



✚ The Mill on the Floss Character List

Ø Narrator

The narrator, unnamed, narrates both as an individual remembering Dorlcote Mill as it was in Maggie's lifetime, and as an omniscient narrator who clearly knows more than any individual could of the thoughts and motivations of the characters. The latter style is predominant, and his or her use of the first person is rare. He or she has a sense of humor which is very satiric. The narrator is reflecting on the lives of the Tullivers from thirty years after Tom and Maggie died.

Ø Maggie Tulliver

Maggie is the very intelligent, very conflicted protagonist of *The Mill on the Floss*. When the novel begins, she is young, clever, imaginative, adoring of her brother, and always getting into trouble. As she grows up, she regularly feels conflicted between acting how her extended family and community would want her to, and following her own desires. The strong pull of both means she is often indecisive, and though she tries to find peace in renouncing all desire - for education, music, love, literature - in the end this only makes her feelings stronger. Even when she chooses based on her desire, though, as when she starts to elope with Stephen, she ultimately feels the pull of her family and community too strongly, and can't bear to follow through on gaining happiness at their expense.

Ø Tom Tulliver

Tom is Maggie's older brother by four years. He is athletic, prideful, obsessed with justice, and usually rather unforgiving. He has very little book-smarts but he is practical, determined, and willing to sacrifice everything to regain his family's honor. His success comes at the expense of real human companionship and his insistence on justice and distrust of Maggie drives a wedge between them until just moments before they both die.

Ø Mr. Tulliver

Mr. Tulliver is Maggie and Tom's father. At the beginning of the novel he is the proprietor of Dorlcote Mill, which has been in his family for generations. He is hot-tempered, stubborn, and litigious, although also intelligent, though uneducated, and very generous and loving towards Maggie and his sister, Mrs. Moss. He is proud of Maggie's intelligence, although he isn't sure what use it will be to a girl. He is also prideful, especially when he comes in conflict with his wife's very opinionated sisters, and this along with his tendency to "go to the law" leads to him losing all of his assets, including his mill and farm. He believes that all of his troubles are caused by lawyers, particularly Mr. Wakem, and paying back all of his debts and punishing Mr. Wakem become his two obsessions after he loses everything until the moment he dies.

Ø Mrs. Bessy Tulliver

Mrs. Tulliver is Maggie and Tom's mother. She is a blond, comely woman, who is very simple, and though she loves her children, she greatly favors Tom and wishes Maggie were blonder and simpler herself. She is very proud to be a Dodson and is particularly devastated by the loss of her household goods and furniture when Mr. Tulliver goes bankrupt. She shows herself to have more depth than originally expected towards the end of the novel, when she leaves Tom and the mill to live with Maggie in her shame.



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Ø Philip Wakem

Philip is the son of Mr. Wakem. Due to an accident in infancy, he is crippled and though he is very intelligent and talented, he feels bitterness over physical inferiority. He is a student with Tom at Mr. Stelling's, and though he never comes to be good friends with Tom, he is immediately drawn to Maggie and ends up loving her for his whole life. Though he is clever, very well educated, and a talented artist, he believes that his breadth of interests and talents mean that he is not particularly talented at any one thing.

Ø Stephen Guest

Stephen is Mr. Guest of Guest & Co.'s only son. When he appears in the novel he is 25, handsome, rich, clever, and conceited. He plans to be a politician. He is very good friends with Philip and tacitly, although not explicitly, engaged to Lucy, who he thinks will be a charming wife. When he meets Maggie, however, he is overcome and quickly falls in love with her. He does not appear in the novel until after Mr. Tulliver's death.

Ø Lucy Deane

Lucy is Maggie's cousin. In childhood, she is the epitome of everything Maggie is not - pleasant, quiet, passive, doll-like and never troublesome. As an adult, she is pretty, kind, and generous, although she has never had any true difficulty to test her spirit except for her mother's death and, eventually, Maggie and Stephen running away together.

