



# Shree H. N. Shukla Group of Colleges

## B. A. DEPARTMENT MATERIAL

CLASS: -S. Y. B. A. Semester -4

SUBJECT: - MAIN PAPER- 9

### *The Mill on the Floss*

#### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Study Guide*

*The Mill on the Floss* was [George Eliot](#)'s third book, after *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and *Adam Bede* (1859). She began writing the novel in 1859 and it was first published in 1860, with a few subsequent revised editions. The novel was eagerly anticipated, as *Adam Bede* had been very successful, and it ended up being well-received for the most part. It was not as uniformly praised as *Adam Bede* had been upon publication, but it was also a more ambitious work. Many critics vastly preferred the first half of *The Mill on the Floss*, which focuses on Maggie and [Tom Tulliver](#)'s childhoods, to the second half - and especially the ending.

*The Mill on the Floss* is Eliot's most autobiographical novel. Although the plot points do not explicitly mirror events from Eliot's life, the character of [Maggie Tulliver](#) is the closest approximation of Eliot to appear in her fiction, and she faces many of the same struggles that Eliot did. The Tullivers are not meant to represent Eliot's parents, but Tom Tulliver is very reminiscent of Eliot's brother Isaac Evans, and the Dodson aunts are reminiscent of Eliot's aunts, the Pearsons.

#### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary*

*The Mill on the Floss* opens with the unnamed narrator dreaming of Dorlcote Mill as she or he knew it years ago. At that time, [Mr. Tulliver](#), owner of the mill and its farm, has decided to send his son, Tom, away to school so that he can become something more than a miller and farmer. When Tom gets home for the summer, he learns that his younger sister Maggie forgot to feed his rabbits and they have all died, so he is furious with her. Maggie is a very bright girl with good intentions and a strong desire to please her brother, so this devastates her. As will happen frequently throughout their lives, Tom coldly holds her carelessness against her for a little while before forgiving her.

Tom's schooling at Mr. Stelling's begins. Tom finds the lessons largely unpleasant, as he is the only pupil and it is the kind of learning that he finds the most difficult. After the Christmas holiday, though, [Philip Wakem](#) joins him at King's Lorton to learn from Mr. Stelling. Philip is the son of [Mr. Wakem](#), a lawyer whom Mr. Tulliver detests, so Tom is prepared to dislike him. Tom is also disturbed by Philip's physical deformity. Philip is overly sensitive but an apt pupil, so he also has a problem with the brutish miller's son. The two reach a wary peace, however, especially when Maggie comes to visit, as Philip is greatly impressed with her intelligence and kind nature. Two years later, Maggie goes away to school with her cousin Lucy, but is called home when Mr. Tulliver has lost his lawsuit against Mr. Pivart, a neighboring farmer represented by Mr. Wakem. The loss of the suit combined with his legal fees means he will lose the mill and be completely



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bankrupt. Right before Maggie's return, he learns that the mortgage on the farm has fallen into Mr. Wakem's hands, and this news on top of everything else causes him to lose his senses. Maggie goes to Mr. Stelling's to deliver the news to Tom, who comes home with her.

There they find that Mr. Tulliver recognizes only Maggie, and a bailiff has come to sell off all of their household goods and furniture, which Mr. Tulliver had used as a security against one of his loans. Mrs. Tulliver turns to her sisters - Mrs. Pullet, Deane and Glegg - for help, but they are more interested in making their moral superiority known, and they only buy the goods that they would want anyway. Tom goes to his uncle Deane for advice on starting out in business so that he can help his family. [Mr. Deane](#) is somewhat discouraging, but he eventually finds Tom a starting position at Guest & Co., Mr. Deane's employer, and sets him up with lessons in bookkeeping.

Mrs. Tulliver goes to see Mr. Wakem to try to discourage him from buying the mill when it comes up at auction, but she inadvertently convinces him to do just that. Mr. Tulliver has been slowly improving, and when they tell him that Mr. Wakem now owns the mill and is willing to keep him on as manager, he agrees to do so even though he despises the idea of working under Mr. Wakem, since he believes he owes it to his wife, and he doesn't want to make his family have to move.

Mr. Tulliver's only focus now is on saving enough money to repay all of his remaining outstanding debts. Tom and Mrs. Tulliver agree this is the honorable thing to do, so Tom gives all of his earnings from his new job to this cause, and Mrs. Tulliver does everything she can to economize. [Bob Jakin](#) gives Maggie a pile of books as a gift, among which is a spiritual treatise which recommends self-renunciation as the path to peace. Maggie becomes convinced this is the only way she will be happy, but she goes at it with an egotistical zeal which is against the true nature of the renunciation.

Bob Jakin offers Tom (now 19) an investment opportunity that he takes with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Glegg, and he manages to quickly multiply his savings. Meanwhile, Philip Wakem meets Maggie on one of her walks, and pleads with her to meet with him regularly, secretly. She eventually agrees, and they do so for almost a year. Philip finally tells Maggie that he is in love with her, and she tells him that she can't imagine loving anyone more than she does him, but she could never marry him and risk hurting her father and brother so deeply.

Tom figures out that Maggie has been meeting Philip and tells her that if she ever sees or communicates with Philip again without Tom's permission, he will tell their father all about it, which will probably cause him to lose his sanity again. She accepts his terms, and Tom follows her to her next meeting with Philip. Tom is very cruel to him, and Maggie tells Philip she must end their friendship.

Tom manages to earn enough money with his investments to pay back all of Mr. Tulliver's debt. Mr. Tulliver is joyous, and decides to quit working for Mr. Wakem, but when he runs into him and tells him this, his anger gets the best of him and he ends up attacking Mr. Wakem with a



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horsewhip. This brings on a stroke of some sort for Mr. Tulliver, and he dies soon after, telling Tom that he should work to buy the mill back, and he should never forgive the Wakems.

Two years later, Maggie returns to St. Ogg's to stay with her cousin [Lucy Deane](#) after having worked at a school since her father's death. When Maggie learns of Lucy's friendship with Philip Wakem, she tells Lucy about her prior, forbidden relationship with him; Lucy begins to scheme ways to get the pair together. Maggie meets [Stephen Guest](#), who has been courting Lucy, and immediately is very attracted to him, and he to her. Though they both try to ignore their feelings, eventually they are overwhelmed by them, and so Maggie goes to visit her aunt Moss to get away for a little. Stephen comes to her there and tells her that he loves her and that they have to be together. Though Maggie is tempted, she insists that she could never be happy with him because of the guilt she would feel about Lucy and Philip.

When Maggie returns to St. Ogg's, Lucy, trying to solidify the relationship between Maggie and Philip, arranges for them to be alone on a boat ride. Philip, though, is depressed because he has realized Maggie and Stephen have feelings for one another, so he arranges to have Stephen take his place, unintentionally leading to Stephen and Maggie being alone in the boat together. Stephen convinces Maggie to elope with him, so they leave the rowboat for a steamship to York. The next morning, however, when they dock, Maggie realizes she can't allow herself to get her happiness out of Philip and Lucy's hurt, so she tells Stephen she can't marry him after all, and heads back to St. Ogg's.

When Maggie returns to St. Ogg's five days later, everyone believes the worst of her, including Tom, who refuses to offer her a home with him. Mrs. Tulliver supports her, though, and together they lodge at childhood friend Bob Jakin's. A letter comes from Stephen to his father, absolving Maggie of guilt, but the damage to her reputation has been done. The town's clergyman, [Dr. Kenn](#), tries to help her and even gives her a job as governess to his children, but when rumors start to swirl about the two of them, he tells her it would be best if she moved to another town altogether.

Lucy, who has been unwell since the shock of Maggie and Stephen running off together, sneaks out one night to visit Maggie and tells her that once she is well again, she will come see her often. Maggie gets two letters, one from Philip telling her he doesn't blame her and wishes her to feel no guilt for his sake, and one from Stephen pleading with her to marry him. She resolves to turn him down for good.

She realizes the house is flooding and, after waking Bob and his family, gets into a boat to get to Dorlcote Mill. Mrs. Tulliver is safely out of town, but Tom is there and gets into the boat with her. They have a moment of unspoken resolution, but a large piece of debris comes right into their path and drowns them. Everyone else survives the flood and the siblings are buried next to one another.

### **Ø The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book I - Boy and Girl**



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### ✓ Chapter I - Outside Dorlcote Mill

The narrator, asleep in her chair, dreams of Dorlcote Mill, and in doing so describes the town of St Ogg's along the Floss and a little girl standing at the edge of the water by the mill thirty years ago. When she wakes, she resumes the story of Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver's actions on the very afternoon she was dreaming of.

### ✓ Chapter II - Mr. Tulliver, of Dorlcote Mill, Declares His Resolution about Tom

At Dorlcote Mill, [Mr. Tulliver](#) explains to his wife Bessy that he is taking their son, Tom, out of his day school to go to boarding school because he wants him to be something better than a miller or a farmer. He plans to ask his friend [Mr. Riley](#) for advice on where to send Tom to school, but worries that even with a good education, he's not smart enough to ever be truly intelligent, as opposed to Tom's clever sister Maggie. Despite her daughter's cleverness, Mrs. Tulliver complains about how difficult Maggie is; in particular, the girl's hair won't hold a proper curl.

