we will] never pause a moment till we are bound to each other, so that only death can part us."

Maggie is swayed by this argument, thinking that she might "glide along with the swift, silent stream, and not struggle any more." This view of the results of marriage sounds more like a description of death than matrimony and foreshadows later developments, when Maggie and Tom are carried away in the flood; instead of being parted by death, as Maggie and Stephen would have been, they are forever united in it.

Historical Context

Education

Schools run by the state did not exist in England until 1870. Before that time, parents could send their children to any of four different types of school: private, endowed, church, and ragged. Anyone could open a private school, and no particular qualifications were required, so these schools varied greatly depending on the skill of the teachers. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the Reverend Stelling's school is a private arrangement, and as Eliot shows, Stelling is obviously not a very gifted teacher. Endowed schools were provided money by wealthy people, often as charity ventures and usually had more supervision of teachers. The Church of England, as well as other religious groups, also ran schools. Ragged schools were established by the Ragged School Union, founded in 1844, to educate the poor.

Women often did not attend school, but those in the wealthier classes had private governesses who schooled them in ladylike "accomplishments" such as painting, drawing, and music.

Roles of Women

In the mid-nineteenth century, women were expected to marry and have children. Because they were not allowed to enter any jobs other than menial ones, they were dependent upon either their parents or husbands for money. In addition, because money and property were inherited only through males, it was almost impossible for a woman to be single and financially independent even if she had wealthy parents, because her brothers or male cousins would inherit everything from them, leaving her without an income. Those who, like Maggie, did not have wealthy parents and were not married had to find work, but their need to work was regarded as somewhat shameful, both for them and for their families. Maggie planned to become a governess; other work available to women included washing clothes, factory work, farm labor, domestic service, sewing, and prostitution.

Women were considered the property of men; a girl belonged to her father until she married, after which she belonged to her husband. A woman had no legal rights; even if someone committed a crime against her, she could not prosecute. Instead, her husband would prosecute the crime as an offense against his property. Women did not have parental rights, so a husband could take his wife's children and send them to relatives or elsewhere to be raised without her consent. If a woman entered the marriage with an inheritance, it became her husband's when they married, and he could spend it on anything he pleased. Women could not obtain divorces, even if their husbands were abusive or unfaithful, and if they ran away, they could be arrested, brought back to their husbands, or imprisoned.

All of these laws and customs made life very difficult for women who, like Maggie Tulliver, found it hard to fit the mold of quiet and submissive womanhood. Nevertheless, some women did rebel against these strictures; George Eliot, who lived with George Henry Lewes without being married to him, was one of them.

The Industrial Revolution

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, new inventions in agriculture, textile spinning and weaving, iron making, and energy generation led to immense changes in the economy and society. By the mid-nineteenth century the Industrial Revolution was transforming England from a rural economy and culture to an urban one based on factories and industry. The growth in factories led to more jobs for working-class people, but it forced them to move to the cities, where the factories were located. This resulted in a population drain in rural areas and unhealthy overcrowding in cities, where sanitation, housing, and medical facilities were often inadequate for the growing masses of workers. Because there were so many potential workers, employers paid very low wages, did not pay sick or injured workers, and fired anyone who complained. Children as young as six years of age worked long hours in the factories, side by side with adults, but received much lower wages. In addition, because parents and children of poor families often worked, children received little or no supervision and family life suffered. In the countryside, the old system of village and church community began to break down as people moved to the cities to find work.

The Industrial Revolution resulted in a huge growth in the goods that were available to poor and middle-class people, because factory production made textiles, pottery, and other items affordable. In addition, the boom in jobs meant that some people were able to learn useful skills, get some education, save money, and become members of the expanding middle class.

Critical Overview

In an 1860 issue of the *Saturday Review*, a reviewer commented that *The Mill on the Floss*, in comparison to Eliot's earlier novel *Adam Bede*, "shows no falling off nor any exhaustion of power." The reviewer also compared Eliot's "minuteness of painting and a certain archness of style" to the work of Jane Austen and the "wide scope of her remarks, and her delight in depicting strong and wayward feelings" to the work of Charlotte Brontë. According to this reviewer, Eliot's greatest achievement in the novel is that "for the first time in fiction, [she has] invented or disclosed the family life of the English farmer, and the class to which he belongs." By using local dialect, vivid characterization, and occasional comedy, Eliot engenders trust in the reader. In addition, the reviewer commented, she "is full of meditation on some of the most difficult problems of life," such as the destinies, possibilities, and spiritual situation of all her characters. However, the reviewer disliked Eliot's emphasis on painful circumstances, her occasional overemphasis of moral issues, and her occasional discursiveness.

In that same year, a reviewer wrote in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* that the novel was "incontestably superior" to *Adam Bede*, because readers are brought to know the characters so intimately that they cannot help reading steadily to the end of the story. The reviewer noted, "And the interest, when once fairly started, though not rapid, never flags." The reviewer praised Eliot's characterization, use of middle-class protagonists, and her unobtrusive moral message.

I. M. Luyster wrote in *Christian Examiner* in 1861 that "since half the book is devoted to the childhood of the principal characters, it loses with some readers a portion of its interest as a romance." He also objected to Eliot's occasional use of "gratuitous vulgarity, for which the author is solely responsible," which, he noted, was "a great blemish, especially in a woman's book." However, he wrote, this vulgarity seldom appears in *The Mill on the Floss* and then only in some of the characterizations.

Leslie Stephen wrote in 1881 in *Cornhill Magazine* that Eliot was "one of the very few writers of our day to whom the name 'great' could be conceded with any plausibility."

By 1901, however, Eliot's reputation had declined. In *Victorian Prose Masters*, W. C. Brownell wrote that this was probably because turn-of-the-century readers were not interested in Eliot's psychological analysis of characters, and he remarked, "We have had a surfeit of psychological fiction since George Eliot's day." Thus, even though Eliot was "at the head of psychological novelists," her work did not garner the praise it deserved. He summed up, "No other novelist gives one such a poignant . . . sense that life is immensely serious, and no other . . . is surer of being read, and read indefinitely, by serious readers."

In *Reference Guide to English Literature*, Walter Allen wrote that Eliot "is probably over-rated" in England but remarked that "in critical estimation she leads all other Victorian novelists and is seen as the one nineteenth-century English novelist who can be mentioned in the same breath as Tolstoy."

Lettice Cooper, in *British Writers*, wrote that the book "has both the strength and the weakness of an autobiographical novel. There is no more vivid picture in English fiction of the sorrows and sufferings of a child." The book's weakness, according to Cooper, is that in depicting Maggie, Eliot did not have enough objectivity about Maggie's character, but at the same time, this gives her portrait of Maggie increased "freshness and intensity." However, Cooper praised the novel's "superb setting of English family life, narrated . . . with humor and shrewd observation." She also noted, "The Dodsons are the very marrow of the English middle class of the last century, a tradition that still survives."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Winters is a freelance writer. In this essay, Winters considers the conflict between self-realization and acceptance in Eliot's novel.

In *Studies in the Novel*, June Skye Szirotny commented that, of all Eliot's works, only in *The Mill on the Floss* does she "explore the conflict between self-realization and acceptance that makes for the ambivalence at the heart of all her fiction—ambivalence that she will set herself to resolve in the rest of her fiction."

This ambivalence runs, like the River Floss, throughout the novel and is the heart of Maggie's conflict with her family and society. It is made worse by the fact that "acceptance" or "love" is rarely given freely by the other characters in the book; it is always conditional. In effect, her family lets Maggie know that "[o]nly if you behave as you're supposed to will we love and accept you."

When Maggie can't or won't behave as her family wants her to, they label her as "unnatural" and threaten to stop loving her. When Mrs. Tulliver insists that Maggie curl her hair, Maggie douses her head in a basin of water, putting an end to the question of curls. Her mother threatens that if her aunts hear about this, "they'll never love you any more." When Tom finds out that she has forgotten to feed his rabbits, he says, "I don't love you, Maggie" and becomes cold to her. In fact, whenever she does anything that displeases him, either he tells her he doesn't like her any more and that he likes someone else (usually their cousin Lucy) instead or he simply walks away from her. Later in the book he goes farther, saying he will hate her if she doesn't do as he says. Arrogantly, he tells her, "You might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you." In other words, his love is conditional; he will only love her if she obeys him. In addition, it is purely self-serving; in the first section of the book, Eliot makes this very clear when she comments:

Tom, indeed, was of [the] opinion that Maggie was a silly little thing—all girls were silly.... Still he was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong.