Ø Mrs. Jane Glegg

Mrs. Tulliver's oldest sister, Mrs. Glegg is Tom and Maggie's least favorite relative when they are children. Although she and her husband are well-to-do, she takes a great deal of pride in frugality. Like all the Dodsons, and probably more so than anyone else, she believes firmly in pride of family. Though she is not very generous with the Tullivers when Mr. Tulliver loses everything, going so far to say that it is a judgment from God, she is later one of Maggie's strongest defenders after her scandal with Stephen.

Ø Bob Jakin

Bob is a childhood friend of Tom Tulliver's from a poorer family, until Tom thinks Bob tried to cheat him and can't forgive him for it. Later, after Mr. Tulliver loses everything, Bob comes to offer the Tullivers the award he earned for putting out a fire. Though they don't accept, they greatly appreciate this offer, and he becomes a friend of the family again, eventually housing both Tom and Maggie at different times. He is a successful peddler and leads Tom to his first speculation opportunity, which eventually allows him to repay all his father's debts. He is kind and generous, and particularly taken with Maggie - he names his daughter after her.

Ø Mr. Deane

Mr. Deane, Mrs. Deane's husband, is a successful businessman with Guest & Co. who is thought of very highly in St. Ogg's. He gets Tom his first job, and ends up being a mentor towards him as he rises in the world of business. Like the other uncles, he made his fortune through hard work over a long period of time and was not educated.

Ø Mr. Glegg

Mr. Glegg is Mrs. Glegg's husband. He is a retired wool dealer, and doesn't take anything very seriously now that he is done working. He is an avid gardener in his retirement. He married Mrs. Glegg because he made his fortune by slowly saving money, and he thus liked her thriftiness and



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thought they would be compatible. Though he is cheap, it is in a kind-hearted and evenhanded way - he would go out of his way to save a few dollars for anyone, not just himself.

Ø Mrs. Sophy Pullet

Mrs. Pullet is Mrs. Tulliver's favorite sister. She is very prone to crying and seems to be a hypochondriac, going frequently to the doctor and obsessed with everybody's physical ailments.

Ø Mrs. Susan Deane

Mrs. Deane is Mrs. Tulliver's sister and Lucy's mother. Mrs. Glegg resents her for being too showy with money, for Mr. Deane becomes more and more successful throughout the novel, and Mrs. Deane is not as subtle with her finery as Mrs. Glegg believes a Dodson should be. Mrs. Deane dies while Maggie is away teaching after Mr. Tulliver's death.

Ø Mrs. Gritty Moss

Mrs. Moss is Mr. Tulliver's sister. She married a man with no capital and had eight children, and so ends up being rather a burden on Mr. Tulliver. She is patient and loving, and Maggie's only aunt who treats her kindly in her youth.

Ø Rev. Walter Stelling

Mr. Stelling is an Oxford graduate and a clergyman whose desire for the finer things means his expenditures outweigh his income, so he begins to take on students to supplement this. He is well-educated, self-confident, and ambitious, though he doesn't have the flexibility of approach that would make him a good teacher for Tom. He gives the impression of shrewdness to the uneducated Mr. Tulliver and his parishioners, but other clergymen believe him to be dull.

Ø Dr. Kenn

Dr. Kenn is the clergyman of St. Ogg's. Although he seems cold, he is well-respected by those who realize he is deeply generous. He gives most of his income to charity and takes good care of his parishioners, including Maggie even after her scandal, which happens around the same time that his wife dies.

Ø Mr. Wakem

Mr. Wakem is the lawyer who represents Mr. Pivart in Mr. Tulliver's case against him, who embodies all the worst aspects of the legal profession in Mr. Tulliver's mind. In reality, he is shrewd, somewhat vindictive, and selfish, but he is a very good father to Philip.

Ø Mr. Pullet

Mr. Pullet is Mrs. Pullet's husband, a gentleman farmer with "a great natural faculty for ignorance." He is very unassuming.