### ✓ Chapter III - Mr. Riley Gives His Advice Concerning a School for Tom

Mr. Riley visits the mill, and Mr. Tulliver asks him about Tom's schooling. Riley strongly recommends he go to Reverend Stelling, who graduated from Oxford and wants to keep teaching even with his duties to his parish, so wants to take on a few pupils. Riley says he will recommend Tom to Stelling. Hearing her beloved brother's name, Maggie interrupts the conversation. She quickly illustrates how clever she is, showing Mr. Riley engravings in "History of the Devil", a book she's reading. But she is disgraced and belittled by Mr. Riley. Mr. Tulliver laments that if she were a boy, Maggie would go far.

### ✓ Chapter IV - Tom is Expected

Maggie, impatient with her mother for not letting her go with Mr. Tulliver to pick up Tom from school, runs outside and talks to Luke, the head miller. From him she learns that Tom's rabbits, that she was supposed to take care of, have all died because she forgot to feed them.

### ✓ Chapter V - Tom Comes Home

Tom comes home with two new fishing lines, one for Maggie to have all to herself, but when Maggie tells him about the rabbits, he takes it back and tells her he doesn't love her. She goes to the attic to sulk and play with a voodoo-doll like toy which she uses to work out her feelings. Though Tom is intent on punishing her, when she comes down again he can't resist her apologies and forgives her, taking her fishing the next day as originally planned.

### ✓ Chapter VI - The Aunts and Uncles Are Coming

The Tullivers prepare for a visit Mrs. Tulliver's sisters and their families. Tom and Maggie play outside, enjoying freshly-baked jam puff. Tom cuts a third puff in uneven halves and tells



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Maggie to choose left or right so one of the siblings gets the better half fair and square. Maggie tells her brother he can have the better piece - to impress Tom - but he insists she choose with her eyes closed. Maggie gets the better half and tries to give it to her brother, but Tom insists on fairness. However, after both pieces are eaten, Tom gets jealous and calls Maggie greedy and runs away with his dog Yap, finding his friend [Bob Jakin](#). They go off to watch a rat-catching, but get into a fight over Bob cheating at heads or tails, so Tom, unwilling to go along with a cheat, stalks off.

### ✓ Chapter VII - Enter the Aunts and Uncles

[Mrs. Jane Glegg](#), [Mrs. Sophy Pullet](#), and [Mrs. Susan Deane](#) with her daughter Lucy arrive at Dorlcote Mill. All the aunts criticize Maggie's hair, so she sneaks upstairs with Tom and cuts it herself. Tom laughs at how stupid she looks, upsetting her greatly. He finally convinces her to come down to dinner, and the uncles mock her while the aunts reproach her.

The children are sent outside, and Mr. Tulliver tells everyone his plans for Tom's education. Everyone is surprised, but the uncles are easily convinced it's a good idea. Mrs. Gregg is quite scornful and unpleasant about the decision and ends up fighting with Mr. Tulliver. She leaves angrily.

### ✓ Chapter VIII - Mr. Tulliver Shows His Weaker Side

Mrs. Tulliver mentions to Mr. Tulliver that he shouldn't have fought with Mrs. Glegg, because she might insist he pay back the 500 pounds he borrowed from her. This convinces Mr. Tulliver that he must pay her back so he won't be beholden to her anymore, so he goes to visit his sister Gritty and brother-in-law [Mr. Moss](#) in order to retrieve the 300 pounds he lent them. Mr. Tulliver tells Mr. Moss that he must pay him back, but almost immediately after loses his resolve. He thinks of Maggie and hopes to set a good example for Tom in the event she falls on misfortune. He returns to the Moss farm and tells his sister not to worry about the loan.

### ✓ Chapter IX - To Garum Firs

Mrs. Tulliver takes Tom, Maggie, and Lucy to Garum Firs, the Pullet's farm. Mrs. Pullet shows the visitors a grand bonnet she has purchased. Maggie is in a bad mood because Tom has been favoring Lucy all morning, as she accidentally knocked over his house of cards. At Garum Firs, the children are sent outside and Mrs. Tulliver and Mrs. Pullet discuss the fight between Mrs. Glegg and Mr. Tulliver. At Mrs. Tulliver's bidding, Mrs. Pullet agrees to visit Mrs. Glegg the following to try to sooth the tension.

### ✓ Chapter X - Maggie Behaves Worse Than She Expected

Outside, Tom, still mad at Maggie for the morning and for causing him to spill some wine at Garum Firs, ignores her and pays attention to Lucy. This makes Maggie more and more miserable. She gets irrationally mad at Lucy as well. Tom takes Lucy to the pond to look for fish



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and Maggie follows behind, but Tom tells her to go away. In retribution, Maggie shoves Lucy into the mud.

Tom takes the crying Lucy back to Pullet house and tells the maid that it was Maggie that did it, and then runs back outside; he knows his cruelty played a part in Maggie's misbehavior. Mrs. Tulliver finds him and tells him to go get Maggie, but she is nowhere to be found. Mrs. Tulliver fears she has drowned in the pond, but Tom says she probably left to go home, so they go off after her.

### ✓ Chapter XI - Maggie Tries to Run away from Her Shadow

Maggie is so miserable she decides to run away and join the gypsies. She goes off looking for a common where she expects to find them, but in fact stumbles upon a gypsy camp in the lane rather quickly. She announces she wants to stay with them and joins them around their fire, but quickly realizes it wasn't all she imagined it would be and gets frightened. She tells the gypsies she must be off, but they insist on taking her home. Maggie is terrified she will be murdered. On the road, Maggie and the gypsy run into Mr. Tulliver, on his way back from Gritty's. He pays the gypsy for his trouble and embraces his daughter, saying she must never leave him. Maggie does not get in trouble for running away.

### ✓ Chapter XII - Mr. and Mrs. Glegg at Home

The narrator describes the history of the town of St. Ogg's and the legend of St. Ogg himself. St. Ogg, a boatman who ferried people across the Floss, ferried a poor woman who turned out to be the Virgin Mother. For his kindness, she blessed his boat - which rescued many people during the great flood.

[Mr. Glegg](#) is kind-hearted and finds it hard to bear when his wife is at odds with someone, so the morning after the argument with Mr. Tulliver, he hopes that she will have calmed down overnight. She has not, instead picking a fight with him over him siding against her. He convinces her, though, that rather than taking her money back from Mr. Tulliver immediately, it would make more sense to wait until she has an opportunity to invest it in something better.

### ✓ Chapter XIII - Mr. Tulliver Further Entangles the Skein of Life

Mrs. Pullet comes the next day to petition for the Tullivers, and Mrs. Glegg says she will speak civilly to him if he does to her and won't give the neighbors any cause to gossip, and she feels quite pleased with herself for being so magnanimous. It thus infuriates her when she soon after receives a note from Mr. Tulliver telling her he will repay everything within a month. Mrs. Glegg does not visit again until the day before Tom leaves for school. Mr. Tulliver realizes he will need to find an investor to replace the 500 pounds he returned to the Gleggs. The last person he wants to borrow from is [Mr. Wakem](#), a lawyer, but fate turns out otherwise.



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- Analysis

The opening chapter of *The Mill on the Floss* frames the novel to come. The narrator introduces us to Dorlcote Mill with a tone of dreamy nostalgia; at the end of the chapter, we realize she is, in fact, literally dreaming. This device of an adult looking back fondly to childhood crystallizes one of the main themes of the book - nostalgia. The narrator considers the lives of Maggie and Tom from an adult perspective, both acknowledging and reveling the innocence of youth. This reverence for childhood innocence is emphasized by the last image of the book. Maggie and Tom die in an idealized version of their childhood - clasping “their little hands in love” and roaming “the daisied fields together” (422).

This frame works on several levels. The narrator speaks from about thirty years past the events of young Maggie and Tom on the Floss and continually focuses on the differences between a child’s worldview and an adult’s. The coming-of-age tale of the Tulliver children is both objective and subjective, portraying its hero and heroine in their emotional reality while exposing the childlike nature they will soon grow out of. We watch Maggie and Tom as they leave their childhood behind without relinquishing the ties created in this time; moreover, their behavior is continually dictated by those ties. The narrator helps to create intimacy both with the reader and the author. *The Mill on the Floss* is, by [George Eliot](#)’s own admission, her most autobiographical work. In writing the novel, Eliot is looking back at her own childhood - fictionalized through Maggie’s experiences - from an adult’s perspective. The reader is privy to the characters’ inner thoughts as well as the sometimes critical thoughts of the narrator of these thoughts.

This section is replete with the dramas of childhood that both reflect a certain nostalgia for this time preceding one’s loss of innocence, and foreshadow the great differences in character that will lead to Tom and Maggie intense disagreements in adulthood. We see in Maggie a strong drive to please Tom as well as a frequent inability to do so, either because she can’t understand him due to their vast differences in character - as in the case with the jam puff - or because she is moved by her strong emotions, which she has trouble controlling - as in the incident with Lucy and the mud. Tom’s martial sense of justice and order contrasts sharply with Maggie’s thirst for knowledge and experience. Tom often punishes his sister for her behavior, especially when her whims get the best of her, but the siblings love each other deeply and maintain a strong familial bond.