In fact, there is almost no one in the world who loves Maggie as she is, rambunctious behavior, intelligence, and all; everyone around her is constantly trying to mold her and withdrawing from her when they are unable to do so. Only Bob Jakin, who chivalrously brings Maggie gifts and takes her in after her disastrous boat ride, and Lucy, who kindly schemes to bring her and Philip together, have no self-serving motives when it comes to Maggie. They are truly her friends and are only interested in helping her find happiness.

However, her family has a big impact on her, and these two friends can't make up for her family's lack of understanding. Because of her family's attitude toward her, Maggie lives under a constant threat of disapproval and abandonment. This is especially hard for her because she has a loving nature; she is described as being "as dependent on kind or cold words as a daisy on the sunshine or the cloud." Because of her strong need to be loved and her sadness when any love is withdrawn, she is often willing to do anything to gain approval from Tom and others. Eliot comments at the beginning of the novel:

It is a wonderful subduer, this need of love—this hunger of the heart—as peremptory as that other hunger by which Nature forces us to submit to the yoke, and change the face of the world.

Maggie loves Tom far more than he loves her, and she falls into despair when he does not approve of her. He, on the contrary, does not care what she thinks of him; it would never even occur to him to wonder what's on her mind.

Eliot writes that Tom was the one person of whom Maggie was most afraid:

. . . afraid with that fear which springs in us when we love one who is inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable—with a mind that we can never mould ourselves upon, and yet that we cannot endure to alienate from us.

She is thus placed in a no-win situation: if she does as he wants, she will be miserable; if she goes against him, she will suffer through losing him.

In addition to her fear of losing Tom's love, Maggie also has a hearty dose of self-blame; she blames herself for the estrangement and strife between her and Tom, even though, to the reader, he appears to be largely responsible for it because of his narrow-minded and controlling nature. Maggie has been taught to see herself as selfish when she seeks love and companionship with Philip, simply because her family would be upset to know she was associating with a Wakem. They demand that she sacrifice this chance for love, or even friendship, so that they can remain strong in their feud with the Wakem family. Like Tom, they never consider how this will affect her. Interestingly, Maggie never becomes angry at Tom or her family for trying to run her life or preventing her from seeing Philip; she simply assumes that they are right and she is wrong.

When Maggie goes down the river with Stephen, few people are sympathetic to her. Although she is actually blameless, she is vilified for shaming her family and Tom. Few people are particularly interested in finding out whether or not she is actually guilty of any illicit behavior. For example, Eliot writes that as Tom awaits news from her, he assumes she is guilty without knowing any facts:

His mouth wore its bitterest expression, his severe brow its hardest and deepest fold.... Would the next news be that she was married—or what? Probably that she was not married; Tom's mind was set to the expectation of the worst that could happen—not death, but disgrace.

It is fascinating to note that Tom believes that "disgrace" would be worse than death; in effect, he would rather have Maggie die than have her be disgraced. Disgrace would reflect badly on him and his family, whereas death would not. This is yet another example of his extreme selfishness and rigidity.

When Maggie does return, Tom will have nothing to do with her, telling her she has disgraced the entire family and that she has been "a curse" to her best friends. He then disowns her, saying, "You don't belong to me," and he won't listen to her explanations and apologies. Although he says he will provide for her, he will not allow her to associate with him or to come under his roof.

This rejection is what Maggie has been dreading for her entire life. Typically, she does not defend herself; Eliot explains her behavior by saying she is "half-stunned—too heavily pressed upon by her anguish even to discern any difference between her actual guilt and her brother's accusations, still less to vindicate herself." Instead, she says weakly, "Whatever I have done, I repent it bitterly," and she apologizes. However, Tom will have none of it. "The sight of you is hateful to me," he tells her.

When a massive flood carries part of the mill away and leaves Tom stranded in their old house, Maggie is the only person who shows up to save Tom. For the first time in his life, he realizes that he has underestimated her and their relationship. Eliot writes that he was "pale with a certain awe and humiliation." It is the first time in the story that he has been deeply beaten or humiliated by anything. He calls her by his childhood nickname for her, "Magsie," and they come to an unspoken forgiveness and understanding, similar to the one they shared as children. They are close again, allies in the fight against the flood, instead of the adversaries they had become.

When a giant mass of debris rushes toward them on the fast-flowing river, their boat is smashed and driven under, and they both drown as they are holding each other "in an embrace not to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands together and roamed the daisied fields together."

This "solution," with which Eliot wraps up Maggie's problems with her brother, her family, and society, is false, because it depends on Maggie's death. If Maggie and Tom had lived through the flood, he might have retained his new respect for her, but it's likely that he would not have. By nature, Maggie simply could never get along with Tom, no matter how self-sacrificing she tried to be; Eliot makes this very clear throughout the novel. Suppose Maggie had lived: what then? Would she have become Tom's housekeeper, as he had planned when they were children? If so, she would never marry, never have children, and would remain a servant to him for the rest of her life. This was Tom's dream, but was never hers. She could not marry Philip, or Stephen, and society's gossip and slander about her character would still remain, even though Stephen has written a letter explaining that she was not guilty of any misdemeanor. Victorian society was strict and unforgiving of girls and women who became involved in any scandal; as Eliot notes, even when she became a governess to Dr. Kenn's children, everyone in town slanders her, despite the knowledge of Stephen's exonerating letter. As Dr. Kenn tells her, "There is hardly any evidence which will save you from the painful effect of false imputations." He also advises her that human nature being what it is, people will never believe she is innocent.

Maggie's story is destined to be tragic: because of her perhaps mistaken love for her brother and her deep regard for her family, she stunts herself. When Maggie dies in the flood, she and her brother are united in a way they haven't been since childhood. However, it is not an adult connection of equals but a return and regression to a time when they were so young and their experiences so limited that they had no reason to quarrel. What Eliot does not do, and perhaps cannot do, given the society she lived in and her own struggles against slander and gossip, is provide an ending to the story in which Maggie lives through the flood and has a happy and productive life. Throughout the book, Maggie struggles with balancing self-realization and acceptance, but the ending of her story, instead of leading her to a solution of that problem, is a simple regression to a time when these problems did not exist.

Source: Kelly Winters, Critical Essay on *The Mill on the Floss*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Ermarth discusses the reality of the norms Maggie struggles to achieve throughout the novel.

George Eliot makes it clear in *The Mill on the Floss* that the social norms of St. Oggs exert a heavy influence on Maggie's development. This fact has long been obvious but less obvious, perhaps, is that fact that the norms Maggie struggles with are sexist. They are norms according to which she is an inferior, dependent creature who will never go far in anything, and which consequently are a denial of her full humanity. Years of such denial teach Maggie to repress herself so effectively that she cannot mobilize the inner resources that might have saved her. By internalizing crippling norms, by learning to rely on approval, to fear ridicule and to avoid conflict, Maggie glows up fatally weak. In place of a habit of self-actualization she has learned a habit of self-denial which Philip rightly calls a "long suicide." Both she and Tom feel the crippling influence of these norms but we will focus here on Maggie and on how being female is an important key to her tragedy.

George Eliot said several times that the first part of this novel, which deals with Maggie's childhood development, had such importance for her that she devoted an amount of time to it that might seem disproportionate. Maggie's fate develops out of her social experience, particularly out of the local attitudes toward sex roles and out of the assumptions behind those attitudes. We can begin with the Dodsons' emphasis on rules and measuring and with their correlative faith in the clear difference between right and wrong.

The Dodsons' "faithfulness to admitted rules" results in two equally dangerous habits: an utter inability to question themselves and a correlative habit of questioning everybody else. The Dodson sisters have codified their need to feel "right" into a whole social and economic position. I am what I am, they say, because I am not that inferior thing. One is either a Dodson or not a Dodson, but the category of not-Dodson contains no valid or interesting possibilities. To be not-Dodson is simply to be wrong or at best unfortunate. Of course, the harmony established on the basis of such narrow exclusiveness is constantly threatened both from within by atrophy and from without by excluded forces. It is Mr. Tulliver's keen consciousness of being "right" that prompts him always to be "going to law" with his neighbors and finally to ruin himself and his family; it is Maggie's sense of being continually "wrong" and her need always to measure up to standards not her own, that encourages the disaster. However, during Maggie's childhood at least, the family and communal rules are strong by their very negations. Nearly everyone is bent on being "right": from little Lucy Deane with her perfect dress and demeanor to the Rev. Walter Stelling who teaches his pupils in the "right" way: indeed, the narrator tells us, "he knew no other."