Ø Mr. Moss

Mr. Moss is Mr. Tulliver's brother-in-law. He is a poor farmer with a knack for losing money, and so is greatly indebted to Mr. Tulliver, who opposed his sister's marriage to him.

Ø Luke Moggs

Luke is the head miller at Dorlcote Mill. He is very kind to Maggie and Tom, and generous and loyal to the entire Tulliver family.

Ø Mr. Riley

Mr. Riley is an auctioneer and appraiser, and a good friend of Mr. Tulliver. He is highly educated and good-natured, and passionately recommends Mr. Stelling to Mr. Tulliver as a



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teacher for Tom, although he really doesn't know much about him. When he dies fairly early in the novel, he leaves a lot of debt, which Mr. Tulliver inherits from him.

Ø Kezia

Kezia is the Tulliver's housemaid. She is loyal, good-hearted, and bad-tempered, and stays with the family even after they can't afford to pay her.

Ø Mrs. Stelling

Mrs. Stelling is Mr. Stelling's young wife. She is haughty and expects Tom to help her take care of her daughter, so Tom dislikes her, even though he quite likes the baby.

Ø Mr. Poulter

Mr. Poulter is the schoolmaster of King's Lorton who is employed at Mr. Stelling's to drill Tom on his bearing. He fought against Napoleon's army, and has many stories - one doubts their veracity - about his prowess in doing so.

Ø Mrs. Prissy Jakin

Prissy is Bob's wife, a tiny woman who is very kind to Maggie.

Ø Lizzy Moss

Lizzy is Maggie's younger cousin who Mrs. Moss believes will be clever like Maggie.

Ø Mrs. Moggs

Mrs. Moggs is Luke's wife.

Ø Mr. Turnbull

Mr. Turnbull is the Tullivers' doctor.

The Mill on the Floss Themes

✓ Loss of Innocence

Loss of innocence is a major theme in *The Mill on the Floss*. From the beginning of the novel, the narrator makes it clear that there is a strong demarcation between living in childhood, as Maggie and Tom are doing, and looking back on it, as she is doing. With sentences like, "Childhood has no forebodings; but then, it is soothed by no memories of outlived sorrow" (72), or "Very trivial, perhaps, this anguish seems to weather-worn mortals who have to think of Christmas bills, dead loves, and broken friendships" (56), the narrator repeatedly calls to attention the great distance between the perception of children and the perception of adults.

When Mr. Tulliver loses all his assets and his senses, it becomes clear that the divide between child and adult is not necessarily slowly created over time, but that, for Maggie and Tom at least, it is created in a single episode of rending - a loss of innocence. With powerful imagery, Eliot shows Maggie and Tom going "forth together into their new life of sorrow," "the thorny wilderness," as "the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them" and they will "never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares" (159). The knowledge of their family's great hardships to come is "a violent shock" that separates them permanently from their edenic - in comparison, at least - childhood.



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✓ Communal versus Individual Interests

The theme of communal versus individual interests, which could also be called duty versus desire, is of central importance to *The Mill on the Floss*, and is essentially what drives the plot. Maggie, with her unusual looks, her intellectual prowess, her driving curiosity, and her passionate desires, does not naturally fit into the community of St. Ogg's at all. Her family continually fears what will become of her, she is often misunderstood and almost never taken seriously, and she is certainly never given the praise for her cleverness that she so desires. To fulfill her individual desires, then, is to break out of any role the community is willing to offer her, and so to go against it.

Though Maggie yearns for this at times, in the end she is far too bound to her past, her family, and the broader community to be willing to relinquish it. Though it would seem that marrying Stephen offers her the best opportunity for happiness, she chooses to leave him and, she believes, all future chances of happiness to return to St. Ogg's. Once there, even the understanding [Dr. Kenn](#), who appreciates her Christian values in staying close to her roots, tells her it would be best for her to go, but still, she stays. When she dies, it is in a boat on a current taking her towards home, so this becomes her final choice, and she has ultimately given her life to stay in the community; she loses her individuality in the most profound sense.

