

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

GEORGE ELIOT



EDITED BY CAROL T. CHRIST

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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George Eliot

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
BACKGROUNDS AND
CONTEMPORARY REACTIONS
CRITICISM

Edited by

CAROL T. CHRIST

SMITH COLLEGE

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Preface

The Mill on the Floss was begun in 1859 and finished and sent to the publisher on March 21, 1860. It was published April 4, 1860 in three volumes. It went through four editions during George Eliot's life (two in 1860, a third in 1862, and a fourth in 1878).

Following Gordon Haight's example in the Clarendon *Mill on the Floss*, I have prepared this text from a stereotyped edition of the novel, which was set from the plates of the 1862 edition, the last for which Eliot made revisions. For a full account of the novel's textual history, see the Clarendon edition (Oxford University Press, 1980), edited by Gordon S. Haight. George Eliot's original manuscript is in the British Library.

I wish to thank my research assistants, William Cohen and Laura Green, for their help with this project. In preparing the notes, I am also indebted to the past editors of the novel—Gordon Haight, A. S. Byatt, who prepared the Penguin edition, and Sally Shuttleworth, who has prepared an edition for Routledge.

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The Text of
THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

THE
MILL ON THE FLOSS

BY
GEORGE ELIOT

In their death they were not divided

STEREOTYPED EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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Book First

BOY AND GIRL

Chapter I

Outside Dorlcote Mill

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace. On this mighty tide the black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal—are borne along to the town of St Ogg's, which shows its aged, fluted red roofs and the broad gables of its wharves between the low wooded hill and the river brink, tinging the water with a soft purple hue under the transient glance of this February sun. Far away on each hand stretch the rich pastures, and the patches of dark earth, made ready for the seed of broad-leaved green crops, or touched already with the tint of the tender-bladed autumn-sown corn.¹ There is a remnant still of the last year's golden clusters of beehive ricks rising at intervals beyond the hedgerows; and everywhere the hedgerows are studded with trees: the distant ships seem to be lifting their masts and stretching their red-brown sails close among the branches of the spreading ash. Just by the red-roofed town the tributary Ripple flows with a lively current into the Floss. How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets! It seems to me like a living companion while I wander along the bank and listen to its low placid voice, as to the voice of one who is deaf and loving. I remember those large dipping willows. I remember the stone bridge.

And this is Dorlcote Mill. I must stand a minute or two here on the bridge and look at it, though the clouds are threatening, and it is far on in the afternoon. Even in this leafless time of departing February it is pleasant to look at—perhaps the chill damp season adds a charm to the trimly-kept, comfortable dwelling-house, as old as the elms and chestnuts that shelter it from the northern blast. The stream is brimful now, and

1. *Wheat.*

lies high in this little withy² plantation, and half drowns the grassy fringe of the croft³ in front of the house. As I look at the full stream, the vivid grass, the delicate bright-green powder softening the outline of the great trunks and branches that gleam from under the bare purple boughs, I am in love with moistness, and envy the white ducks that are dipping their heads far into the water here among the withes, unmindful of the awkward appearance they make in the drier world above.

The rush of the water, and the booming of the mill, bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond. And now there is the thunder of the huge covered waggon coming home with sacks of grain. That honest waggoner is thinking of his dinner, getting sadly dry in the oven at this late hour; but he will not touch it till he has fed his horses,—the strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts, who, I fancy, are looking mild reproach at him from between their blinkers, that he should crack his whip at them in that awful manner as if they needed that hint! See how they stretch their shoulders up the slope towards the bridge, with all the more energy because they are so near home. Look at their grand shaggy feet that seem to grasp the firm earth, at the patient strength of their necks, bowed under the heavy collar, at the mighty muscles of their struggling haunches! I should like well to hear them neigh over their hardly-earned feed of corn, and see them, with their moist necks freed from the harness, dipping their eager nostrils into the muddy pond. Now they are on the bridge, and down they go again at a swifter pace, and the arch of the covered waggon disappears at the turning behind the trees.

Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again, and watch the un-resting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too: she has been standing on just the same spot at the edge of the water ever since I paused on the bridge. And that queer white cur with the brown ear seems to be leaping and barking in ineffectual remonstrance with the wheel; perhaps he is jealous, because his play-fellow in the beaver bonnet is so rapt in its movement. It is time the little playfellow went in, I think; and there is a very bright fire to tempt her: the red light shines out under the deepening grey of the sky. It is time, too, for me to leave off resting my arms on the cold stone of this bridge. . . .

Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair, and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking about, as they sat by the bright fire in the left-hand parlour, on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of.

2. Willow.

3. A patch of farmland adjacent to a house or cottage.

Chapter II

Mr Tulliver, of Dorlcote Mill, Declares His Resolution About Tom

"What I want, you know," said Mr Tulliver—"what I want is to give Tom a good eddication; an eddication as'll be a bread to him.¹ That was what I was thinking of when I gave notice for him to leave the academy at Ladyday. I mean to put him to a downright good school at Midsummer.² The two years at th' academy 'ud ha' done well enough, if I'd meant to make a miller and farmer of him, for he's had a fine sight more schoolin' nor I ever got: all the learnin' my father ever paid for was a bit o' birch at one end and the alphabet at th' other. But I should like Tom to be a bit of a scholar, so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talk fine and write with a flourish. It 'ud be a help to me wi' these lawsuits, and arbitrations, and things. I wouldn't make a downright lawyer o' the lad—I should be sorry for him to be a raskill—but a sort o' engineer, or a surveyor, or an auctioneer and vallyer,³ like Riley, or one o' them smartish businesses as are all profits and no outlay, only for a big watch-chain and a high stool.⁴ They're pretty nigh all one, and they're not far off being even wi' the law, I believe; for Riley looks Lawyer Wakem i' the face as hard as one cat looks another. He's none frightened at him."

Mr Tulliver was speaking to his wife, a blond comely woman in a fan-shaped cap (I am afraid to think how long it is since fan-shaped caps were worn—they must be so near coming in again. At that time, when Mrs Tulliver was nearly forty, they were new at St Ogg's, and considered sweet things).

"Well, Mr Tulliver, you know best: I've no objections. But hadn't I better kill a couple o' fowl and have th' aunts and uncles to dinner next week, so as you may hear what sister Glegg and sister Pullet have got to say about it? There's a couple o' fowl *wants* killing!"

"You may kill every fowl i' the yard, if you like, Bessy; but I shall ask neither aunt nor uncle what I'm to do wi' my own lad," said Mr Tulliver, defiantly.

"Dear heart!" said Mrs Tulliver, shocked at this sanguinary rhetoric, "how can you talk so, Mr Tulliver? But it's your way to speak disrespectful o' my family; and sister Glegg throws all the blame upo' me, though I'm sure I'm as innocent as the babe unborn. For nobody's ever heard *me* say as it wasn't lucky for my children to have aunts and uncles as

1. There was no standardized system of secondary education at the time at which the novel is set. By removing Tom from his "academy" (day school) and sending him to a private boarding school, Mr Tulliver hopes to better his son's prospects.

2. Midsummer: June 24; Ladyday: March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation.

3. Valuer, appraiser.

4. Business men in the nineteenth century commonly sat on high stools in their offices in order to consult their ledgers.

can live independent. However, if Tom's to go to a new school, I should like him to go where I can wash him and mend him; else he might as well have calico as linen, for they'd be one as yallow as th' other before they'd been washed half-a-dozen times. And then, when the box is goin' backards and forrards, I could send the lad a cake, or a pork-pie, or an apple; for he can do with an extry bit, bless him, whether they stint him at the meals or no. My children can eat as much victuals as most, thank God."

"Well, well, we won't send him out o' reach o' the carrier's cart, if other things fit in," said Mr Tulliver. "But you mustn't put a spoke i' the wheel about the washin', if we can't get a school near enough. That's the fault I have to find wi' you, Bessy; if you see a stick i' the road, you're allays thinkin' you can't step over it. You'd want me not to hire a good waggoner, 'cause he'd got a mole on his face."