Many of the other themes of the novel are also introduced in the first book. Maggie’s inability to fit into a societal role because of the limitations placed on women is abundantly clear, even in her childhood. Mr. Tulliver is the character that loves and supports Maggie most throughout this section, yet even he wishes, on some level, that she were different. He says it’s “a bit of a pity” (11) that Maggie is “too 'cute for a woman” (12). Throughout this section, while the narrator and the reader appreciate her intelligence, almost all of the other characters are dismayed by her cleverness and her reluctance to behave and look the part of a proper girl.

Beyond just the issues of gendered limitations, this book gives the reader a strong sense of the setting which is hugely important to the novel as a whole, since it is Maggie’s struggle between her internal desires and what the community expects of her, between progress and tradition, that drives the plot. We learn that in St. Ogg’s, an “old, old” town (98), “it was a time when



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ignorance was much more comfortable than at present...and when country surgeons never thought of asking their female patients if they were fond of reading, but simply took it for granted that they preferred gossip” (101). We also learn that the Dodsons stand as the symbol of community and tradition, as “while no individual Dodson was satisfied with any other individual Dodson, each was satisfied...with the Dodsons collectively,” and one of their core values is their “faithfulness to admitted rules.” It is in this world that the distinctly individual Maggie will struggle to survive.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book II - School-Time*

#### ✓ Chapter I - Tom's "First Half"

Tom finds life at King's Lorton, where he is now the sole student to Mr. Stelling, unpleasant. The material is harder than anything he has faced before, and he has Mr. Stelling's undivided attention. Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, though, are both quite pleased with what they see when they leave him there. [Mr. Tulliver](#) thinks Mr. Stelling seems quite shrewd, and Mrs. Tulliver is pleased with [Mrs. Stelling](#)'s housekeeping.

A little while later Mr. Tulliver brings Maggie to visit Tom for a fortnight. Maggie quite enjoys getting a chance to follow along with Tom's lessons, and likes to show off her cleverness to Mr. Stelling, who enjoys her conversation. Mr. Stelling, though, says that girls are often quick and shallow, but aren't able to get deeply into anything, devastating Maggie, who has always taken pride in being called quick.

#### ✓ Chapter II - The Christmas Holidays

Tom comes back to Dorlcote Mill for the Christmas holidays, and is very happy to be home. However, Mr. Tulliver's bad mood dims the festivities for Tom. Mr. Tulliver is upset because Mr. Pivart, a neighboring farmer, adversely affects the mill's water power with his irrigation plans. He becomes more and more bitter towards Mr. Pivart and the lawyer [Mr. Wakem](#), who he believes is behind everything. Tom finds out Wakem's son will be joining him at Mr. Stelling's, but Mr. Tulliver doesn't mind since he likes the idea of Tom having the same advantages as his foe's son.

#### ✓ Chapter III - The New Schoolfellow

Tom returns to Mr. Stelling's after the holiday, where he meets [Philip Wakem](#). Due to an accident in infancy, Philip's spine is deformed, resulting in his hunchback. Philip is sensitive and intelligent. Tom feels awkward around the boy at first because of his appearance and Mr. Tulliver's hatred of his father, but he warms to the boy upon hearing tales of mythical and historical war figures. Each wants to make it clear that he is superior to the other in some ways - Philip in intellect and Tom in physical prowess.





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### ✓ Chapter IV - "The Young Idea"

Tom doesn't quite get over his negative feelings towards Philip, but he does enjoy his company when Philip's in a good mood - which is fairly inconsistent because of his irritable personality stemming from his sensitivity about his deformity. Tom also enjoys that Philip's presence leads to Mr. Stelling not focusing on him quite so intensely, so his schooling becomes less unpleasant.

This term also includes physical education for Tom taught by [Mr. Poulter](#), a former soldier. Tom convinces Mr. Poulter to bring his sword to King's Lorton. Tom's excitement drives him to interrupt Phillip's intense piano-playing in order to ask the boy to join him. In a rage, Phillip calls Tom stupid and Tom retorts that Mr. Wakem is a scoundrel. Tom goes back to Mr. Poulter, and bribes him to lend him his sword for a week.

### ✓ Chapter V - Maggie's Second Visit

The enmity caused by this fight between Philip and Tom continues, and they barely speak to one another. Maggie comes for another visit, and is quickly impressed with Philip's cleverness. Tom brings Maggie up to his room where he surprises her with his loaned sword. In trying to show off his moves, he drops the point on his own foot and promptly faints.

### ✓ Chapter VI - A Love-Scene

While the doctor is treating his injured foot, Tom is afraid to ask whether he will be permanently lame. As no one thinks to ask on his behalf and reassure him, Philip - knowing how difficult it would be for Tom to go through life deformed - brings him the news that he will soon be back to normal. This leads to reconciliation between the boys, and from then on Philip spends all his time outside of class with Maggie and Tom. As a result, Maggie and Philip become quite close and she promises to kiss him when she sees him again, though, he is disappointed that her affection stems from pity and not simply his intellect. Once Maggie leaves, Tom and Philip eventually cool to their original mixed feelings for one another.

### ✓ Chapter VII - The Golden Gates Are Passed

Maggie and Lucy go to boarding school at Laceham on the Floss. Mr. Tulliver finally enters into the long-threatened lawsuit with Mr. Pivart, who is represented by Mr. Wakem, increasing Mr. Tulliver's animosity towards him and his son. Maggie thus regrets that she'll probably never be able to be close with Philip again.

Tom, now 16, enters his last quarter at Mr. Stelling's believing his father's lawsuit to be approaching its end - and assuming his father will win. Maggie, now 13, comes to King's Lorton unexpectedly to tell Tom that Mr. Tulliver has lost the lawsuit, and as a result will lose the mill and all his land. Even worse, it seems he has fallen off of his horse and been gravely injured, recognizing no one but Maggie since the accident.



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- Analysis

In the first book, Maggie and Tom have plenty of small childhood traumas, and the narrator insists that though they may seem silly to an adult, to a child they are truly tragic as they occur before both experiencing and overcoming deeper adult trauma. A child's pain is constantly fresh and seemingly unending. However while these traumas predict later troubles, none is so grave as to force them out of childhood. In this second book we see the loss of innocence that creates the divide between child and adult - a father's ruin and illness. This is the moment that creates this nostalgic figure looking back in rending it from experiencing the child's perspective firsthand.

Right before Maggie comes to tell Tom about their family's misfortune, the narrator describes the promises of childhood as "void as promises made in Eden before the seasons were divided...impossible to be fulfilled when the golden gates had been passed" (155). This simile yokes childhood to Eden and adulthood to life after the fall; innocence is lost through knowledge and its punishment.

When we next see Maggie, a mere page later, "her young face had a strangely worn look" (156) as she has already been aged by the hardship that has befallen them; she is no longer in Eden. With Tom, we witness the actual moment of the fall, when he is "awakened" from his "boyish dreams" "with a violent shock" (158). The final paragraph of Book II explicitly states the Tulliver children have lost their innocence: "the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them" (159), using the same language and thus reinforcing the connection as in the Edenic simile a few pages earlier. Though we know their childhood had its dark moments, here there is a vast divide between its "sunshine undimmed by remembered cares" and "their new life of sorrow" (159). Eliot makes clear that growing up, for the Tulliver children at least, is not a gradual process but a violent rending of childhood and adulthood.

This volume also emphasizes the positive side of calamity - the bringing together of people. The narrator calls this "the gift of sorrow - that susceptibility to the bare offices of humanity which raises them into a bond of loving fellowship". (159) This occurs when the generally unpleasant Mrs. Stelling offers a sympathetic gesture to the children in the wake of their father's illness. Even Philip and Tom's relationship is briefly mended when Tom gets injured. We will soon see that this reaction is not universal - the Dodsons leave much to be desired in their support of the Tullivers after their calamities - but it is really the defining bond of Maggie and Tom's relationship.

The two siblings are so different in temperament that they often have trouble understanding each other's motivations and behaviors, and frequently have trouble getting along. In a smaller pattern in these first two books of their childhood, we see a cycle of fighting leading to mutual support in the face of the trouble that that fighting causes. When true tragedy strikes, they are immediately yoked together, going "forth together into their new life of sorrow" (159). Throughout the final paragraph, they are only referred to as "they," reinforcing this union that makes them "indistinct" from each other.



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This section also continues the disillusionment of Maggie in regards to her cleverness. Praised by her father for her wit and aptitude for learning, Maggie wholeheartedly believes that she is special and others will not fail to recognize her gifts. As in the episode in the gypsy camp, her excitement upon meeting Mr. Stelling falls short of expectations. Tom's barb that girls are unable to understand Latin and math is not refuted by his teacher; Mr. Stelling tells the Tulliver children that girls are capable of learning a little bit of every subject, but no more. Maggie is crushed that the same word her father used to praise her, quick, is used against her sex here. Maggie's opinion of herself butts up against society's perception.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book III - The Downfall*

#### ✓ Chapter I - What Had Happened at Home

Right after finding out he has lost the lawsuit, [Mr. Tulliver](#) turns his obstinacy towards planning to provide for himself and his family. He believes Mr. Furley, who owns the mortgage on the land, will be willing to buy the mill from Mr. Tulliver and keep him on as a tenant, and that his wife will be able to get a loan from the Pullets so that they won't have to give up their furniture. Still, he writes to Maggie to tell her to come home immediately, as he would find her presence comforting.