✓ Gender Disparity

The gender disparity in the world of *The Mill on the Floss* is vital to understanding Maggie's story. She is an intelligent and fascinating woman, but the world she is born into offers nothing for her to do with her talents; women are assumed to be more interested in gossip than reading, adherence to custom is valued more highly than intelligence or knowledge, and whether women are even capable of amassing a depth of knowledge is a subject of debate.

In this world, Maggie's many talents do nothing for her except make her feel all the more dissatisfied with what is available. This context is crucial to understanding why choice is so difficult for her, why she is pulled so strongly between duty and desire. Her desires would lead her to a masculine pursuit, which is not available to her in any meaningful way and would require a great sacrifice of duty. But duty offers little of interest to someone with her creativity and sharpness, and so is a much harder choice than it is for, for example, [Lucy Deane](#), who can play the appropriate feminine role perfectly. Maggie's struggles, then, which the author so directly associates with progress, are not just for the general progress of culture away from the previous generation's comfort with "ignorance" (101), but progress towards greater freedom of possibility for women like Maggie - women like [George Eliot](#).

✓ The Difficulty of Choice

Throughout *The Mill on the Floss*, the individual is pitted against the community, especially in reference to [Maggie Tulliver](#). To make the decision to inhabit her individuality would be, in many ways, the more difficult path, as the book shows us that with the freedom of individuality comes the responsibility to make choices, and for Maggie, at least, such decisive action is never easy.



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If Maggie were to subjugate her will to the greater community, choices become meaningless - she just has to do what everyone does, follow tradition and custom, and so the only choices she would have to make are minor and insignificant because they are within these set bounds.

If instead Maggie were to assert her individuality, as she tries to at various points, the choices she makes define who she is, how she will live, how her community will see her, and in some cases, how those around her will live. Though Maggie is deeply intelligent and passionate and has clearly defined desires, she finds this nearly impossible. She tries to choose between Philip and Tom, fails, and in trying to have both, hurts them both. She tries to choose between Stephen and the community, regrets her decision, but in regretting it after the fact, finds she has already alienated most of the community. The difficulty Maggie finds in making choices, sticking to them, and facing the consequences, leads her to subjugate her will to the community completely.

✓ Renunciation and Sacrifice

Renunciation and sacrifice are at the heart of the major actions of Maggie and Tom's lives. After his father's losses, Tom dedicates his life to repaying his father's debts, and then to getting the mill back from [Mr. Wakem](#). To this end he gives up all socializing so that he won't be tempted to spend any of the money he makes, and he works so hard that when he gets home every night, he is too tired to even converse with his family. He thus essentially sacrifices human interaction to regain his family's honor.

Maggie also becomes fixated on renunciation, but whereas Tom sacrifices pleasure for a specific, concrete aim, Maggie's renunciation is a spiritual attempt to find peace in a world ill-suited to her. Maggie finds the weight of the "conflict between inward impulse and outward fact, which is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature" (225) too much to bear, and so "renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain" (237).

Because her sacrifice has no active realm in which to act, as opposed to Tom's, she finds it much harder to adhere to. She lapses from it repeatedly, but in the end, returns to it in her plan to finally renounce a chance for love and happiness with Stephen. Though at that point, the damage has already been done and to marry him would likely not cause any more harm, she does not allow this for herself, because she believes renunciation is right for its own sake, regardless of what is being renounced or the potential consequences.

✓ Nostalgia

Tom and Maggie are cut off from their childhood by their loss of innocence caused by their father's troubles, but that does not mean the ties created in their childhood are severed. The narrator repeatedly makes it clear that "old inferior things" always have a special meaning when you grow up with them, and almost all of her passages describing the mill and the surrounding area are riddled with nostalgic musings. The nostalgic frame for the past makes the loss of innocence all the more poignant, for the present can never be as good as the nostalgic past, since even the reality of the past was not as good as one remembers.



