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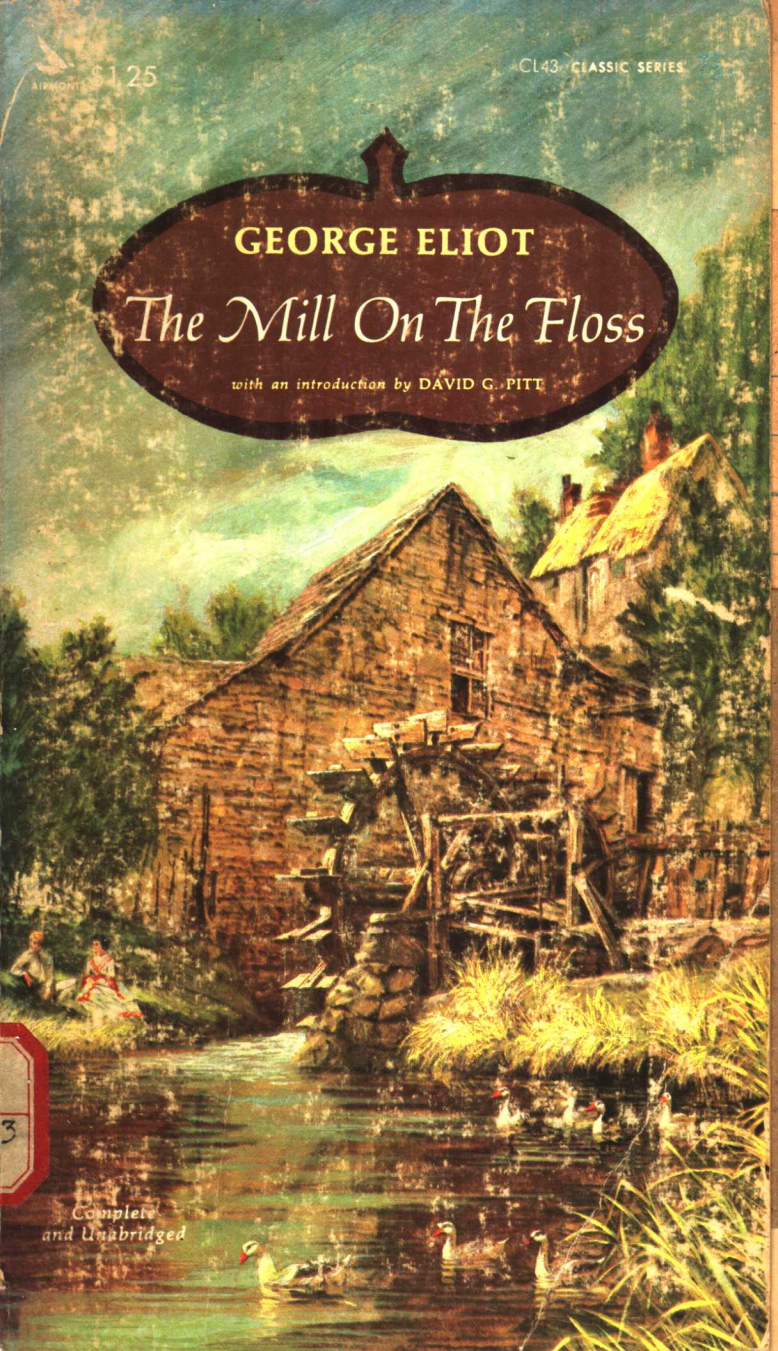
GEORGE ELIOT

The Mill On The Floss

with an introduction by DAVID G. PITT



Complete and Unabridged

The Mill on The Floss

GEORGE ELIOT

INTRODUCTION

The author of *The Mill on the Floss* can truly be called a woman of many names and identities. During her lifetime she was known by at least five different names and perhaps even more: Mary Ann Evans, the name given her by Robert Evans, her father, when she was born on November 22, 1819; Marian, the name into which as a young woman she transmuted her baptismal name; "Polly," the intimate nickname given her by George Henry Lewes, the man with whom she lived for twenty-four years and to whose children (though she had none) she was known as Mother; George Eliot, the masculine nom-de-plume she chose for herself when she began her career as writer of fiction; and Mrs. J. W. Cross, the name that became hers when she married a few months before her

death in 1880. And this parade of identities is more than a curious and interesting fact of her biography. Each name suggests a different facet of a very varied personality, suggests almost, one may say, different personalities. For George Eliot, to use the name and identity by which the world knows her best, possessed such a many-sided nature, such a variety of personal qualities, such a range of interests, and capacities for life lived on so many levels of experience, that to one who knows her life and work she must often appear like several beings embodied in one.