He goes the next morning to see his lawyer, Mr. Gore, to find out if Mr. Furley will buy the mill, but on his way he meets Mr. Gore's clerk, who has a letter from the lawyer for him. He reads it before continuing on his way, and learns that Mr. Furley, strapped for cash himself, had sold Mr. Tulliver's mortgage to [Mr. Wakem](#). Half an hour later, Mr. Tulliver's waggoner finds him lying unconscious by the roadside. When Maggie arrives, he has regained consciousness but not his senses; he only asks for the letter and "the little wench", and doesn't seem to recognize his wife or the doctor. Maggie's presence comforts him, but his condition does not improve.

Though the aunts and uncles oppose it, both Mrs. Tulliver and Maggie decide they need Tom at home, so Maggie offers to retrieve him from school. On their way back to the mill, Maggie tells Tom about the letter which was believed to have caused Mr. Tulliver's illness, and Tom tells Maggie that she must never speak to Philip again.

#### ✓ Chapter II - Mrs. Tulliver's Teraphim, or Household Gods

When Maggie and Tom arrive at the mill, a stranger is sitting in their father's chair. Maggie doesn't understand who he is, but Tom figures out that he is the bailiff who has come since they lost the mill. He finds his mother, who explains that all of their furniture and goods are going to be sold. Maggie's incredulous at her mother's behavior; she doesn't understand why Mrs. Tulliver is concerning herself with her possessions rather than her husband. Tom tells his mother that he will find a way to help.



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### ✓ Chapter III - The Family Council

The aunts and uncles, except [Mr. Deane](#), come to Dorlcote Mill to confer. Pullet and Deane offer to buy some of the Tullivers' things when they come up at auction, but only those that they actually want. Glegg thinks Mrs. Tulliver should stop worrying about her things, and think instead of the disgrace her husband has brought to the family.

Mrs. Glegg insists Maggie and Tom join the discussion, in order to be properly humbled. Tom - in a surprisingly mature tone - suggests that the aunts, rather than leaving money to Tom and Maggie in their will, advance it to them now so they can keep their furniture and the mill. Mrs. Glegg is quite offended by this, as she doesn't think she, who has saved her money, should have to pay for those who failed to be as smart with their own. [Mr. Glegg](#), more kindly, explains that with the massive legal debts, it's more important for the aunts and uncles to use their money to make sure the family is fed, rather than keeping their furniture.

Maggie, sick of hearing her father being insulted and blamed, says that the aunts should stay away from them if all they're going to do is berate her father and not even help their own sister. The aunts, of course, take this as confirmation that Maggie, as they always expected, will come to no good.

Mrs. Moss, having heard of Mr. Tulliver's troubles, arrives, and feels quite guilty that she can't afford to pay back the money Mr. Tulliver lent her family. Mr. Glegg points out that if Mr. Tulliver is made bankrupt, the creditors will force [Mr. Moss](#) to pay back the money anyway. Tom reports that Mr. Tulliver never wanted her to have to pay it back if it would have been a hardship, so Mr. Glegg recommends they destroy the note.

### ✓ Chapter IV - A Vanishing Gleam

Mr. Glegg, Tom, Maggie, and Mrs. Moss go to Mr. Tulliver's room to look for the note. The familiar sound of the lid of the chest crashing wakes Tulliver from his stupor, and he is for the first time himself again. He tells Tom he'll have to take care of Maggie and his mother, and agrees that they should destroy Mr. Moss's note. He says that everything that has happened is the law and Wakem's fault, and as he gets agitated again, he falls back into his stupor.

### ✓ Chapter V - Tom Applies His Knife to the Oyster

The next day Tom goes to St. Ogg's to ask his uncle Deane's advice about getting some kind of job. He believes that like his uncles Deane and Glegg, he should be able to make himself rich through labor. But Mr. Deane is rather discouraging, telling him it will take a long time and lots of work, and his education probably won't help him at all as he has learned no proper skill. Deane suggests Tom find a job on the wharf, but he is fearful of vouching for his nephew as he has yet to prove himself valuable. When he gets home, Maggie tries to comfort him, but he gets mad at her for always acting superior.



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### ✓ Chapter VI -Tending to Refute the Popular Prejudice against the Present of a Pocket-Knife

The sale of the household goods is finally over, and a familiar-looking young man comes to see Tom. He turns out to be [Bob Jakin](#), now 19. He has recently come into some money for preventing a fire at his job and he offers it all to Tom, who he has always remembered fondly for giving him his pocketknife. Tom and Maggie won't accept it, but thank him wholeheartedly.

### ✓ Chapter VII - How a Hen Takes to Stratagem

Mr. Tulliver seems to slowly be improving, while the sale of the mill is also moving forward. Mr. Deane finds Tom a temporary position in the warehouse and sets him up with lessons in bookkeeping. Mrs. Tulliver secretly plots to go to Mr. Wakem and reason with him in order to keep him from bidding on the mill so that Mr. Deane's company can get it at a reasonable price and keep Mr. Tulliver on as manager.

Telling Tom she is going to sell some pickles, Mrs. Tulliver goes to Mr. Wakem's office instead. She pleads with him not to buy the mill. Before their meeting, Mr. Wakem had no intention of buying Dorlcote, but Mrs. Tulliver's pleading convinces him that not only would it be a great investment, it would also be the perfect humiliation to inflict on Mr. Tulliver.

### ✓ Chapter VIII - Daylight on the Wreck

Mr. Wakem does indeed buy the mill, and tells all the aunts and uncles that he would be glad to have Mr. Tulliver as his manager once he is well. Mr. Tulliver, still ignorant of this, decides he is ready to leave his bedroom for the first time since his illness, but his family can't get him to understand that several weeks have gone by.

He goes downstairs and sees the absence of furniture, and the children explain everything to him - except they keep from him that it is Wakem who has bought the mill for fear of upsetting him further. Mrs. Tulliver comes in and tells him this last piece of information, pleading with him to take the job of manager, and he is beyond putting up a fight.

### ✓ Chapter IX - An Item Added to the Family Register

Although Mr. Tulliver abhors the idea of working for Mr. Wakem, he loves the mill and doesn't want to leave it. He also knows that if he did, he would have no way to survive without getting help from his wife's sisters, which he can't stomach. So he agrees to work for Mr. Wakem, although he vows that he will never forgive him for what he's done, and he gets Tom to vow the same by writing as such in the family Bible.

#### • Analysis

In the third book, we see the world after Tom and Maggie's loss of innocence. Though they are united by tragedy at the beginning of their father's illness, cracks in this union begin to form



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almost instantly as we see their childhood tendencies firming into adult characteristics. Tom's "natural inclination to blame" is solidified by "the natural strength and firmness of his nature...beginning to assert itself" (168-9). This leads to him implicitly blaming Mr. Tulliver for the family's current situation, which Maggie cannot stand: "Maggie hated blame: she had been blamed all her life" (169), and often by Tom.

This crack in their unity is brief, for right after their father's sad presence leads them to forget "everything else in the sense that they had one father and one sorrow" (169). Once again it is a moment of stark painful emotion that unifies them, but in the scene immediately preceding it we have seen how their differences are only becoming more pronounced in their adult characters, and so will cause more major divisions down the line.

The world after the fall is a bleak one, and not just because of Maggie and Tom's inability to get along for any period of time. Mr. Tulliver, though stubborn, prideful, and sometimes ignorant, is essentially a good man, and yet misfortune after misfortune fall upon him as he loses his home, his livelihood, his furniture, his sanity, and his pride. If to some extent his own behavior and litigiousness has led to this outcome, the consequences are most certainly not in proportion to his mistakes, and so the world seems a very bleak place indeed.

The situation should not be the direst, for his wife's relatives have plenty of money and are in a position to help the family; and yet, they do so only in the most minimal ways, buying at auction their sister's household goods that they wanted anyway, and doing nothing to protect the things she cares most about. Their failure of generosity does not mean they stay out of it, however; they are perfectly happy to heap blame on Mr. Tulliver and revel in their moral superiority, as they believe is evidenced by their material wealth. They care about the Tulliver's fall, certainly, but only in so much as it reflects on their family.

Maggie and Tom are on opposite sides concerning their relatives' plans for the Tullivers. While Maggie aims an outburst of vitriol at her aunts and uncles for showing up only to berate her father, Tom silently understands why money is not handed out: "Why should people give away their money plentifully to those who had not taken care of their own money? Tom saw some justice in severity; and all the more, because he had confidence in himself that he should never deserve that just severity." (200) Thus begins Tom's journey to seek a fortune for himself - though it does not run smoothly.

The Dodson clan's behavior contrasts sharply with that of Mr. Tulliver, who lends to his sister's family even to his own ruin. It contrasts even more dramatically with Bob Jakin's behavior when he offers Tom almost everything he has, just because of a remembered childhood kindness; certainly, he has no familial obligation to the Tullivers. There are these moments of kindness and light in this bleaker adult world that Maggie and Tom have been thrown into, but the lack of generosity of money or of spirit from their own family in the third book makes it clear how important money was to those of a certain class in this society, and how little true generosity was valued. Indeed, Maggie is admonished for her opinion that those with the means should offer help to those in need, no matter what is deemed socially-acceptable.