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Nostalgia is important not just in that it distinguishes the adult looking back on childhood from the child, but in that it provides a counterbalance to the human “striving after something better and better in our surroundings” (127). The “deep immovable roots” created by the past and made more strong by nostalgia allow for progress that is tempered and controlled, progress that looks to promote the community where these nostalgic ties are located, and not just the individual.

✓ Progress versus Tradition

The tension between progress and tradition is central in *The Mill on the Floss*. In many ways, it is embodied in Maggie. The pull she feels between her individual desires and her communal duties is very much a pull between progress and tradition, as those communal duties are highly traditional, and her individual desires are far more suited to a more progressive world. There is a clear distinction between generations in the novel, and, especially because the narrator is looking back from a more progressive present to the traditional past, it is clear that the novel’s setting, “a time when ignorance was much more comfortable than at present,” is on the verge of transformation.

But the novel, though it presents a world which is unfit for Maggie, still does not want uninhibited progress. The “striving after something better and better in our surroundings” is essential, “but heaven knows where that striving might lead” without the tempering influence of tradition. It is easy to imagine that Maggie might have been much happier had she followed through on her elopement with Stephen, ignoring what tradition asks of her, but had she, she would not have had her final reconciliation with Tom, nor given her mother and Mrs. Glegg the opportunity to show how staunchly they would defend her in a time of trouble. Dr. Kenn believes the world is moving away from adhering to the obligations created by tradition with the rise of the individual over the communal, but Maggie is an example of someone with individual desires who still adheres to the duties her past has created. Though she is unable in the end to find the right balance, her struggle is emblematic of the greater societal pull between progress and tradition.

✚ The Mill on the Floss Quotes and Analysis

- 1) “Plotting covetousness, and deliberate contrivance, in order to compass a selfish end, are nowhere abundant but in the world of the dramatist: they demand too intense a mental action for many of our fellow-parishioners to be guilty of them. It is easy enough to spoil the lives of our neighbours without taking so much trouble: we can do it by lazy acquiescence and lazy omission, by trivial falsities for which we hardly know a reason, by small frauds neutralised by small extravagances, by maladroit flatteries, and clumsily improvised insinuations.”



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This passage highlights Eliot's interest in realism. Though she could easily have given Mr. Riley motives of self-interest for recommending Mr. Stelling so strongly to the Tullivers, she insists that that kind of behavior belongs "in the world of the dramatist" only. This world, then, is implicitly not the "world of the dramatist." It is instead a realistic world where lives are spoiled through "small frauds" and "lazy acquiescence," not by grand acts of evil. The fact that, rather than just show Mr. Riley's motives to be realistic, the narrator makes this explicit declaration, shows how much *The Mill on the Floss* means to draw the reader's attention to its naturalness, to how likely there is to be a Maggie or a Mr. Tulliver in any small town at the time.

- 2) "These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows - such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass today, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love."

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There are multiple examples of passages like this throughout the novel, where the narrator takes a break from the action to dwell on the importance of childhood memories on adult perception of a place. This kind of nostalgia is essential, for although we usually hear it through the narrator's voice, it helps to explain why Maggie is willing to give up so much potential happiness with Stephen, and then later freedom from judgment, to stay in the town where she was raised.

The connection in this passage specifically with nostalgic memory and "language," "the mother tongue of our imagination," is especially interesting because since the publication of *The Mill on the Floss*, it has been Eliot's writing about Maggie's childhood that most awed critics, and it was also this section that was seen as most autobiographical. Thus for her, at least, it appears to be true that these nostalgic memories attach a great power to her expressive ability.

- 3) "The two slight youthful figures soon grew indistinct on the distant road - were soon lost behind the projecting hedgerow.

They had gone forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them."



