

*"Poor Maggie. She is so kind and lively;
she deserves a better life."* Rebecca, 11



THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

GEORGE ELIOT

Why was this feeling of regret so familiar to her? Why must she always wish she had done something different?

Maggie Tulliver and her brother Tom grow up in the Mill on the River Floss. Although Maggie adores Tom, she often finds him cruel and cold. All she wants is for life to be full and warm.

The Tulliver family's traditional way of living is threatened by changes beyond their control. Will the educated world of lawyers and lawsuits destroy what generations have enjoyed?

As Maggie grows into adulthood, how can she control her passionate nature? With a destiny like an unmapped river – full, deep and rapid – where will love and desire lead her? Where will it all end?



THE MILL ON THE FLOSS George Eliot



Retold by Gill Tavner
Illustrated by Sarah Wimperis

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THE CHARACTERS



Maggie Tulliver

Intelligent, lively and passionate, Maggie lives a frustrating life. Will she succeed in subduing her desires, or are they too strong even for her?



Tom Tulliver

Although brother and sister, Tom and Maggie are very different. How will their stormy relationship develop into adulthood? How will it end?

Mr and Mrs Tulliver



Loving parents to Tom and Maggie, Mr and Mrs Tulliver live happily in Dorlcote Mill. Will modern values turn their traditional world upside down?



Mr Wakem

A wealthy lawyer representing a legal case against Mr Tulliver, Wakem's values threaten Tulliver family life.



Philip Wakem

Wakem's injured son is gentle and kind. Will Maggie ever be able to return his love?



Lucy Deane

Everybody loves Tom and Maggie's delightful, kind cousin. Why must Maggie struggle so hard to avoid breaking Lucy's heart?



Stephen Guest

The son of a wealthy businessman, Stephen seems destined to marry Lucy. Where will his attraction to Maggie lead him?



THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

‘Our little Maggie takes after my side o’ the family,’ said Mr Tulliver. ‘She’s twice as clever as Tom. I’m afraid Tom’s brain isn’t suited to education. He’s a bit slowish, more like your side o’ the family.’

Mrs Tulliver looked up from her needlework and nodded amiably. ‘Yes, he is that. His hair is neat and fair like mine, not dark and wild like Maggie’s. I can never get *her* hair to curl. She’s a bit of a mad creature anyway, always sitting in the sunshine singing or reading.’

Maggie was indeed, at that very moment, sitting in the sunshine. Although a book lay open on her lap, she wasn’t reading. She could barely sit still. ‘Oh, how long must I wait?’ she sighed impatiently. Laying her book aside, Maggie ran into the grain-house where, among the familiar smells and the noise, she found Luke, her father’s head miller. ‘Luke, Tom’s coming home today!’ She ran to the great pile of grain in the corn-hatch and slid down it joyfully.

Luke continued his work. 'Tom'll want to see his rabbits, Maggie.'

'Oh no!' Maggie's hands rose to her face. 'I forgot to take care of them! Where are they?'

'They're all dead.'

Maggie's heart sank. 'Oh, I'm so sorry! He'll be so angry!' Of all things in life, she dreaded Tom's anger the most.

An hour later, as soon as Tom stepped down from the gig delivering him back to his family, he found Maggie's arms around his neck, in rather a strangling fashion. Disentangling himself with difficulty, he smiled. 'Magsie, I've got something for you. Guess what it is! It's a fishing line. Now you can come fishing with me. Aren't I a good brother to you?'

Maggie pictured a perfect riverside afternoon with Tom. 'You're very good, Tom. Can we go fishing today?'

'Of course. After I've seen my rabbits.'

Standing before the empty rabbit hutch, Tom looked at Maggie with cold eyes. 'You shan't go

fishing with me,' he said. 'I don't love you.' When Maggie begged for forgiveness, Tom replied simply, 'I wouldn't have forgotten the rabbits. *I never forget things.*' Maggie knew that this was true, but if he ever were to forget something she knew that she would forgive him. Tom was different. He believed it his duty to punish Maggie for her mistakes.

'Oh, he is cruel' she sobbed, alone in her attic later, when she should have been fishing with her brother. Poor Maggie. What use was anything if Tom didn't love her?



Back in time

George Eliot was in fact a woman whose real name was Mary Anne Evans. She chose to use a male pseudonym because writing by a man had a greater chance of being taken seriously. Published in 1860, *The Mill on the Floss* was her second novel, but she had written a great deal about philosophy before becoming a novelist. Her other famous novels include *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* and *Middlemarch*.

As in her other novels, George Eliot's writing in *The Mill on the Floss* shows the influence of Romanticism. Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth, idealised nature, childhood and natural affections. In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot often allows the narrator to comment upon the strength of the bonds that tie us to the past. By doing this, she guides our feelings about events in the story.

The novel shows us England during a period of rapid change. The traditional, provincial way of life was being threatened by the growth of materialism, manufacturing and capitalism. In Mr Tulliver's mind, these are all represented

by Mr Wakem. The flood which kills Maggie and Tom could be seen as a metaphor for the destructive force of modernity which Eliot saw as washing away the old ways of life.

George Eliot makes frequent references to the concept of tragedy. The usual requirements for a tragic hero are that they should be in a high social position, and that they should have a fatal flaw in their character which, due to external events, leads to their downfall. From the beginning, the reader should feel that a tragic ending is inevitable – the hero's suffering should be keenly felt as they struggle against their inevitable doom, and the reader (like the hero) should feel emotionally cleansed at the end.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Maggie and Tom's England.

Books

- Peter Hepplewhite and Mairi Campbell, *All about the Industrial Revolution*, Wayland, 2002.