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### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book IV - The Valley of Humiliation*

#### ✓ Chapter I - A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet

The narrator takes a break from the story's action to present an interlude describing the contrast between the ruins of villages on the Rhone and of castles on the Rhine, and how the former feels small and oppressive in the way that the traditions of the older generation of Dodsons and Tullivers were oppressive to Maggie and Tom. The Dodsons were religious out of habit and tradition only and they strove to be honest and rich. Their kin were not to be left out of wills, but reproached severely if they were not a credit to the family. [Tom Tulliver's](#) spirituality was adrift, lost in the pursuit of common sense.

#### ✓ Chapter II - The Torn Nest Is Pierced by the Thorns

[Mr. Tulliver](#) is recovered enough to attend to business, so he acts as [Mr. Wakem's](#) manager, but is constantly depressed and focused only on saving enough of his wages to pay back the creditors that he still owes. Tom and Mrs. Tulliver both agree this is the honorable thing to do, so everyone does their best to help economize. Tom continues at his job and training in bookkeeping, saying very little in the short periods he is at home. Maggie's internal struggle continues as her passions and sense of self contrast greatly with the facts of her situation. She seeks an understanding of her suffering. Her mother tries to spare her hard work, though she is becoming more frail each day. The aunts and uncles visit only rarely, as their social ties are becoming strained in misfortune.

#### ✓ Chapter III - A Voice from the Past

[Bob Jakin](#) comes to give Maggie some books he bought for her because he remembered how upset she was when her family's books were sold. Maggie, who has been very unhappy, is grateful. One of these books is *Thomas a Kempis: Imitation of Christ*, which causes her to have a spiritual awakening. She believes that a renunciation of her personal desires is the answer to finding the peace and happiness that has eluded her. She takes up sewing in order to contribute to the family's fund; Tom disapproves. Maggie reads to her father, but her new-found faith is of no comfort to him. He dwells on how his situation will adversely affect Maggie's prospects and maintains his vow of revenge against Wakem.

#### • Analysis

A note on the title of Book IV: "Bousset" refers to Jacques-Benigne Bousset, a 17th century French bishop and theologian. He was a preacher in Louis XIV's court.

The fourth book of [The Mill on the Floss](#) is the shortest and least important to the plot, but it is very significant thematically. The first chapter of Book IV is the true center of the novel, with 29 chapters on either side of it, and this combined with its irrelevance to the plot of the story marks



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it as important thematically. Indeed, the narrator even says directly that “it is necessary that we should feel” the “sense of oppressive narrowness” that she highlights in the example of the Rhone ruins to understand the story of Maggie and Tom. The major importance of this chapter is that it ties two of the novel’s major themes together - that of progress versus tradition, and that of the communal versus the individual.

We have already seen examples of Maggie’s being torn between her individual desires and the needs of the community. She is intelligent and creative but her society does not reward her for these virtues, nor does it give her a place to use them, and this leads to her strive for “affection” because her intelligence is “unsatisfied” (148). But this affection needs to come from somewhere, so she has to find a way to please the community which is so ill-suited to her.

This dilemma, the narrator tells us in this chapter, is what drives human progress--”the onward tendency of human things” who “have risen above the mental level of the generation before them” (222). The stifling nature of the older generation’s obsession with “whatever was customary and respectable” (223) drives Maggie to strive for something greater, but she is still “tied by the strongest fibres of” her heart to her family, and this is the source of all the conflict within her nature.

The narrator also makes it clear that, though this is but one family’s story, seemingly insignificant in the scheme of human history, “we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great” (223). These are the tragedies that are “of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation, and leaves no record” (163), for they are the tragedies of “millers, and other insignificant people” (162), but in writing this very story, and in making the reader care deeply about the characters suffering these indignities small and great, the narrator has proven to us that such tragedies do merit telling, and it becomes all the more powerful when she emphasizes that this is but one example of what happens “in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths” (223).

In the rest of this chapter, we see Maggie’s attempts to reconcile this interior struggle and achieve happiness through renunciation of all desire. Eliot makes it clear this will not be the answer - the narrator tells us directly that “renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain” but “she had not perceived...that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly” (237). And, indeed, her renunciation is not true renunciation, for “she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity” into it, losing “the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act” (239). Both the fact that Maggie is forced into such an extreme set of behaviors, and the fact that we can tell clearly that she is doomed to fail to find peace from them, emphasizes the great strains that her society has put on her, and how deeply her intelligence has doomed her.

Maggie's (albeit fleeting) faith, which is centered around true inspiration, thirst for knowledge and desire to understand her predicament, is contrasted with the spirituality of the Dodsons and the Tullivers. In St. Ogg's, religion is practiced out of respect for tradition rather than faith or belief. The Dodsons especially follow the basic rites - baptism and last rites - because it is





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expected of them; last rites are equally as important as the proper ham for the funeral. The reading of the will should also bear no surprises - either in reporting the deceased's financial worth or in the inheritances doled out to family members. As seen in their treatment of Mr. Tulliver, the Dodson way of caring for kin is severely admonishing their faults while making sure to leave them what is traditionally owed. Like their faith, the Dodson familial spirit is a hollow gesture. The Tullivers, on the other hand, respect the church but put their faith in common sense. Over the years, Tom's faith has dissipated and even Maggie's fervent beliefs are of no comfort to him. Even in her beliefs, Maggie does not follow the accepted traditions.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book V - Wheat and Tares*

#### ✓ Chapter I - In the Red Deeps

[Mr. Wakem](#) comes on one of his usual visits, but this time he brings Philip with him. Maggie (now 17), seeing them approach, hurries upstairs so that she won't have to meet Philip in front of their fathers. Once she thinks they have left, she goes outside to walk and ends up coming upon Philip, who was waiting for her.

Maggie is pleased to see Philip, but tells him that though she wishes it wasn't necessary, she will have to renounce his friendship because of their families. Philip protests that it wouldn't harm anyone for them to see each other every once in a while in secret, and that it would do him great good. Maggie tells him she must think about it so that she doesn't make the wrong decision.

#### ✓ Chapter II - Aunt Glegg Learns the Breadth of Bob's Thumb

Tom's determination at his job does not go unnoticed by [Mr. Deane](#), who is very pleased with his progress. By his second year he has already gotten a raise, but he still puts all but what he needs for necessities into paying back his father's debts. Against his personality, he sacrifices all social activities and pleasure, for he fears that would lead to extra expenses. The aunts and uncles are all impressed with the growing evidence that Tom is more like a Dodson than a Tulliver.

[Bob Jakin](#) tells Tom he could speculate in some trading with his savings, so Tom asks [Mr. Tulliver](#) if they might try to multiply some of what they have put away - only 116 pounds after two years of saving all they could. Mr. Tulliver is reluctant, having been unlucky speculating in the past, and Tom, seeing how unhappy the idea makes him, decides to ask [Mr. Glegg](#) to invest in the prospect and let Tom keep some of the gains until he has enough to invest himself.

Tom brings Bob to explain the idea, and Mr. Glegg is pleased with both Bob and the plan. Mrs. Glegg, offended at being left out, says she'd like to participate too, provided she can trust she won't lose her money. Bob manages to talk her into buying some of his wares as well. Together the Gleggs lend Tom fifty pounds, which he successfully invests, and by the time of Maggie's first meeting with Philip, he has already amassed 150 pounds for himself.



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### ✓ Chapter III - The Wavering Balance

Maggie meets Philip again with the intention of telling him that she has decided they must give each other up as friends. She does so, and he asks only for one last conversation. Tom offers to be Maggie's tutor, to supply her with the books and knowledge she craved before renunciation. Maggie can't say yes. Before they part, he asks if he is forbidden to ever walk in that area where they might meet by chance, without it being secretive. She does not forbid it.

### ✓ Chapter IV - Another Love-Scene

Almost a year later, Maggie goes to meet Philip in the woods, and it is clear they have been meeting regularly. Philip declares his love for Maggie, who says she can't imagine loving anyone else more than she loves him. However, she also insists that they can't have a future because she would never risk hurting her father, and his father would also disapprove.

### ✓ Chapter V - The Cloven Tree

Mrs. Pullet stops by Dorlcote Mill to visit the Tullivers. She casually mentions having seen Philip about in the woods, and Maggie blushes aggressively in response, which Tom notices. Combined with the knowledge that Maggie had been often out in the woods, he becomes convinced that she is having secret meetings with Philip.

The next day he confronts Maggie about it, and she doesn't deny it. He makes her tell him all the details, and then says she must vow to never have any contact with him again, or Tom will tell their father everything, breaking his heart and very likely causing him to lose his mind again. Maggie agrees to vow only that she will never contact Philip without Tom's knowledge.

Tom takes Maggie to the woods where he confronts Philip, accusing him of taking advantage of Maggie's ignorance and loneliness caused by their circumstances. Tom also says many cruel things about his deformity. Philip cares only for what Maggie has to say, and she explains that she has agreed to only contact him with Tom's knowledge in order to protect her father, which he accepts.