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This moment closes the second book of *The Mill on the Floss* and immediately follows their loss of innocence, represents the end of Maggie and Tom's childhood that is the focus of the first two books. Though they are described as "youthful" as they walk away from the Stellings, they soon grow "indistinct." "Indistinct" here has meanings that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Most literally, Tom and Maggie are walking out of the Stellings' field of vision, but it is also that the "youthful figures" are disappearing, because they are no longer youthful.

Finally, they are growing "indistinct" from one another, as is emphasized by the fact that for the rest of the chapter they are described solely as "they," never as Tom, Maggie, or Tom and Maggie. This illustrates the unity that Tom and Maggie find in hardship again and again. It is when tragedy strikes that they are best able to break through the great differences of character that divide them throughout the novel.

- 4) "And Mr. Tulliver, you perceive, though nothing more than a superior miller and maltster, was as proud and obstinate as if he had been a very lofty personage, in whom such dispositions might be a source of that conspicuous, far-echoing tragedy, which sweeps the stage in regal robes and makes the dullest chronicler sublime. The pride and obstinacy of millers, and other insignificant people, whom you pass unnoticingly on the road every day, have their tragedy too; but it is of that unwept, hidden sort, that goes on from generation to generation, and leaves no record."

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In Aristotle's classical definition of the tragic hero, a defining characteristic is that "he must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous" (*Poetics*, Section XIII). In this passage, the narrator argues that though Mr. Tulliver is not such a "very lofty personage," his story has its "tragedy too." Eliot was a realist writer concerned largely with families and small towns in England, with "millers, and other insignificant people," and here her narrator is making it clear that they have stories worth telling, too, even if they aren't "far-echoing." There is also some of meta, or self-reflexive, play here, since she says that Mr. Tulliver's tragedy is the kind that "leaves no record," which, of course, is not true in this case since she has written it into a novel. But the larger point is that there are real men, not just characters, like Mr. Tulliver, and their stories are tragic, and abundant, even when they go unnoticed and unremarked on.

- 5) "Maggie in her brown frock, with her eyes reddened and her heavy hair pushed back, looking from the bed where her father lay, to the dull walls of this sad chamber which was the centre of her world, was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty



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for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it.

No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it.”

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This passage really emphasizes that Maggie’s passions and desires would not, on their own, be a problem for her, but because of the world she exists within, they lead to “painful collisions.” She is in her home, but her soul has no “sense of home,” for this world is so far from all the wonderful things she is capable of imagining. Again and again St. Ogg’s is connected with dullness, and here the “dull walls” block out what is “beautiful and glad” and allow for no “dreamy music.”

This stark contrast between what Maggie desires and what she has really drives home that Maggie’s being blocked out of the male world of work and power is not just painful because of the powerlessness, but because it means being locked into a world of unceasing boredom. Tom can leave every morning and challenge himself, while Maggie is stuck in “this sad chamber” with the relics of their happier childhood, and, thanks to having to auction off her books, without even any imaginary worlds to escape into. This makes it easier to understand how difficult it is for her to withstand the temptation to spend time with Philip and his vast knowledge, even at the risk of hurting her father and brother.

- 6) “I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness; but it is necessary that we should feel it, if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie - how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths.”

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This is a key thematic passage in *The Mill on the Floss*. It tells the reader that the pull Maggie feels between her imagination, her desires, the world she wants to live in, and the community she



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was born and raised in and has deep emotional ties to, is not just a personal conflict, but represents the driving force of progress from generation to generation. The quote illustrates that this story of one family - particularly, one young woman - and its lessons are important far beyond that limited scope.

This also makes it a more emotionally powerful story because the oppression Maggie feels, the desires she has to smother in order to remain part of the community she is “tied to by the strongest fibres” of her heart, are, we learn, felt “in every town, and by hundreds of obscure hearths.” This is not one woman’s tragedy, but a generation’s, and even more: “many generations.” It is not just sad though, for the pain of the struggle is intricately linked to “the onward tendency of human things,” and so allows us to progress from “a time 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) to a better future.