"Dear heart!" said Mrs Tulliver, in mild surprise, "when did I iver make objections to a man because he'd got a mole on his face? I'm sure I'm rether fond o' the moles; for my brother, as is dead an' gone, had a mole on his brow. But I can't remember your iver offering to hire a waggoner with a mole, Mr Tulliver. There was John Gibbs hadn't a mole on his face no more nor you have, an' I was all for having you hire *him*; an' so you did hire him, an' if he hadn't died o' th' inflammation, as we paid Dr Turnbull for attending him, he'd very like ha' been driving the waggon now. He might have a mole somewhere out o' sight, but how was I to know that, Mr Tulliver?"

"No, no, Bessy; I didn't mean justly the mole; I meant it to stand for summat else; but niver mind—it's puzzling work, talking is. What I'm thinking on, is how to find the right sort o' school to send Tom to, for I might be ta'en in again, as I've been wi' th' academy. I'll have nothing to do wi' a 'cademy again: whatever school I send Tom to, it shan't be a 'cademy; it shall be a place where the lads spend their time i' summat else besides blacking the family's shoes, and getting up the potatoes. It's an uncommon puzzling thing to know what school to pick."

Mr Tulliver paused a minute or two, and dived with both hands into his breeches pockets as if he hoped to find some suggestion there. Apparently he was not disappointed, for he presently said, "I know what I'll do—I'll talk it over wi' Riley: he's coming to-morrow, t' arbitrate about the dam."

"Well, Mr Tulliver, I've put the sheets out for the best bed, and Kezia's got 'em hanging at the fire. They aren't the best sheets, but they're good enough for anybody to sleep in, be he who he will; for as for them best Holland sheets, I should repent buying 'em, only they'll do to lay us out in. An' if you was to die to-morrow, Mr Tulliver, they're mangled⁵ beautiful, an' all ready, an' smell o' lavender as it 'ud be a

5. Pressed.

pleasure to lay 'em out; an' they lie at the left-hand corner o' the big oak linen-chest at the back: not as I should trust anybody to look 'em out but myself."

As Mrs Tulliver uttered the last sentence, she drew a bright bunch of keys from her pocket, and singled out one, rubbing her thumb and finger up and down it with a placid smile while she looked at the clear fire. If Mr Tulliver had been a susceptible man in his conjugal relation, he might have supposed that she drew out the key to aid her imagination in anticipating the moment when he would be in a state to justify the production of the best Holland sheets. Happily he was not so; he was only susceptible in respect of his right to water-power; moreover, he had the marital habit of not listening very closely, and since his mention of Mr Riley, had been apparently occupied in a tactile examination of his woollen stockings.

"I think I've hit it, Bessy," was his first remark after a short silence. "Riley's as likely a man as any to know o' some school; he's had schooling himself, an' goes about to all sorts o' places—arbitratin' and vallyin' and that. And we shall have time to talk it over to-morrow night when the business is done. I want Tom to be such a sort o' man as Riley, you know—as can talk pretty nigh as well as if it was all wrote out for him, and knows a good lot o' words as don't mean much, so as you can't lay hold of 'em i' law; and a good solid knowledge o' business too."

"Well," said Mrs Tulliver, "so far as talking proper, and knowing everything, and walking with a bend in his back, and setting his hair up, I shouldn't mind the lad being brought up to that. But them fine-talking men from the big towns mostly wear the false shirt-fronts; they wear a frill till it's all a mess, and then hide it with a bib; I know Riley does. And then, if Tom's to go and live at Mudport, like Riley, he'll have a house with a kitchen hardly big enough to turn in, an' niver get a fresh egg for his breakfast, an' sleep up three pair o' stairs—or four, for what I know—an' be burnt to death before he can get down."

"No, no," said Mr Tulliver, "I've no thoughts of his going to Mudport: I mean him to set up his office at St Ogg's, close by us, an' live at home. But," continued Mr Tulliver after a pause, "what I'm a bit afraid on is, as Tom hasn't got the right sort o' brains for a smart fellow. I doubt he's a bit slowish. He takes after your family, Bessy."

"Yes, that he does," said Mrs Tulliver, accepting the last proposition entirely on its own merits; "he's wonderful for liking a deal o' salt in his broth. That was my brother's way, and my father's before him."

"It seems a bit of a pity, though, said Mr Tulliver, "as the lad should take after the mother's side instead o' the little wench. That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come