Philip leaves, and Maggie berates Tom for being so cruel to him, especially about his deformity, and tells him that he is always reproaching others because he has not enough imagination to realize that there are better aims and ways of living than his own. They fight and separate, and Maggie is distressed primarily by how cruel Tom's insults to Philip were, but she is also a slight bit relieved that she will be forced to be apart from him.

### ✓ Chapter VI - The Hard-Won Triumph

Three weeks later, Tom comes home to the mill in a particularly good mood and tells his father that he has 320 pounds in the bank, which, combined with what Mr. Tulliver has put aside, is enough to pay back all of their debts. The family is thrilled, and Mr. Tulliver tells Tom he hopes



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he will buy back the mill one day, when he has made his fortune. Maggie puts aside her anger with Tom and celebrates.

### ✓ Chapter VII - A Day of Reckoning

The next day, Tom and Mr. Tulliver have a lunch with all of the creditors to repay them. Everyone is very impressed with Tom. On his way home, Mr. Tulliver sits high in his saddle for the first time in years. He comes upon Mr. Wakem just leaving the mill and tells him that he will no longer work for him. Mr. Wakem tries to ride by him, but Mr. Tulliver spurs his horse towards him, and Mr. Wakem's horse throws him off. Before Mr. Wakem can get up, Mr. Tulliver jumps off his horse and attacks him.

Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver run over from the house, and Maggie holds Mr. Tulliver back. Luke helps Mr. Wakem home, and Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver help Mr. Tulliver, who suddenly feels very faint, back to the house. Early the next morning, Mr. Tulliver calls for his children. He tells them he is dying, and asks Tom to try to get the mill back, and to take care of his mother and be good to Maggie, and to never forget the harm that Mr. Wakem did to them - despite Maggie's insistence that he forgive Mr. Wakem.

#### • Analysis

Maggie's suppressed desire is a major feature in the fifth book. She has borne her renunciation easily by taking pleasure in it itself, but once Philip makes a new appearance in her life and reminds her of all she has given up - art, music, literature, good conversation - the true struggle begins. It is intense enough that the narrator says this interior struggle is actually outwardly visible: "one has a sense of uneasiness in looking at her - a sense of opposing elements, of which a fierce collision is imminent" (243). Though she is slow to admit how strong her desires still are, we hear them voiced through Philip, who sees the inevitable failure of her choice of pure renunciation when she is one who desires so fiercely.

Tom stands in stark contrast. He, too, renounces much; though he has "a very strong appetite for pleasure" (252) Tom does not indulge in any social interaction in order to focus solely on paying back his father's debts. The difference, though, lies in the lack of struggle for him, for Tom - unlike Maggie - is "a character at unity with itself". (252) Tom's actions are motivated by his own moral compass but also the concrete aim of revenge against Wakem while Maggie's renunciation and friendship with Philip are enacted for more abstract notions - happiness of others. Although this is largely a result of their different characters, gender also plays a major role. For "Maggie's life struggles had lain almost entirely within her own soul" while Tom grapples "with more substantial obstacles...gaining more definite conquests" (251), an option not available to Maggie because of the restricted options available to women. Maggie has nothing concrete to struggle for, and so the battle remains within her, where it can never be won.

Both she and the narrator make it explicit that this is a gendered issue. The narrator tells us that this distinction "has been since the days of Hecuba...inside the gates, the women...watching the



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world's combat from afar, filling their long, empty days with memories and fears: outside, the men, in fierce struggle with things divine and human...losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the hurrying ardour of action." And when Tom criticizes Maggie's behavior, she makes it clear that his sacrifice is different than hers: "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world" (282). Tom is able to have unity of action and desire because the community provides a clear path for him to follow.

Maggie's internal struggle in this section is particularly interesting because it makes explicit that it is not so simply a case of selfish desire conflicting with what is best for the community. She is dismayed by her father and her brother's intense hatred of Philip because of his father's actions, and she believes that though it would be wrong to hurt her family, their hatred is in itself wrong. This complicates the issue, especially as Maggie feels that her affection would do Philip (and, ultimately, herself) much good, but she is also smart enough to know that "if we only look far enough off for the consequence of our actions, we can always find some point in the combination of results by which those actions can be justified" (268), and she doesn't want to be guilty of excusing behavior that is in fact wrong.

This serves as a microcosm for the setting of Maggie's general internal conflict, for while it is not so clear to the narrator and the reader - both reflecting on an earlier time than the characters inhabit - it is clear that the limitations placed on women in Maggie's day were not right. Thus in struggling to act in a way appreciated by the community, and in feeling the strong pull of tradition against progress, Maggie is smothering her own individuality so that she can fit into what was seen as a woman's role. Though Maggie believes she is striving to subvert the selfish for the greater good, this comes at the steep price of her own interests and desires.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book VI - The Great Temptation*

#### ✓ Chapter I - A Duet in Paradise

Two years later, Mrs. Deane has died and Mrs. Tulliver - who had come to take care of her sister in her illness - is now living at the Deanes'. Lucy tells [Stephen Guest](#) that her cousin Maggie is leaving the school where she has been teaching since [Mr. Tulliver's](#) death and coming to stay at Lucy's. Stephen isn't pleased, thinking this means he won't get any time alone with Lucy any more. They are in the stage of courtship where each is certain of the other's regard, although no declarations have yet been made.

#### ✓ Chapter II - First Impressions

Lucy tells Maggie about her feelings for Stephen. She asks if Maggie feels as negatively toward Philip as Tom does because he is Stephen's good friend and Lucy wants to invite him to sing with them. Maggie tells her that she always liked Philip, but before she has a chance to explain that even so, she can't see him, Stephen arrives, interrupting them.



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Stephen and Maggie are immediately struck by each other. Lucy, worried only that they wouldn't get along and relieved to see that they do, doesn't suspect anything. After talking for a while, Stephen takes the cousins on a boat ride. He reflects that he finds Maggie's character quirks quite interesting even though he usually doesn't like anything eccentric in a woman.

The Pulletts visit the Deane house and lament Maggie's lack of proper evening wear. Mrs. Pullett promises to give the girl some of her old dresses.

### ✓ Chapter III - Confidential Moments

Lucy comes to Maggie's bedroom as she gets ready for bed and asks her what she thought of Stephen. The subject of Philip comes up and Maggie, swearing Lucy to secrecy, tells her what had happened between them - and that Tom will still forbid any contact. Lucy determines that she will find a way for Maggie and Philip to marry.

### ✓ Chapter IV - Brother and Sister

Maggie goes to see Tom, who is lodging at [Bob Jakin](#)'s house. While waiting for Tom to arrive home, Bob tells Maggie that he's worried about Tom, who seems always melancholy and hardly ever socializes. He mentions a puppy that Tom made a lot of fuss to get, and Maggie knows he means Lucy's puppy, and so realizes Tom may be in love with Lucy.

Tom arrives, and Maggie tells him that she wants his permission to see Philip, as Lucy wishes. Tom tells her that if she decides to marry Philip, she'll have to give Tom up forever, but that he will allow her to see Philip in company at Lucy's, even though he doesn't have any faith in her.

### ✓ Chapter V - Showing that Tom Had Opened the Oyster

[Mr. Deane](#) tells Tom that he has done a very good job, and, as the world moves faster now than when he was coming up in it, he and Mr. Guest want to offer Tom a share in the business. Tom is grateful, but he has his heart on returning to Dorlcote Mill. He brings up the idea that the firm might again consider buying his father's mill; since the new caretaker is currently mismanaging the mill, Tom figures [Mr. Wakem](#) might be willing to part with it. Mr. Deane says he'll bring it up with Mr. Guest, the head of the business, and they'll look into it.

### ✓ Chapter VI - Illustrating the Laws of Attraction

Maggie is incorporated into Lucy's social life, and so for the first time experiences a young lady's life. Her beauty is very much admired by the people of St. Ogg's, and her deficiencies in social customs and lack of coquetry mean that the other young women aren't threatened by her, so she is welcomed.

Stephen comes to see Lucy more and more, and although his attentiveness towards her seems to be growing, he and Maggie are more and more entranced by each other, although they hide it well. One evening, when Stephen knows Lucy to have a dinner engagement, he comes by under the guise of leaving music for his sweetheart. But he and Maggie are both overcome by being



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alone together, and after he leaves Stephen tells himself he must not trust himself to be alone with her again.

### ✓ Chapter VII - Philip Re-enters

Philip, having returned from a trip, comes to see Lucy and Maggie for the first time. Maggie tells him that she has spoken to Tom, and he has released her from her vow to relinquish contact with Philip. They speak for a little in private before Stephen arrives and Lucy rejoins them.

Maggie and Stephen are at first stiff with each other, and then very kind, and though Lucy thinks nothing of it, Philip quickly grows suspicious.

Before dinner, Mr. Deane asks Philip a few questions about how his father is enjoying running his farms. Lucy finds this odd, so questions her father about it when they are alone. He explains that they want to try to get the mill back from Wakem and to restore Tom in his father's place. Lucy convinces her father to let her tell Philip, because she thinks he will help them make it happen.