This emphasis on rules and measuring connects naturally with a tendency to value the measurable, a tendency which is expressed in the materialism of St. Oggs, where most of the respectable citizens are in trade, and which finds its most grotesque elaboration in the Dodson sisters' household religion. Their peculiar view of human priorities puts a premium on physical manifestations and leaves little room for deviation. The important differences between people are usually physical, as with the Dodson kinship which is an affinity of blood not spirit. "There were some Dodsons less like the family than others—that was admitted; but in so far as they were 'kin' they were of necessity better than those who were 'no kin.' " In a similar way the correct appearance and behavior for little girls is already established, too rigidly to allow for the internal, individual imperatives Maggie feels. Maggie's physical characteristics—her unruly hair, her unruly manners, her physical robustness as a young woman—all inappropriate for a Dodson girl, generally convince her relations that she is a "mistake of nature": a deformity just as surely as Philip Wakem with his hunchback.

The same logic of right and wrong that holds in social and economic matters also holds for the sexes. If one is either right or not right, of course the second alternative merely means to be wrong. In St. Oggs one is either male or not-male, and while there may be a way to be a proper female, in a deeper way to be not-male means merely to be wrong or inferior in some essential way. For a woman in this society to be "right" means accepting a place that is defined for inferior creatures, always adjunct to the more significant activities of men. As the hard-headed Wakem says bluntly, "We don't ask what a woman does—we ask whom she belongs to."

Most men in the novel have a deep, unselfconscious belief that they are innately superior to women, even to the women they most care about. Although Maggie is Mr. Tulliver's favorite child, he deplores her acuteness. In discussing the important question of a child's education he says of her simply, it's a pity she wasn't a boy, she is "too 'cute for a woman. . . . It's no mischief while she's a little 'un, but an over'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep—she'll fetch none the bigger price for that." Both Mr. Tulliver and Stephen Guest look for a certain weakness when choosing their spouses. Mr. Tulliver confides to Mr. Riley, "I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute—being a good-looking woman, too an' come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't agoin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside." Mr. Stephen Guest, the "odiforous result of the largest oil mill and the most extensive wharf in St. Oggs" (316), is a "patronising" lover who finds charm in silliness. When Stephen directs Lucy to sing "the whole duty of woman—'And from obedience grows my pride and happiness,' " his banter has a point. He chooses the wife "who was likely to make him happy," which means that he has a norm Lucy happens to fit, not that he derives his norm from knowing her qualities. "He meant to choose Lucy: she was a little darling, and exactly the sort of woman he had always most admired."

As a growing boy Tom struggles anxiously to be superior. For him equality is confusing and inferiority insupportable. He is baffled by Bob Jakin's different ways and standards and by the fact that he cannot assert mastery because Bob does not care for Tom's approval. Tom makes the most of his opportunities with Maggie, who does care. He feels the flattery of her emotional dependence on him and he gives his affection chiefly as a reward for submission. "He was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his housekeeper, and punish her when she did wrong." When

Tom takes an equal chance with Maggie for the unevenly divided jampuff, he cannot accept either the fact that she wins the big half or the fact that she offered it to him anyway, so he turns the incident into another instance of Maggie's inferiority. She is made to feel that she is somehow mysteriously at fault: a "fact" she knows for certain because Tom withdraws his affection as punishment.

Tom's affections for his absent sister are strongest when his ego is most in jeopardy, under his tutelage at Mr. Stelling's. His difficulties with Euclid and Latin and the long lonely evenings crush his spirit and give him a "girl's susceptibility." "He couldn't help thinking with some affection even of Spouncer, whom he used to fight and quarrel with; he would have felt at home with Spouncer, and in a condition of superiority." When Philip Waken arrives it is even worse for Tom since Philip is much more accomplished, and so Tom is delighted when Maggie arrives to visit. Now he can measure his ability in Latin against her non-existent one. How important condescension to "girls" is to Tom, and how readily he gets corroboration in this from adults, appears in this exchange with Stelling:

"Girls can't do Euclid: can they sir?"

"They can pick up a little of everything, I daresay," said Mr. Stelling. "They've a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far in anything. They're quick and shallow."

Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie behind Mr. Stelling's chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called 'quick' all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. It would have been better to be slow, like Tom.

"Ha, ha! Miss Maggie!" said Tom, when they were alone; "you see it's not such a fine thing to be quick. You'll never go far in anything, you know."

And Maggie was so oppressed by this dreadful destiny that she had no spirit for a retort.

At the end of a scene like this Tom's prophecy promises to be self-fulfilling. Mr. Stelling, so long as he can patronize her actually enjoys her talk; and Tom actually learns through Maggie to take more interest in Latin. But neither Tom nor his teacher can admit to themselves that she has intellectual potential, and when Maggie demands recognition they resort to that old and effective cruelty, ridicule: Tom with conscious delight and Mr. Stelling, at his more advanced stage of masculine development, without thinking.

The women in the novel accept their place willingly. Lucy knows her lover thinks her silly and that he likes insipid women, but she does not think of challenging this view of her character. She is complacent in her "small egoisms" and "small benevolences," fond in her turn of patronizing dependent creatures like Mrs. Tulliver and even Maggie. The most Lucy's talents run to, given the limits of her options, is to manage and manipulate people by strategem into better dealings with one another: not a bad cause, perhaps, but in her case pitifully circumscribed. "I'm very wise," she tells her papa, "I've got all your business talents." She probably does, poor thing. Within her scope she manages but her scope is small and her influence peripheral to the real business of people's lives. She derives her strength from her security and hence does not dream of asserting herself.

Like Lucy, Mrs. Tulliver was a good child. She never cried, she was "healthy, fair, plump, and dull-witted; in short, the flower of her sex for beauty and amiability." She is like the early madonnas of Raphael, says the narrator (reminding us of the venerable age of this tradition of feminine virtue) with their "blond faces and somewhat stupid expression" who were probably equally as "ineffectual" as Mrs. Tulliver and Lucy. Mrs. Tulliver's view of the whole duty of women befits a Dodson sister: it is to make beautiful elderflower wine; it is to keep her clothes tidy so no one can speak ill of her, for she does not "wish anybody any harm" (implying with her usual logic that if she keeps her clothes neat she will somehow be wishing her neighbors well); it is to make pie fit to "show with the best" and to keep her linen "so in order, as if I was to die tomorrow I shouldn't be ashamed." As she concludes with unwitting penetration, "a woman can do no more nor she can."

Maggie, too, learns the family pieties, though not so willingly. She is strong enough to be suffocated by her narrow life, but not strong enough to escape it. Responsive and flexible, she resents the narrow restrictiveness of her environment and she struggles valiantly against it. But because she is completely alone in this struggle her small force is too feeble to prevail. Her family's constant opposition to her aspirations gradually teaches her a habit of self-distrust which overpowers her better self and which perverts her energies. This habit is already well-developed on the morning she goes off to fish with Tom. "Maggie thought it probable that the small fish would come to her hook, and the large one to Tom's." Soon Tom sees she has one and he whispers excitedly,

"Look, look Maggie", and came running to prevent her from snatching her line away.

Maggie was frightened lest she had been doing something wrong, as usual.

The family pieties, unflattering though they are and in conflict with her inner imperatives, are inseparable from her sense of identity. She feels she must be wrong, not according to any standard of her own but according to some external authority which she barely understands and yet which, as a child, she implicitly trusts more than she trusts herself.