7) “She thought it was part of the hardship of her life that there was laid upon her the burthen of larger wants than others seemed to feel - that she had to endure this wide hopeless yearning for that something, whatever it was, that was greatest and best on this earth. She wished she could have been like Bob, with his easily satisfied ignorance, or like Tom, who had something to do on which he could fix his mind with a steady purpose, and disregard everything else.”

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This passage highlights Maggie’s unfitness for the time and world she is born into. It is not just her father’s troubles and tragedies that make her life hard, it is her powerful desire and intellect. And because she knows that desire and intellect cannot be satisfied or utilized meaningfully in this world of tradition, gossip and feminine powerlessness, she doesn’t even bother to wish for their satisfaction. She wants wholeness, she wants to stop feeling so torn between her desire and her reality, but the only way she can imagine to achieve this is to not have such desire, so that is what she wishes for. She wishes that “she could have been like Bob” with small desires that can be “easily satisfied,” or like Tom, who, because he can do male labor, can escape or suppress any such desires with distraction.

8) “Apparently the mingled thread in the web of their life was so curiously twisted together, that there could be no joy without a sorrow coming close upon it. Tom was dejected by the thought that his exemplary effort must always be baffled by the wrong-doing of others: Maggie was living through, over and over again, the agony of the moment in which she had rushed to throw herself on her father’s arm - with a vague, shuddering foreboding of wretched scenes to come.”



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Maggie and Tom's distinct reactions in this passage - which occurs just after Mr. Tulliver attacks Mr. Wakem - are very emblematic of their overall differences in character. The siblings are not completely distinct here, or on opposite sides of a spectrum - both are deeply unhappy, and their unhappiness was precipitated by the same cause, Mr. Tulliver attacking Mr. Wakem.

What makes each sibling unhappy about their situation, though is completely different and utterly emblematic of their respective characters. Tom is unhappy because, as he sees it, his accomplishments have been tarnished "by the wrong-doing of others" yet again. He is incapable of ever seeing a mistake in his own actions, but he is constantly looking to blame others, and Mr. Tulliver, in shaming the family right after they finally regained some standing all thanks to Tom, has given him ample cause.

Maggie, on the other hand, is unhappy because of her deeply felt emotions regarding the pain of seeing her father performing a violent act. It is not shame over what the public will think, or embarrassment about how it reflects on her or her family that causes her grief, but the horror of seeing someone she loves commit a terrible act. In addition, the power of her imagination adds to the problem - she cannot stop imagining it in enough clarity to keep her stuck in the moment. Maggie had never fully accepted her family's blind hatred of the Wakems - especially in light of her understanding of Philip - and this act of her father's is dreadful in that it perpetuates that hatred even after the debts are paid. Maggie's empathizes with both her father and Mr. Wakem.

9) "The boat reappeared - but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together."

422

This moment, when Maggie and Tom lose their lives, is also the moment when they finally achieve union with each other, and are able to re-enter those "golden gates" of their childhood that had "forever closed behind them" (159). Though this is a sentimental and moving image, it also rings slightly false to the reader, since we never saw Tom and Maggie clasping "their little hands in love." Though they certainly had moments of happiness and tenderness together in childhood, far more frequent were moments of bitter anger, recrimination, and hurt. This reminds the reader of Maggie's first memory is standing on the banks of the Floss with her brother. It is a lovely image, but the narrator has laid out the lens through which we should view scenes of childhood memory - memories are sweetened by nostalgia and are often re-lived more harmoniously than lived.

In addition, the siblings have had moments of reconciliation like this before, almost always in the face of grave tragedy, and in no other instance were they permanent. This instance is, because it



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is their death, both necessarily fleeting and completely permanent. Had they somehow survived, though, it seems unlikely that they could have maintained their unity and peace, just as the reader doubts whether Maggie could have truly relinquished Stephen, or more broadly, happiness, had she had to continue to live with the decision.