### ✓ Chapter VIII - Wakem in a New Light

Lucy quickly finds a time to tell Philip, and he develops a plan. He admits to his father that he has always loved Maggie, who tells him he can marry her if he likes, but it will be the end of their relationship. Philip says this is impossible since he has been raised to no profession would be thrust into poverty. Mr. Wakem storms out in anger, but returns later in the evening and agrees to give them his blessing. Philip brings up the question of the mill, and Mr. Wakem agrees to that as well, so long as he doesn't have to have any direct dealings with Tom.

### ✓ Chapter IX - Charity in Full-Dress

At the church bazaar, Mr. Wakem approaches Maggie's stand and is quite pleasant to her. Stephen witnesses this, and soon after notices that Philip has perched himself across the room where he has a clear view of Maggie, leading him to believe that there is some sort of history between Maggie and Philip. From his seat, Philip has also seen the exchange between Stephen and Maggie, and is quite convinced that there is something between them.

Though Lucy told Maggie that Mr. Wakem would support her marrying Philip and would sell the mill to Guest & Co., Maggie announces that she has accepted a new governess position which begins soon. She explains that she can't give up Tom to marry Philip, and she fears Tom won't change his mind about that for a very long time - if ever.

### ✓ Chapter X - The Spell Seems Broken

Maggie and Lucy go to a dance at the Guests' home, Park House. Stephen is proud of himself for paying no attention to Maggie, until she starts dancing, and then he cannot stop himself from approaching her and asking her to walk with him in the conservatory. They share a look in which



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both reveal their feelings, but when Stephen can't stop himself from kissing her arm, Maggie runs off, furious.

The next morning, while Maggie is waiting for her mother so they can go to visit Mrs. Moss, Philip visits. He asks her if there is a chance they will ever be like they were in the past, and she says that she cannot break her ties to Tom, but that is the only thing holding her back. Philip is largely relieved, although he still has some suspicions.

### ✓ Chapter XI - In the Lane

Maggie has been at her aunt Moss's four days when Stephen suddenly shows up, saying he has a private message for her. When they are alone, he declares his love for her and apologizes for his conduct, but tells her he is being tortured enough by his own feelings and she has to forgive him. She does, and he says that they should marry, that that is the only way either of them will ever be happy, and that it would be cruel for them to marry Lucy and Philip, feeling the way they do.

She tells him that she loves him, too, but that if she married him, she would forever be haunted by the suffering they had caused, and so because they love each other, he must help her to resist him. He acquiesces, but asks for one kiss before they part, which she gives him.

### ✓ Chapter XII - A Family Party

After her visit with Mrs. Moss, Maggie goes next to stay with Mrs. Pullet. In the brief interlude preceding this, Mr. Wakem's manager of Dorlcote Mill had been drunkenly thrown from his horse and was gravely injured, such that Mr. Wakem turned the property over to Guest & Co. even sooner than expected, and Tom becomes the manager.

Everyone gathers at the Pullet's farm to celebrate the news, and Lucy encourages Mrs. Pullet to donate some linens to Tom's new home at the mill. When it's time to leave, she insists on sitting with Tom so she can talk to him about Maggie and Philip. She explains how Philip convinced his father to sell the mill, expecting that to convince him to forgive Philip, but instead he is resolute, insisting that Maggie can do as she pleases but he will never have any relationship with the Wakems.

### ✓ Chapter XIII - Borne Along by the Tide

Maggie returns to Lucy's less than a week later. Maggie manages to avoid Lucy in the mornings by going on promised visits to Aunt Glegg and helping Mrs. Tulliver prepare to move to the mill, but in the evenings Lucy insists she spend time with her. Stephen resolves to go on a trip until Maggie leaves, but he can't hold himself to it, instead going to Lucy's as often as possible to see Maggie as much as he can in what little time they have left.

Lucy notices that Maggie is particularly melancholy, but she assumes it is because Tom won't let her marry Philip, and so still suspects nothing. In reality, Maggie is much quieter than usual



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because she is fighting an inner battle between her desire to marry Stephen - whom she loves - and live in happiness and comfort, and her desire to do the right thing and not hurt Lucy and Philip, who are both very important to her.

Philip pays a visit, and Lucy entreats him to come the next morning to row her and Maggie on the river. Philip is not completely satisfied by Maggie's word that she would marry him if not for her brother, watches Stephen and Maggie closely, and becomes almost convinced that there is some kind of mutual regard and understanding between the two of them.

He is so upset by this belief that the next morning he sends Stephen a note saying he is too ill to row the ladies, so asks Stephen to go in his stead. Lucy had contrived to get herself and the rest of the household out of the way so that Maggie and Philip could be alone in the boat, so when Stephen arrives, Maggie is the only one home.

They go out in the boat, each in a daze, until Stephen stops rowing and Maggie realizes they have passed their expected stopping place. Stephen proposes that they elope. Maggie at first is furious, but seeing how hurt Stephen is by her refusal, she yields. They ask to be taken aboard a larger vessel heading to Mudport, pretending to be a married couple. Maggie goes into a trance-like state of acquiescence, enjoying Stephen's nearness and care for her, and not struggling with her conflicting desires for happiness and to do what's right.

### ✓ Chapter XIV - Waking

Maggie wakes on the boat from intense dreaming, and realizes she has done an irrevocable wrong to those dearest to her. Though she despairs to cause Stephen pain, she realizes she must leave him, because though she has already caused pain to those she loves, she doesn't feel she deserves to get the joy out of that pain that marrying him would give her.

Stephen wakes, and though she doesn't say anything about it, he worries from the look in her eyes that she has changed her mind. When they finally near Mudport, she tells him that this is indeed the case - they must part. Stephen tries and tries to convince her, but she is resolved that she would be unable to marry him and live with herself. She must choose unhappiness rather than continue to hurt those to whom she is bound. She leaves.

#### • Analysis

In the sixth book, Maggie's inner struggle between doing what's right for the community and satisfying her own desires comes to a head. Though she had earlier chosen to see Philip against her family's wishes, she believed that those wishes were based on a hatred that was wrong and unfair, and she believed that no one would ever find out, and so would not be hurt by her choices. Plus, Maggie believed, because of his urging, that Philip's happiness depended on their meeting. In this book, however, her (short-lived) decision to elope with Stephen clearly lacks justification - she knows Lucy and Philip will be deeply hurt, and she knows that neither Philip's





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expectations of her nor Lucy's of Stephen are predicated upon nothing wrong or unfair. Thus here she truly, if only very briefly, chooses her own desires over the community's.

Even before she meets Stephen, Maggie has started to find self-renunciation deeply trying - "she had slipped back into desire and longing: she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder" (302-3). And as Philip had predicted in their earlier meetings, the unnaturalness of renunciation for her character only makes her desires stronger once she allows them to blossom.

Eliot sets up the relationship between Stephen and Maggie such that she really does have two viable options, and she is forced to make a choice based on her competing desires to remain deeply connected to her past and tradition, and to follow her desire forward. Stephen is not officially engaged to Lucy, nor is Maggie to Philip, though both have made certain implicit and explicit promises. This means that, though both characters would be deeply hurt if Stephen and Maggie chose to marry, their relationship would be in violation only of personal feelings; ultimately, societal distaste would not be devastating and would ebb in time, and there is no legal barrier. Thus, Maggie has a choice to make.

Choices, in *The Mill on the Floss*, aren't easy. They are an important part of the world the new generation is growing into, and they will lead to progress and the rise of the importance of the individual, but they come with heavy responsibility. Tom is always decisive, making choices quickly according to his narrow set of principals, and never looking back. This is clearly effective for him, as he fulfills all of his father's dreams for him, and manages to get back to their home, even if at the cost of his personal happiness.

Maggie, on the other hand, is chronically indecisive. She often makes her decisions in moments of high passion - as when she cuts her own hair, for example - and then almost immediately after regrets the choice that she made. The biggest choice of her life - deciding to stay in the boat with Stephen - she seems to make in a trance, and again, is met with immediate regret. Once again, though, the damage has already been done. She does not want to elope because of the hurt it will cause Philip and Lucy, but that hurt has already happened by her not reappearing with Stephen when she should have. In choosing to go back to St Ogg's, in spite of the ruin it will cause her and the happiness she is giving up for it, she shows that she finds the burden of decision-making to be too great. High-spirited and intelligent though she is, she would rather go back and disappear into the communal and traditional, rather than remain an individual.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss Summary and Analysis of Book VII - The Final Rescue*

#### ✓ Chapter I - The Return to the Mill

Five days after Stephen and Maggie first disappear, Tom is back at Dorlcote Mill. Thanks to the news that [Bob Jakin](#) saw Maggie and Stephen get off a boat together, he knows there has been no accident. He sees Maggie approaching, and can tell immediately that she is not married, confirming his worst fears.



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Maggie tells him that she has come to him for refuge, and to confess everything, but he tells her that she will never have a home with him for she has disgraced their family and deceived and deeply hurt those who cared about her most. He tells her he will support her if she needs it, but she can never enter his home. Mrs. Tulliver, overhearing this, tells Maggie that she will go with her. Not daring to seek shelter with any of the aunts, they go to Bob Jakin's. Bob happily takes them in, and tells Maggie that he and his wife named their baby after her.