She has already learned to defer to others in place of developing a sense of her own authority; hence what she learns to fear most is the withdrawal of approval. In the jampuff episode this is Tom's device for enforcing her submission and he has learned it from his elders. Maggie's mother uses the same device to control her troublesome daughter. On the morning Tom is to be brought home from school, for example, Maggie is prevented from going along because the morning was too wet "for a little girl to go out in her best bonnet." When Maggie tries to assert herself against these unfair restrictions by ducking her curls in water, she gets the following response: " 'Maggie, Maggie,' exclaimed Mrs. Tulliver, sitting stout and helpless with the brushes on her lap, 'what is to become of you if you're so naughty: I'll tell your aunt Glegg and your aunt Pullet when they come next week, and they'll never love you any more.' " Of course, Maggie and Tom are none too fond of their aunts—their mother says this is "more natural in a boy than a gell"—but the important point is that Maggie is threatened with the withdrawal of approval or love as punishment for being the wrong kind of little girl. She is referred to a standard she does not accept or understand (the value of her aunts' love) and for which her own mother will betray her or "tell" on her.

Insulting behavior causes dependency, as Bernard Paris has shown in his "Horneyan analysis" of Maggie's neurosis. With her pride constantly knocked away from under her, Maggie responds by becoming self-effacing and dependent, buying her identity at the price of her autonomy. The narrator suggests in the first Book that "the dark-eyed, demonstrative, rebellious girl may after all turn out to be a passive being compared with this pink-and-white bit of masculinity with the indeterminate features." If Maggie wants to be accepted she must learn to submit to the control of others who will then reward her obedience with affection. Without this affection Maggie has no identity, and so it happens that "the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature" develops, the "need of being loved."

As a child Maggie has no adult reserve about her feelings so it is then that her need to be loved is most apparent. Tom has no sooner arrived from school than he is teasing her and she is having to beg, "*Please* be good to me". When he wants to punish her for not being sure his rabbits were fed, he says, "I'm sorry I brought you the fish-line. I don't love you". And Maggie begs: " 'O, please forgive me, Tom; my heart will break,' said Maggie shaking with sobs, clinging to Tom's arm, and laying her wet cheek on his shoulder. . . . What was the use of anything, it Tom didn't love her?" Alone in her attic, just as "her need of love had triumphed over her pride" and she is going down "to beg for pity" she hears Tom's step on the stair. "Her heart began to beat violently with the sudden shock of hope. He only stood still at the top of the stairs and said, 'Maggie, you're to come down.' But she rushed to him and clung round his neck sobbing,

'O Tom, please forgive me—I can't bear it—I will always be good—always remember things—do love me—please dear Tom!' " Her need for love, inculcated by her bitter experience, overthrows her pride so completely that it also overthrows her integrity. She cannot exercise independent judgment. She will promise to be something she cannot be (always good, always remember things): anything, so long as the essential support is not withdrawn. Her need for love is a morbid dependency, and Tom uses it to master her, threatening to hate her if she is not just what he requires.

Maggie's dependency is reinforced continually by ridicule and disapproval. When she shows her precious picture book to Mr. Riley she has the sense, not that he thinks the *book* silly but that *she* was "silly and of no consequence." No matter what Maggie does on her own initiative she usually regrets it. For example, on the visit to aunt Pullet, while Lucy characteristically waits without eagerness until she's told to eat, Maggie "as usual" becomes fascinated by a print of Ulysses, drops her cake underfoot, and earns the general disapprobation once again. The next minute, when the musical snuff-box excites her feelings, she runs to hug Tom and spills his wine.

"Why don't you sit still, Maggie?" her mother said, peevishly.

"Little gells mustn't come to see me if they behave in that way," said aunt Pullet.

"Why, you're too rough, little miss," said uncle Pullet.

Poor Maggie sat down again, with the music all chased out of her soul, and the seven small demons all in again."

When she resolves on a "decided course of action" in regard to her troublesome hair and cuts it all off, she is again met with disapproval and ridicule. "She didn't want her hair to look pretty□that was out of the question□she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl, and not to find fault with her." But Tom's response brings an "unexpected pang" of regret. " 'Don't laugh at me, Tom,' said Maggie, in a passionate tone, with an outburst of angry tears . . ." The impulsiveness of her actions and the rapidity of her regret seem to be consequences of her persistent sense of inferiority, a sense which is further reinforced on this occasion. She is met in the dining room with "a chorus of reproach and derision" so that, when Tom unexpectedly adds his own, "her feeble power of defiance left her in an instant, her heart swelled, and, getting up from her chair, she ran to her father, hid her face on his shoulder, and burst out into loud sobbing." Nearly the only source of sweetness in her early life comes when she throws herself on this source of support, never from her own powers, which only bring her ridicule and shame. The love she gets is nearly always payment for humiliation. It is not surprising, then, that she learns to distrust her own powers and to develop a fatal sense of the sweetness of submission.

Maggie's rapid shift from defiance to despair suggest the fatal instability that is developing in her. Potentially she could develop a strong, flexible character, given her inclinations and her gifts; but actually she is preparing for disaster because she never has an opportunity to make her own choices or to develop her own judgment. Whatever she attempts, the withdrawal of approval is so great a threat—almost an ontological threat—that she cannot proceed in the face of contradiction. In her later struggles with St. Oggs Maggie does not struggle like Antigone to hold her own against social norms because, in a fundamental way, she has no force of her own. She has assimilated the social norms and if she fights against them she must fight against herself. *She* believes the lie, that she is inferior, or wrong, or not to be taken seriously. She has learned to collaborate in her own defeat.

The same self-defeating habits occur in the second stage of her life, when Maggie must face the family disaster and when she establishes important relationships outside her family (with Philip and Stephen). As a child Maggie gives up her will for the reward of acceptance and affection; after the downfall when her family seem like strangers and she is driven more into herself she develops a new rationale for the old habit, she gives up things on priniciple. It is perfectly in keeping with her childhood need to be loved that an adolescent Maggie resolves to meet the family misfortune by "plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness" (notice the familiar connection between devotion and the necessity for self-humiliation). She succeeds so well that her mother is amazed "that this once 'contrary' child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will." But the motives are still what they were. As the narrator warned, her rebelliousness was weaker than her need to be loved and it has turned into a strange passivity. She *likes* to give up her will or, rather, to exert her will only against herself. She now can do to herself what others used to do to her, and it gives her the sense of being "right" for the first time in her life. Being "right" requires Maggie to turn against herself.

The morbidity of her so-called renunciation is obvious to Philip Wakem. She refuses even to read or hear music because "it would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be—it would make me long to see and know many things—it would make me long for a full life." Philip tells her she has "wrong ideas of self-conquest." "It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now will assult you like a savage appetite.... It is less wrong that you should see me than that you should be committing this long suicide." Philip's own self-interest in the matter does not invalidate the accuracy of his observations on her "wilful, senseless privation" and "self-torture." He perceives that the fatal weakness Maggie is cultivating is a form of suicide.

Of course self-privation suggests there is something of which to deprive herself. Unlike Lucy, who renounces personal desires so completely that she effectively has none, Maggie has desires that might be fulfilled. She is responsive to the appeal of books, of music, of conversation with Philip, and she feels her life growing again through these experiences. In particular she begins to feel need for a life outside love, as if she is beginning to understand that what she has called love is really a self-defeating, neurotic compulsion. "I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving. I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do." A true prompting, this wish for a life outside affection. George Eliot wrote to her friend Mrs. Robert Lytton:

We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life—some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed—because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. Yet surely women need this sort of defense against passionate affliction even more than men.

The important themes of the novel are recapitulated here: the importance to a woman of a life outside love, the danger of ridicule in pursuing it, the unhealthiness of confinement to the affections. Maggie might have become a woman who, like Madame de Sablé, was a woman "men could more than love—whom they could make their friend, confidante, and counsellor; the sharer, not of their joys and sorrows only, but of their ideas and aims." But to make a life outside love one needs experience of actual dealings with the actual world, experience from which Maggie has always been cruelly "protected." Even in her statement to Philip it is clear that she has in mind vague hopes but no real alternative.

While Maggie's inner promptings to a wider life do exist, they are not stronger than her habit of self-denial as, I think, her rejection of Philip shows. Maggie obeys Tom's insistence that she break with Philip ostensibly out of duty to her father, but there may be some argument about her motives. She feels an unaccountable relief when her relations with Philip are cut off, a relief which seems to me to have reference to the demands Philip has been making on her: that she be herself and trust her interests. But responsibility for herself is something she has learned to avoid, and so her relief seems a clear assertion of an old reluctance to assert herself and not, as has been thought, a sexual repulsion to Philip. George Eliot has spent most of her time showing that Maggie is not chiefly a sexual creature but a social creature, and so it is plausible, given the whole direction of the novel, that Maggie is simply glad the inner conflict and need for decision are over.