- 10) “Nature repairs her ravages - but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred; if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair.”

422

The Mill on the Floss is very much the story of one town, one family, one woman, but at intervals throughout the novel, Eliot extends the story's lessons to the greater world, and explains that tragedies like Maggie's and Mr. Tulliver's are repeated in every generation, in every small town, at countless hearths. This passage reinforces that idea in bringing up the idea of renewal, of the natural world's cyclical nature, of progress - "new growth."

Yet she doesn't want us to forget that, though "nature repairs her ravages," each individual, though they may be part of a larger community that continues on, can never be replaced. Though new trees may grow, "the trees are not the same as the old." They might live a similar pattern to those "uptorn trees," but they are not the same trees, just as another young, intelligent, spirited girl might grow up in St. Ogg's and feel much the same internal conflict that Maggie did, but she would not be Maggie. Thus though the survival of the community is worth celebrating, the loss of every individual is a tragedy.

The Mill on the Floss Glossary

a priori

"from the earlier" (Latin)

alacrity

eagerness

approbation

commendation; praise

aquiline

curved, like an eagle's beak

ascetic

practicing strict self-denial out of spiritual discipline

assiduous

showing great perseverance

Bedlam



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a place, state, or scene of uproar and confusion; chaotic

bonhomie

good cheer; friendliness

calenture

delirious fever

capricious

whimsical; wayward; fickle

catechising

instructing by asking questions

cavil

disagreement over petty or unnecessary objections

chiaroscuro

"light-dark" (Italian); having an interplay between dissimilar qualities

compendious

concise and comprehensive

croft

small area of farmland next to a house

da capo

a musical term meaning "from the beginning" (Italian)

disburthened

unburdened

dolorous

sad; mournful

dubitative

doubtful

eidolon

apparition (Greek)

fallacious

false; faulty; untrue

fetish

a token or object that is imbued with mystical power

franz

frenzied

fromenty

a boiled wheat porridge that is sweetened and spiced

hagiographer

a person who studies saints

Harpagons

misers

ignomy

disgrace; shame; dishonor

imperious

arrogant; domineering



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impetuous

passionate, vehement

implacable

unable to be soothed

importunate

persistent

imputation

negative attribution

incubus

a demon that sexually preys on sleeping women

insipid

lacking flavor or depth

irascible

easily angered

jejune

naive; simplistic

jocosely

cheerfully

loquacity

talkativeness

maladroit

unskillful; awkward; tactless

mangled

pressed

Manichaeism

An ancient gnostic religion that centered on the struggle between the good, spiritual world of light and the evil, material world of darkness.

murrain

a pestilence or plague affecting domestic animals

nash

soft, delicate

nidus

a nest; cavity for spores

obfuscated

made obscure, darkened

obloquy

strong public criticism or abuse

Old Harry

the devil

opprobrium

harsh criticism or censure

oracular

enigmatic



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paroxysm

sudden violent attack

perspicacity

penetrating discernment

pillory

a punishment device made of wood or metal that binds head and hands

poultice

a medicinal porridge used on inflamed skin

propitious

favorable

prosaic

banal; unromantic

Providence

divine guidance

remonstrance

protest, objection

Rhadamanthine

inflexibly just

sagacity

wisdom

salutary

wholesome

sanative

healing or curative

sang froid

"cold blood" (French); self-possession

sanguinary

bloody, violent

Saturnalian

from *Saturnalia*, an ancient Roman festival where, through role-reversal, slaves were treated to honors typically bestowed on their masters

sententiously

tersely

sonorous

loud

supercilious

haughty; arrogant

supernal

heavenly; celestial; divine

suretyship

a security; a pledge or formal promise made to secure against loss, damage, or default

tumulus

ancient grave mound



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vicissitude

a change of fortune or circumstance - typically unwelcome

vituperative

bitter and abusive

withy

willow