### ✓ Chapter II - St. Ogg's Passes Judgment

Because Maggie returns to St. Ogg's unmarried, everyone assumes Stephen chose not to marry her, and that she is fallen, so she is condemned by the town. Despite a letter Stephen writes to his father in which he assumes all of the blame, disapproving gossip spreads through the parish. Stephen traveled on to Holland from York and thus stays away from Lucy for the time being. Maggie lives in a state of constant guilt and despair, not expecting to ever feel happiness again, hoping only to never give into another such temptation.

Maggie goes to see [Dr. Kenn](#), and tells him everything. He says that he admires her instinct to come back to her roots and that it is a very Christian ideal, but that in this case, he fears that the town has condemned her beyond the actual evils of her case, and she might be much happier at a distance. Maggie says she can't bear to cut herself off, and she thinks her best chance of showing Lucy how sorry she is is to stay in St. Ogg's. Dr. Kenn promises to help her any way he can.

### ✓ Chapter III - Showing That Old Acquaintances Are Capable of Surprising Us

Mrs. Glegg, when Maggie first disappears, is sure she is dead, for she cannot believe the alternative, and she scorns Tom for doing so so easily. When Maggie returns unscathed, she doesn't emerge from her bedroom until she hears of the arrival of Stephen's letter, which she feels gives her enough ground to defend Maggie to anyone who insults her. She tries to talk to Tom about it, but even in the face of Stephen's letter largely absolving Maggie, he is irresolute and only believes the worst in his sister because of her history of indulging whims.

Mrs. Tulliver goes to see Mrs. Glegg, who tells her that Maggie is always welcome under her roof and she will defend her from those who speak ill against her. Maggie is very grateful to hear this, but still firmly wants to be independent, and doesn't feel prepared to see anyone besides her mother and Dr. Kenn just yet.

Mrs. Tulliver has also been to see Lucy, who has heard Stephen's letter, and seems to be regaining her health. Maggie is desperate to hear news of Philip, but Dr. Kenn hasn't heard anything verifiable about him and her mother can't find out anything. Finally, she gets a letter from him in which he tells her that he saw what was happening between her and Stephen and he knows that she tried to resist it for Philip's sake as much as she could. Ultimately, he admires her and is better for the chance to have loved her, and does not want her to feel any pain for his sake. Indeed, he will always love her.



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### ✓ Chapter IV - Maggie and Lucy

Dr. Kenn tries to find employment for Maggie, but all the women of St. Ogg's are still set against her. Finally it becomes clear that the only option is for him to hire her himself as governess to his children, which she gratefully accepts. This leads the townspeople to speculate on the relationship between the two of them. Stephen's sisters, having been dismayed by Stephen's attachment to Maggie, report these rumors to him by mail.

Maggie wants desperately to see Lucy, but knows that she can't go to her house, and Lucy isn't well enough to be seen by chance anywhere in the town. Lucy sneaks out one night, however, to come and see Lucy, and they embrace. Lucy tells her that she is going away with Stephen's sisters in a few days, but when she returns and has regained her full strength, she'll be able to see Maggie whenever she wants to. They embrace tearfully.

### ✓ Chapter V - The Final Conflict

Dr. Kenn hears of the rumors spreading about his relationship with Maggie, and finally feels that because of his moral responsibility to his parishioners, he can't give them any reason to doubt him. He releases Maggie and tells her that he thinks she must move to another town. She goes home and, feeling very weary, tries to mentally prepare herself for such a change. It rains constantly, so she is stuck inside.

A letter from Stephen arrives. He has, unbeknownst to anyone, returned to Mudport, and he pleads with Maggie to let him come to her. She feels, suddenly, that her temptation has only just begun, for after the two months of constant pain, the joy his love offers feels even more powerful than it did when she first renounced it, and she is so pained by the despair in his letter that she wants more than anything to relieve him of it. She comes very close to telling him to come, but holds out, instead burning his letter and deciding to write to him in the morning to say goodbye forever.

Suddenly she realizes that the house is flooding. She runs upstairs to wake Bob and his family, and they get into the boats. Hers is swept away, and she knows she must try to make her way to the mill to help her mother and Tom. She finally makes it to the mill, where she finds Tom is alone - Mrs. Tulliver has gone to the Pullets' - and he climbs into the boat with her.

They row towards the town to check on Lucy, but soon the current brings huge debris towards them, and they have no chance to get out of the way. The mass goes right over their boat, which rises again soon after, but without Maggie and Tom in it. They drown together.

### ✓ Conclusion

Five years later, St. Ogg's looks much like it did before the flood, although there are some scars that remain. Besides Maggie and Tom, everyone survived the flood. Both Stephen and Philip still visit Maggie's tomb; Stephen eventually marries but Philip remains solitary.



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- Analysis

Since *The Mill on the Floss*'s original publication, almost all critics have felt dissatisfied with the seventh and final book. Throughout the rest of the novel, Eliot certainly foreshadows that Maggie will die by drowning, and water and flooding is frequently alluded to. So it may not be unexpected, but still many feel that in drowning Maggie in the middle of her most emotional struggle, Eliot leaves too many questions unanswered and prevents Maggie from having to see through the results of her decisions.

Maggie's death comes soon after she has decided to, again, renounce Stephen and the happiness he could bring her. Yet she herself feels that "her real temptation had only just begun" (416), and though she symbolically burns Stephen's letter, the reader is not convinced that, faced with having to leave St. Ogg's and return to lonely, unglamorous work, she would not have ever relented, especially as she seems to have gained Philip and Lucy's forgiveness. Thus by killing her, Eliot allows Maggie to escape the grueling difficulty of following through on such a decision.

Although in some ways it is true that Maggie's death leaves certain of the novel's themes feeling unfulfilled, her death does ultimately feel appropriate in that it highlights how difficult it was for a woman of her intelligence and creativity to thrive or survive at all in the very narrow, claustrophobic world of a small town like St. Ogg's in that time period. Though her death begins with a decisive action - getting into the boat and steering towards Dorlcote Mill to save her family - in the end she is utterly powerless as the current - like in her elopement with Stephen - carries her swiftly to her doom.

The ending also seems to resolve Maggie and Tom's troubled relationship, but this too feels insufficient to many critics. It is abrupt and a repetition of the pattern common throughout the novel - in the face of great trouble and tragedy, Maggie and Tom are overcome with their love for each other. Yet in every other instance in the novel, this mutual regard would soon fall apart in the face of their very different characters and desires, and it is unclear whether their final union would have held if they had survived long enough to test it.

In addition, the final image of the siblings finds them "living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together" (422). This idealized vision of childhood rings clearly false to the reader, who better remembers incidents when, for example, Tom told Maggie he didn't love her, or ignored her while he played with Lucy, or laughed at her for cutting her own hair. Though they did have happy moments of love and reconciliation in their childhood, they were fleeting, and so imagining them in such idealistic terms makes the whole resolution feel oversimplified.

This does, however, reinforce the theme of looking back on the past with nostalgia which is important in the novel. It is also not the only time the narrator glosses over pains of childhood to imagine it as edenic - at the end of the second book when Tom and Maggie have their loss of innocence, the narrator similarly idealizes what came before the loss. This idealization could be part of what makes the past's ties so strong for Maggie, to the extent that she comes back to St.



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Ogg's and chooses to remain there even though to do so is to cut herself off from almost all society and opportunities to support herself.

In light of the autobiographical nature of *The Mill on the Floss*, this *deus ex machina* ending (where a writer resolves a problem for his or her characters' lives through a contrived action) provides closure to Eliot's relationship with her own brother, which was never resolved in her lifetime.

### Ø *The Mill on the Floss* George Eliot's Own Words about *The Mill on the Floss*



Because [George Eliot](#) became well-known before she published *The Mill on the Floss*, many of her own words about the book survive, giving a fuller picture of her intentions with the novel, as well as her regrets and her general humility. In a letter to her publisher enclosed with an early draft, she wrote, “At present, I have no hope that it will affect people as strongly as Adam [Bede] has done,” but as she continued, she developed “high hopes” for its reception. Eliot found herself deeply attached to her characters, and a companion wrote that she was “getting her eyes redder and swollener every morning as she lives through her tragic story.” Upon completion of the novel, Eliot wrote that Maggie’s “sorrows have clung to me painfully.”

After the publication, Eliot was magnanimous in response to criticism. Most of the negative reactions to *The Mill on the Floss* were to the second half of the book--the suddenness with which



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the tragedies occurred, the relationship between Maggie and Stephen, the *deus ex machina* quality of the ending. In response, Eliot would agree that “the tragedy is not adequately prepared,” because she “was beguiled by love of [her] subject in the first two volumes,” so the rest of the novel suffered “a want of proportionate fullness.”

She also said that her primary purpose in writing the novel was to illuminate the struggle between generations and, though this was a major part of her own life, “in *The Mill on the Floss*, everything is softened, as compared with real life.” Her own experience, she said, “was worse.” In looking back on her conflicts with her father, however, she blames her own youthful ignorance and egotism. Additionally, she was surprised to see that readers thought she didn’t like the Dodsons or Tom, as she was very fond of all characters, especially Tom--thus, though these characters were based on her brother and aunts, she was not trying to hold them up to public ridicule.