Much as she may wish for a life outside love, the undertow of her dependency is too strong a force with her, preventing her from dealing with the conflicts of adult life. Her clandestine association with Philip, which by definition is a separate reality from her home life, inevitably results in a conflict with her family once the protection of secrecy disappears. Yet she is emotionally unprepared to accept the fact that her two worlds are separate and unreconcilable. Tom says that since she can do nothing in the world she should "submit to those that can," still assuming that it is her nature to depend and be capable of nothing. Maggie cries, "you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world"; but these poignant words are lost on Tom Tulliver and, with Maggie's acquiescence he makes her choice for her, literally requiring her to speak the words he gives her:

" 'Do as I require,' said Tom. 'I can't trust you, Maggie. There is no consistency in you. Put your hand on this Bible, and say, "I renounce all private speech and intercourse with Philip Wakem from this time forth."' " Maggie gives her word, although in this context it hardly can be called hers. Her private reflections after this scene reveal how fully she wishes to escape from conflicts she cannot resolve:

She used to think in that time that she had made great conquests, and won a lasting stand on serene heights above worldly temptations and conflict. And here she was down again in the thick of a hot strife with her own and others' passions. Life was not so short, then, and perfect rest was not so near as she had dreamed when she was two years younger. There was more struggle for her—perhaps more falling. If she had felt that she was entirely wrong, and that Tom had been entirely right, she could sooner have recovered more inward harmony....

She would rather be "wrong" and submit to the "right" than to continue in a struggle she is unequipped for, or to support the painful consciousness that she is responsible for defending a valid position, but that, at the same time, she is without the resources necessary to the task.

Maggie seems to acknowledge that this promise she made for Tom was not really hers when she asks him to release her from it, two years later. But the scene in which Tom gives her her freedom has a bitterly ironic quality, since it actually confirms in other ways how little strength she has for bearing freedom. "When Maggie was not angry, she was as dependent on kind or cold words as a daisy on the sunshine or the cloud: the need of being loved would always subdue her, as, in old days, it subdued her in the worm-eaten attic." It subdues her again. Tom releases her, but with resentment and criticism. She sees the "terrible cutting truth" in Tom's remark that she has "no judgment and self-command" without seeing that this is true because she has always been commanded, that even now she is seeking to be commanded to do what she herself wants to do. Her one clear response, through the confusion of inner voices which condemn both herself and Tom, is despair at being shut out from acceptance by Tom.

The same weakness for substituting another's will for her own plays a crucial role in her relationship with Stephen, when she falls in love with him as well as when she leaves him. Initially she feels a sense of relief at being able to depend on Stephen, first when she slips in the boat and is supported by his firm grasp, and later when he takes her arm in the garden. "There is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of the firm arm: the help is not wanted physically at that moment, but the sense of help—the presence of strength that is outside them and yet theirs—meets a continual want of the imagination." Being used to treatment that is indifferent and preemptive, Maggie is more at the mercy of such flattery which, when it comes "will summon a little of the too-ready, traitorous tenderness into a woman's eyes, compelled as she is in her girlish time to learn her life-lessons in very trivial language." Maggie's love for Stephen is traitorous dependence because it fulfills her need to be supported from without, rather than from within, and it thus acts as one further encouragement to deny herself.

In the light of her development it seems clear that Maggie rejects Stephen out of the same weakness that made her accept him. She rejects him, not out of moral principle, but out of the same, deep-rooted, unhealthy instincts that made her give up Philip and music and books. Both Philip and Stephen ask in different ways that she assert her will against the wills of others and that is what she cannot do (of course, Stephen also asks for a personal submission to himself that Philip does not ask). Now, far from being a virtue in Maggie this unassertiveness is perverse. George Eliot makes it crystalline in her novels and letters and essays that one must not only learn to renounce (i.e., submit to actual conditions that cannot be changed) but also to act (i.e., shape the conditions that can be changed). One must even "dare to be wrong." So when Maggie returns to St. Oggs for the third time, when she clings to those who ostracize her, saying—"I have no heart to begin a strange life again. I should have no stay. I should feel like a lonely wanderer—cut off from the past"—George Eliot is not praising Maggie out of Maggie's own mouth for acting on principle or for respecting the past. While George Eliot valued those things, she also valued realism. Maggie is merely expressing her insistence on having what, by definition, she cannot have: acceptance of herself by her brother and by St. Oggs.

The confusion and ambivalence we feel so keenly in the final chapters reflects accurately Maggie's own confusion and ambivalence at the painful conflict in her life between aspiration and fact: "It is no moral philosophy that determines her decision, but a far deeper moral sense, which turns out to be hardly distinguishable from a sense of what she *is*. It is a clear recognition that there is no escape from what she is, however bitterly she might wish there were." This interpretation makes clear the essential importance of the full portrait of Maggie's childhood. It is not the happiness of her childhood that finally brings her down but the intensity of it. She speaks to Stephen of Philip's claims, yet neither she nor Philip ever recognized the kind of formal relationship she implies; she speaks of the past that sanctifies one's life, but we know her past has hardly done that; and finally, when Stephen presses her, her reasons disappear and she responds just as she did to the prospect of leaving St. Oggs: her "heart" won't let her. " 'O, I can't do it,' she said, in a voice almost of agony—'Stephen—don't ask me—don't urge me. I can't argue any longer—I don't know what is wise; but my heart will not let me do it.' " The past is her "stay": from which it does not follow that for her this is the best, but merely that it is for her the case. She is still looking to the same source for resolution of conflict, for rest from the too-feeble effort that always seems to turn back on itself and achieve nothing. When she leaves Stephen her mind is

unswervingly bent on returning to her brother, as the natural refuge that had been given her. In her deep humiliation under the retrospect of her own weakness—in her anguish at the injury she had inflicted—she almost desired to endure the severity of Tom's reproof, to submit in patient silence to that harsh disapproving judgment against which she had so often rebelled. . . . She craved that outward help to her better purpose which would come from complete, submissive confession—from being in the presence of those whose looks and words would be a reflection of her own conscience.

Given other conditions these instincts might not be entirely wrong (although the masochistic note here is hard to miss), but she has chosen the wrong object in Tom, and she perseveres, like the goldfish still endeavoring to swim in a straight line beyond the glass, in spite of the actual condition.

When Tom rejects her, she looks for some other "sure refuge" or stay to "guarantee her from falling," and lacking any, she only continues to vacillate between her conflicting feelings. She denies Stephen and then is inclined to yield because she begins to "doubt in the justice of her own resolve"; then, having decided to accept him, "close upon that decisive act her mind recoiled; and the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness came upon her like a pang of conscious degradation. No—she must wait . . . for the light that would surely come again." The confusion in interpreting this part of the novel is owing partly to Maggie's confusion. Her course is as erratic as a boat loose on the flood. Philip does have a claim, and so does Tom and even Stephen; but their claims conflict and Maggie has not learned the strength to do what she must, which is to choose one particular course and let another go. Her only instinct is to wait passively for help.

" 'O God, where am I? Which is the way home?' she cried out, in the dim loneliness." In the flood, at night, her boat leaves its mooring at Bob Jakin's and floats away: a "transition of death" which is only the last in a series of fatal transitions which began in her childhood and which in a few moments will finally carry her under. As she floats and then rows towards home she is finally able to see the "light" she waited for: "the dawning seemed to advance more swiftly, now she was in action." What seems to be a dawning is a fatal illusion, because it is death she is heading for. Maggie is looking for a "reconcilement with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity . . . ?" The undertow of dependency carries her back, and only with it can she act decisively: "as if her life were a stored-up force that was being spent in this hour, unneeded for any future."

The final scene where Tom reverts to the "childish" nickname for his sister, the scene which ends in a recollection of "the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together" seems not saccharine and sentimental but, in light of the present interpretation, harsh and grim. Such sentimentality as there is echoes Maggie's longing for an impossible reconciliation. (When did they ever roam the fields in love?) And the words suggest that, since she was shaped to be a child by the family pieties, it is fitting that her life ends in a reversion to childhood where her energies to be an adult, tragically, are "unneeded."

George Eliot, born the same year as Maggie, left her brother Isaac, who was born the same year as Tom; she left her home of thirty years for London and despite the hard and lonely beginning she never went back. Maggie went back and her fate is the strongest possible argument and justification for doing the opposite: for doing precisely what George Eliot did in leaving her home behind. George Eliot does not try to disguise the tremendous difficulties in making the endless, painful effort required of such a woman, nor does she disguise the importance to such a woman of some support in making the effort; but in counterpoint she offers a grim warning as to the consequences of avoiding that effort. For Maggie the price of "feminine" affection and "feminine" self-sacrifice is suicide. Just as a fully human life is constituted of mind, imagination, and feeling, not only biological conditions, so equally, human death comes not only with the deprivation of oxygen but with the deprivation of mental, imaginative, and emotional life. Maggie's literal drowning is merely physical corroboration of the more important disaster.

Source: Elizabeth Ermarth, "Maggie Tulliver's Long Suicide," in *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, Autumn 1974, pp. 587-601.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Hagan discusses what he considers the questionable interpretation of polarity in Mill on the Floss *by various critics.*

One of the reasons the critics I have been considering offer a questionable interpretation of the novel's tragic central subject is that they narrow the range of George Eliot's outlook and thus create a polarization which does not exist in the novel itself. Each reading ignores the explicit indication of her perspective which she provides near the beginning of Book IV, where, after explaining that she has been depicting the "oppressive narrowness" of Tom's and Maggie's environment in order that the reader may understand "how it has acted on young natures in many generations," she identifies the young natures with whom she is specifically concerned as those "that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts." Applied to Maggie, this passage makes clear that the yearnings for a wider life which spring from the fact that Maggie has "risen above the mental level of the generation before" her and the love which ties her to her brother, her father, and her past by "the strongest fibres" of her heart are to be regarded as *equally* legitimate, *equally* worthy of fulfillment. By not allowing that both kinds of need deserve satisfaction, that it would be best for Maggie if neither had to be sacrificed, one misses either the fact that her life is a tragedy, or the fact that the essential nature of that tragedy is one of having to choose between goals that are equally good but incompatible.

This incompatibility is not inherent in the goals themselves (the desire to marry Philip and the desire to remain loyal to Tom, for example, are not intrinsically irreconcilable), but is the result of circumstance. Nor is this circumstance chiefly "social," for to whatever degree the narrowness of thought and feeling which is characteristic of Maggie's social environment thwarts her desires, it comes to play upon her chiefly through the characters and actions of Tom and Tulliver. Maggie has intense desires for a full and rich life which Tom and Tulliver can neither comprehend nor sympathize with, but she is, at the same time, bound to them by a noble love which makes her renunciation of those desires morally necessary. From this situation spring directly or indirectly all the decisive frustrations of her life and hence the tragedy which is at the center of the novel. A detailed analysis of the structure of the plot will I believe, demonstrate this.

The first segment, which comprises Books I and II, centers on Maggie's late childhood and establishes the premises about her psychology and her relations to Tom, her father, and her society in general on which the rest of the novel depends. The major emphasis is placed on precisely those two aspects of her character and situation which, as I have just noted, are explicitly singled out at the beginning of Book IV: that is, her intellectual and spiritual superiority to her environment and the fact that she is "nevertheless tied" to this environment by "the strongest fibres" of her heart. On the one hand, extensive, primarily satirical portraits of her mother and her maternal aunts and uncles, who lack

Maggie's sensitivity, and who habitually misunderstand, criticize, and reject her, make clear the degree to which her position in this society is an isolated and painful one. On the other hand, George Eliot shows that Maggie is dominated by a great need to love and be loved by Tom and Tulliver, which impels her to turn to them in times of trouble, and enables her to find in this uncomprehending and otherwise intolerable environment a spiritual home. The essential fact is that, during this period of her life, her father and brother reciprocate her love. This is why at the end of Book II, when Maggie's childhood is coming to an end, George Eliot can refer to it as having been an Eden, and why at the end of the novel the last thing Maggie remembers before she drowns is the time when she and Tom, like a kind of Adam and Eve, "had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together." The point is not that Maggie's childhood is an unadulterated idyll (it obviously is not), but that this is the time when her need to be loved and accepted by her brother and father is most fully satisfied. It is true, of course, that even in this period Tom's need to love Maggie is much less than hers to love him. But it is also true that, in comparison to the later periods of her life, Maggie's childhood is the period of least frustration and greatest fulfillment. It becomes for her the touchstone of what her loving relations to her brother and father should be.

The relations to her brother, in particular, are defined most clearly by a series of parallel episodes which give Book I its structural backbone (the episode on the dead rabbits, of the jam-puff, of the haircutting, of the mud, and, climactically, of the gypsies) and in nearly every one of which there emerges a sequence of actions which dramatizes Maggie's hunger for Tom's love, the frustration of that hunger, her rebellion, and the pleasure she receives from reconciliation. At this period of her life such reconciliation and the consequent fulfillment of her need to be loved by her brother satisfy Maggie's deepest instincts. Her need to rebel is decidedly secondary, and is primarily a response to her brother's rejections. When Maggie's craving to love and be loved by her brother asserts itself, as sooner or later it always does, her desire to rebel is suppressed; and when that craving is satisfied, as sooner or later it always is, she is reconciled to her otherwise hostile environment.

In Book III, however, with the father's financial and mental collapse, begins the process which results in the cruel frustration of that craving and in the tragic search for alternative sources of fulfillment. This Book is thus the pivot on which the central action of the novel turns. Its title, "The Downfall," refers not only to the misfortunes which befall Tulliver, but to the fact that those misfortunes expel Maggie from the "Eden" of her childhood by progressively alienating from her the father's and brother's love on which she has come so deeply to depend. Walter Scott, who would understand and "surely do something for her." Such fancies led her in childhood to seek compensation for Tom's rejection by running away to the gypsies. But this kind of solution will no longer work, for by now Tulliver's plight has inculcated Maggie with a strong sense of moral responsibility. The object of her first quest becomes, therefore, a way not of fleeing her world, but of enduring it, and the key ready to hand turns out, of course, to be Thomas à Kempis, in the spirit of whose philosophy of renunciation and resignation Maggie hopes to solve the problem of her frustrated desire for her father's and brother's love and for the happiness of her childhood by crushing that desire itself. This quest is the main subject of Book IV, Chapter iii.

That it fails—as the two different quests which follow it in Books V and VI will also fail—is clear. The crucial question is why it fails. In one sense, obviously, the fault is Maggie's: her longings for a happiness which will compensate for the emptiness of her life after her father's downfall are so great that the effort of renunciation becomes for her a source of that very happiness which she is supposedly renouncing. George Eliot's ironical attitude toward this piece of self-deception is quite explicit. Yet it is also true, as I have shown, that Maggie's longings arouse George Eliot's deepest sympathies. To deny their legitimacy would be to insist absurdly that she alter her very nature and completely subdue herself to the oppressive narrowness of the provincial world around her. Thus, it might seem to follow that the fault lies instead in Kempis' philosophy itself: Kempis' demand that legitimate yearnings such as Maggie's be suppressed is unnatural. Yet, again as I have shown, George Eliot's sympathy for this philosophy is as great as her sympathy for the passions it would deny. Under the circumstances, Maggie's attempt to live by it—to endure suffering rather than to seek escape in romantic daydreams—not only makes good sense, but is even morally noble. The issue, therefore, comes down to the existence of the circumstances themselves—circumstances which decree that what is morally noble should also be unnatural. To ask why Maggie's first quest fails is to ask what has brought these circumstances into being.

And the answer to that can only be the flaws in the characters of her father and brother. Maggie's frustration and her struggles to endure that frustration by means of renunciation are the direct consequences of Tom's and Tulliver's failure, at this stage in her life, to perceive, to understand, and to reciprocate her love. Were they to respond to her now as they did in her childhood, Maggie's happiness would be restored, and any futile attempts to deny her need for happiness would therefore no longer need to be made. But such a response has become impossible for them: their mutual hatred of Waken, their acute sense of disgrace, and their grim determination to restore the family fortunes imprison them in a world of gloomy obsessions from which Maggie is wholly excluded. The conflict which thus results is the conflict which appears in all George Eliot's novels—that between two radically different kinds of characters: on the one hand, the large-souled, who, like "all of us" (as George Eliot puts it in *Middlemarch*, Ch. xxi), are "born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves," but are sensitive and imaginative enough ultimately to transcend this limitation and see that others possess "an equivalent center of self," and, on the other hand, the narrow-souled, who are incapable of this kind of vision, and remain permanently trapped in the confines of the egoistic self.

The conflict between these two kinds of characters which begins to emerge as the novel's central tragic issue in Book IV becomes even more intense, however, in Book V, when Maggie begins her second quest for fulfillment, the result of which is her involvement with Philip Wakem. The futility of her attempt to live by Kempis' philosophy which was demonstrated in Book IV by her self-deception is demonstrated even more clearly now, three years later, by the flaring-up of her erotic passion for "the only person who had ever seemed to love her devotedly, as she had always longed to be loved." Her need to love and to be loved by her father and brother and to win their approval remains as compelling and legitimate as ever; she continues to be bound to them by "the strongest fibres" of her heart. But now, partly because Tom and Tulliver continue to frustrate her demand, and partly because Maggie is going through a natural process of maturation, which, in accord with "the onward tendency of human things," enables her to rise even farther "above . . . [their] mental level" than previously, this need is balanced by an equally strong, legitimate, and autonomous desire to find additional fulfillment from sources beyond them. Both kinds of fulfillment have become essential to her. Yet, because of the "moral stupidity" of Tom and her father, she will get neither. This is the basic tragic situation of the novel which now definitely takes shape.

The obvious solution to Maggie's hunger for a new life in Book V is for her and Philip to marry; she is nearly seventeen by this time, and he is twenty-one. Near the end of a year of secret meetings in the Red Deeps, she kisses him, admits that she loves him, confesses that she has found in him the greatest happiness since her childhood with Tom, and implicitly tells him that, though the thought is new to her, she would willingly marry him if there were no obstacle. But the crux of the situation is precisely that there *is* an obstacle, and that because of it her second quest proves as futile as the first. Superficially, of course, that obstacle is in Maggie herself—in her profound attachment to her father and brother, both of whom oppose not only marriage but even friendship between Maggie and Philip because of their long-standing hatred of Philip's father. If Maggie's attachment to them were not so deep, she could disregard the voice of her guilty conscience which urges her to renounce Philip, defy their ban, and find an escape from her frustration. But it does not follow from this that her attachment is wrong. George Eliot explicitly states that Philip's arguments for continuing to meet Maggie in the Red Deeps are "sophistry" and "subterfuge"; and she calls Maggie's "prompting against a concealment that would introduce doubleness into her own mind, and might cause new misery to those [Tom and Tulliver] who had the primary natural claim on her" a "true" prompting. Given Maggie's deep loyalty to her father and brother, and given George Eliot's complete sympathy with that loyalty, Maggie's scruples of conscience are wholly justified. The real obstacle to her fulfillment lies, as in her first quest, in the flawed characters of Tom and Tulliver, whose opposition to Philip springs from their narrow prejudice against Wakem and their complete failure to appreciate the depth of Maggie's need for a fuller life. The most active opposition comes, of course, from Tom, who cruelly forces upon Maggie an absolute choice between Philip and himself. Were it not for Tom's fanaticism, Maggie could be loyal to him and marry Philip at the same time; in themselves both goals are completely compatible and completely desirable. The necessity of choosing between them is an artificial one forced upon Maggie by Tom's insensitivity. The situation is very similar, indeed, to that in *Middlemarch*, when Mr. Casaubon cruelly contrives his will so as to force Dorothea to choose between inheriting his property and marrying Ladislaw (Ch. 1). As George Eliot sums up at the end of Book VI, Chapter xii, Tom belongs to a class of minds to which

> prejudices come as the natural food of tendencies which can get no sustenance out of that complex, fragmentary, doubt-provoking knowledge which we call truth. . . . however it [a prejudice] may come, those minds will give it a habitation: it is something to assert strongly and bravely, something to fill up the void of spontaneous ideas, something to impose on others with the authority of conscious right: it is at once a staff and a baton. Every prejudice that will answer these prejudices is self-evident.

The nature of the tragic contrast between the two kinds of characters represented by Maggie and Tom and its decisive effect on Maggie's destiny could hardly be spelled out more distinctly.

By the middle of Book VI, however, the situation has been complicated by an additional factor: Maggie is reluctant to marry Philip not only because of Tom's continued opposition, but because of her growing attraction to Stephen Guest, whom she met at Lucy's home upon her return to St. Ogg's after her two years' absence as a governess, and whose admiration has become one of the chief causes of her renewed discontent. The two things with which Stephen is most frequently associated—music and the river—come to epitomize the irresistible force of the intoxication which she increasingly feels in his presence. To satisfy her newly aroused yearnings for love and life by surrendering herself to Stephen has now become, in fact, her third and final quest.

This quest fails, of course, no less than did the others. Maggie has to renounce Stephen, just as she renounced Philip, and, as a result, the frustration of her life reaches its tragic climax. The pattern of futile quests which has been taking shape since the last chapter of Book IV is thus logically completed and the novel's true central subject is fully defined. The relation of this failure to the two preceding ones, however, needs careful clarification. The first two quests failed, as we have seen, because of the flaws in the characters of Maggie's father and brother, who were unable to reciprocate her love and opposed her marriage to Philip. But the third quest fails for a different reason: Maggie gives up Stephen, not (as in Philip's case) because she is intimidated into doing so and wishes to avoid betraying Tom and her father, but because of her own free choice and her desire not to betray Philip and Lucy, to whom she and Stephen are tacitly engaged. In this decision Tom plays no role whatsoever. Nevertheless, he is decisively related to the failure of Maggie's third quest in other ways which keep the conflict between him and Maggie—and, by implication, the larger conflict between the kinds of characters which they respectively represent—the tragic focal point of the novel to the very end.

To begin with, though Maggie renounces Stephen of her own free will, both her involvement with him in the first place and the great intensity of that involvement are direct consequences of the earlier renunciation of Philip which Tom virtually forced upon her. Philip's warning at the time—namely, that " 'You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite' "—is precisely what happens later when she meets Stephen. Had she been able to marry Philip with Tom's approval in Book V, this tragic development would presumably have been impossible. Tom has helped to create the very predicament for which Maggie herself must pay the tragic price.

Moreover, almost equally influential in Maggie's destiny is the continuation of Tom's ban on Philip not only to the beginning of Book VI, but even to the end. The obvious solution to her suffering after her renunciation of Stephen at the end of Book VI would be to return to Philip and marry him, just as this was the obvious solution at the beginning of this Book, when she came back to St. Ogg's. Philip's letter clearly implies that if Maggie were to return to him, he would accept her. But, even if she were able to overcome her remorse and the infatuation she still strongly feels for Stephen, the insuperable barrier of Tom's ban on Philip would still remain. Tom's "bitter repugnance to Philip" is the same after the trip down the river as it was before—the same at the end of her final quest as it was at the beginning. The "something" for which Maggie had earlier hoped "to soften him" has still not occurred.

But the most important way in which Tom is related to the failure of Maggie's final quest is through his reaction to her renunciation itself. This reaction is, indeed, the central subject of all but the last chapter and the brief "Conclusion" of Book VII, a fact which strikingly differentiates this Bookfrom the three preceding ones (which are centrally concerned with Maggie's quests themselves), and thus makes clear the decisive thematic significance George Eliot wishes to attach to it. Maggie's renunciation of Stephen is climactic: uncompelled by anything but the voice of honor and conscience, and carried out in opposition to the strongest, most sensual passion for love and a rich life she has known, it represents the moment in the novel when her success in living by Kempis' philosophy is most complete. Only later, when temptation in the form of Stephen's letter assaults her again, does her hold on this philosophy slacken. Yet the point of the first four chapters of Book VII is that if Maggie's self-discipline has reached its height, so too, in ironic counterpoint, has Tom's blindness and opposition. The heroism of her renunciation of Stephen, instead of at last winning her brother's understanding, respect, and love, as it should, is powerless against the alienation of his sympathy which has been caused by the river journey itself. Completely oblivious to the moral grandeur of that renunciation, he rejects her more brutally than ever before, and Maggie, of course, is crushed.

With the exception of the malicious town gossips, no one else in her world is so cruel to her. In fact, after the rejection scene in Chapter i, nearly every other episode in the first four chapters of Book VII is carefully designed by George Eliot to emphasize the key importance of that scene by contrasting Tom with characters and actions which put him in the worst possible light: Bob Jakin climaxes an earlier series of benevolent actions by chivalrously taking Maggie into his home as a lodger; Dr. Kenn gives her sympathetic counsel, and, failing in his efforts to find her employment elsewhere, takes her on as a governess to his own children; Philip declares not only that he forgives Maggie and still loves her, but that in loving her he has attained to a new and enlarged life of selflessness; Lucy too has forgiven her; and even Aunt Glegg, although motivated by family pride, comes staunchly to her defense on the ground that she should be punished only in proportion to the misdeeds actually proved against her, rather than those merely alleged. Especially important is the contrast between Tom and Dr. Kenn. Whereas the latter can appreciate Maggie's spiritual conflicts because he is a man of "broad, strong sense" who can "discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy," Tom is the "man of maxims" par excellence—a representative of all those "minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality—without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human." This passage, echoing the earlier one on Tom as a man of prejudice, emphatically defines again the crucial distinction between the two types of human character which underlies the tragic contrast and conflict between Tom and Maggie herself.

But, if it is true that Tom's climactic rejection of Maggie is the central subject of most of Book VII, this has the crucial effect of placing the drama of her fall and recovery in Book VI in a wholly new perspective. What now becomes clear is that the struggle leading up to her renunciation of Stephen and the renunciation itself have been fully and emphatically rendered by George Eliot not because they themselves are the novel's central subject, but because they provide the occasion for the rejection which is the culminating revelation of Tom's insensitivity, and because only in relation to their nobility can the horror of that rejection and insensitivity be fully measured. The ultimate importance of the entire affair with Stephen which constitutes Book VI is not that it brings to a climax Maggie's efforts to live by Kempis' philosophy (though this does happen), but rather that it brings to a climax Tom's failure to understand his sister's needs and reciprocate her love. By the end of Book VII, Chapter iv, then, the drama of Maggie's tragic frustration is complete in all essentials, and has emerged as the true center of the novel. Each of her three vitally necessary quests for love and a wider life, which were originally incited by the alienation of her father's and brother's love at the time of the family downfall, and were later broadened and intensified by the natural process of her maturation, has ended in failure. And the failure in each case is related in some vital way to the flawed characters of Tom or Tulliver or both, who are far inferior to Maggie in spiritual sensitivity, but to whom she is nevertheless bound by the noblest feelings of loyalty and devotion.

There still remains, of course, the important question of how this drama is related to another one, namely, that of the flood and its aftermath, which comprises the main action of Book VII, Chapter v, and the "Conclusion." As is well known, this part of the novel has given critics more trouble than any other; there is almost universal agreement that for one reason or another it is unsatisfactory. That the action is melodramatic and indeed almost comic in its foreshortening and fortuity; that it is sentimental in the abruptness with which Tom at last awakens to Maggie's nobility and in the description of their death embrace; and that it has the defect of imposing a somewhat mechanical finality, a formal "ending," upon a struggle in Maggie's soul which, as long as Tom's opposition exists, can only remain inconclusive—all are points that can be conceded at once. But the question of the thematic relevance of this action to the rest of the novel may still be profitably reconsidered. For if the flood sequence is seen as functioning primarily to clarify and reinforce the tragic central theme of the novel I have been defining, its logic becomes inescapable. When Maggie begins her prayer to the "Unseen Pity" in Book VII, Chapter v, that theme has been developed as far as strict dramatic necessity requires: as a result of the attitudes of her father and brother various frustrations have been built up in her which there is no way of enduring except by struggling again, as we see her doing, to renounce all her desires. The flood sequence, though it carries the action farther, adds nothing new to this theme. But it does serve as a rhetorical device for giving it maximum final emphasis. A series of ironies focuses all the major issues. That the "something" which Maggie had earlier hoped would "soften" Tom has finally occurred, so that he begins to awaken to her greatness of soul and to reciprocate her love, accentuates the momentous significance of his earlier blindness and spirit of opposition; that this awakening occurs only because Maggie is sacrificing herself to save *him* highlights the importance of his selfishness; that now it comes too late to alter Maggie's destiny confirms our sense of the decisive difference for the better it could have made earlier; that she and Tom are killed by floating "machinery" symbolizes how destructive have been the effects on her of her father's and brother's prosaic materialism; and finally, that their epitaph reads "In death they were not divided" comments definitively on how much Maggie and Tom were divided in life. With this epitaph, indeed, as I suggested earlier, the thematic center of the novel is established conclusively: appearing as both the last words and again as the epigraph, it unmistakably implies that the whole of Maggie's story must be seen with reference to her tragic relationship with Tom—and, of course, by extension, her father. The key concept of the novel, it emphatically announces, is "division"—the division between the large-souled woman, whose profound love for her father and brother is one of the proofs of her spiritual greatness, and the narrow-souled father and brother themselves, whose inability to reciprocate that love or grasp the validity and urgency of her other needs destroys her life.

Source: John Hagan, "A Reinterpretation of *The Mill on the Floss*," in *PMLA*, Vol. 87, No. 1, January 1972, pp. 53-63.

Adaptations

The Mill on the Floss was adapted to film in a Carnival Films production, in association with UGC D.A. International and Canal Plus. It was produced by Brian Eastman and directed by Graham Theakston. The film starred Emily Watson as Maggie, Ifan Meredith as Tom, James Frain as Philip Wakem, and James Weber-Brown as Stephen Guest.

Topics for Further Study

In the book, Maggie is torn between obeying her brother's often selfish wishes and choosing her own happiness. Which do you think is more important: obeying the wishes of parents and family or choosing your own life, even when they disagree with it? If your parents or brother threatened to disown you because of a choice you made, what would you do?

Research the use of water-powered mills, like the one in the book, to grind grain. When were such mills invented? How did they work? When did their use begin to fade, and why?

In the book, Maggie is highly intelligent, yet instead of being considered smart, she is viewed as "unnatural" by her father and others. How have attitudes toward women's education and intelligence changed over the years since 1860?

Tom makes money by investing in goods, which a sailor then sells on his voyages overseas. Investigate seafaring trade practices of the mid-1800s. Was this sort of investment common? Was it risky or a sure thing for Tom to do this?

Compare and Contrast

1860: Most professions are closed to women, who are expected to marry and have children. Those in the poorer classes must do menial labor, and any money they make is legally their husbands' property.

Today: Women can choose almost any career they desire, including professions such as law and medicine; they can join the armed forces and can expect to see combat; and they are free to enter traditionally male-dominated fields, such as business, construction, and many others.

Today: Women and men have equal educational opportunities.

1860: Women do not have the right to vote.

Today: The Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution, giving women the right to vote, was passed in 1920.

1860: When a woman marries, all her property becomes her husband's, and in her wedding vows, she must promise to obey her husband in all things.

What Do I Read Next?

Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861) is a story of alienation and betrayal that nevertheless has comedic elements.

Adam Bede, which was hugely successful when Eliot published it in 1859, tells the story of Hetty Sorrel—a young woman who is seduced, has a baby, and neglects it so that it dies—and of Adam Bede, who loves her.

Middlemarch (1872), widely considered Eliot's most ambitious work, presents a clash between individuals' aspirations and the limitations imposed on them by society.

Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) tells the story of Daniel, an early Jewish activist in England.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) tells the story of an orphan girl who becomes a governess in a mysterious household.

In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), a rural woman is seduced by an unworthy man and is subsequently abandoned by her husband.

Further Study

Bodenheimer, Rosemarie, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*, Cornell University Press, 1996.

Bodenheimer uses Eliot's own writings, particularly her voluminous correspondence, to explore her life and work.

Giobbi, Giuliana, "A Blurred Picture: Adolescent Girls Growing Up in Fanny Burney, George Eliot, Rosamond Lehman, Elizabeth Bowen and Dacia Maraini," in *Journal of European Studies*, June 1995, p. 141.

Giobbi examines adolescent female characters in the work of several women writers and discusses their path to maturity.

Hughes, Kathryn, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*, National Book Network, 2001.

In this combination of biography and critical work, Hughes examines Eliot's phenomenal celebrity in her own lifetime, as well as the Victorian society that nurtured it.

Ludwig, Mark, "George Eliot and the Trauma of Loss," in *Essays in Literature*, Fall 1992, p. 204.

Ludwig discusses the repeated portrayal of traumatic loss in Eliot's novels.

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Introduction

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The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale'sFor Students Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
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- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
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