In Mary Ann Evans we have the country-born and country-bred girl of nineteenth-century rural England, born on a farm, nurtured amid the sounds and sights and the daily drama of life in such a sphere—the Maggie Tulliver of Arbury Farm, Warwickshire. In Marian Evans we have the educated and cultivated young lady who went to school at Nuneaton and Coventry, who studied Italian, German, Latin, and Greek while keeping house for her widowed father, who made friends with young intellectuals, and dared to form her own religious beliefs in opposition to her father's faith. In "Polly" Lewes we have both the rebel who defied Victorian moral and social codes to live with a man whom she could not marry (he was married already, though separated from his wife), and the devoted and loyal helpmate of the man she called her husband and to whom she was the best of wives. In George Eliot we have perhaps the greatest of Victorian women

novelists and the rival of the greatest of either sex in an age that produced a brilliant galaxy of novelists, a skilled craftsman, a profound intellect, a powerful and sensitive imagination, author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1872), *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and other works in prose and verse. In Mrs. J. W. Cross we have the retired writer, her public career ended, living quietly as the wife of the man to whom she turned in her great grief on the death of her first "husband," enjoying the books and music and society of friends she loved, until her death in December, 1880. This last identity of hers was very short-lived, and this fact, too, is, perhaps, significant. Though she and Cross were happy during their short marriage—just seven months—her real, most vital, and most characteristic self died with George Henry Lewes. George Eliot's pen had been stilled with his life.

Fortunately for us, George Eliot's pen, during the twenty years it was given to glean her teeming brain, was rarely idle, as the partial catalogue of her works given above clearly shows. And of all the novels that she gave the world during those two great decades of her life none occupies a place of greater affection and memorability than *The Mill on the Floss*. Perhaps this is because it contains one of the most deilghtful pictures ever drawn of childhood lived in the authentic world of rural England,

or because it reveals an unparalleled insight into the workings of the child's and young adult's mind, or perhaps it is because, in accomplishing both of these, George Eliot gives us so much that is herself. For *The Mill on the Floss* is undoubtedly closer to George Eliot's—or, perhaps, rather Mary Ann Evans'—own life than any other book she wrote. This is not to imply that it is strictly autobiographical in the usual sense. It is not. Few of the incidents and situations in the book bear any relationship to actual incidents and situations in her own life, though its setting and atmosphere are authentically those that Mary Ann Evans grew up in. In Maggie Tulliver, however, we have a character who is far closer to her creator in personality and temperament, in her response to life, in her acting and suffering and in the quality of these, than is any other character in the vast gallery of George Eliot's creations.

This close relationship between Maggie and Mary Ann Evans decides very largely the total imaginative and emotional impact and quality of the novel. For while *The Mill on the Floss* is the story of a family—the Tullivers—and the narrow circle of friends and enemies in which they move, it is even more essentially the story of Maggie Tulliver. She is the pivotal character. Her brother Tom and their parents are never quite so central to the design of the novel, or so decisive in shaping the nature and quality of our emotional response to it, as Maggie is from start to finish. Without the

others, of course, Maggie could not have been what she is; her life could not have taken on the lights and shades that it does. They are essential to her as we know her in the novel, and they have their own interest and value for us, too. But it is Maggie —the mischievous little lover of the outdoors and of her brother Tom; the "straight black-eyed wench" whose hair would not curl and who was "so franzy about having it put i' papers"; who one day cropped off her long black locks and ran away to live with the gypsies; who fled from her troubles to the high attic to console herself with a fetish doll; Maggie, the impulsive, passionate girl, who could be both gentle and soft as a doe and spirited and fiery as a young lioness; Maggie as sister and daughter, lover, and flirt, innocent sinner and tragic heroine—who dominates the novel and gives it its primary interest and purpose. It is not surprising to learn that George Eliot thought at first of calling the book "Sister Maggie."

She called it, instead, *The Mill on the Floss,* and when we have read it we realize, I think, that this title, suggested by her publisher, is the right one. For though Maggie is the central human figure in the novel, the world she lives in is the world symbolized by the mill and the river. Both symbolize forces, the one human and temporal, the other non-human and eternal, that shape her destiny. The novel is thus no simple old-fashioned tale of rural domesticity, rustic lovers, and other such clichés of Victorian popular fiction. It is, rather, a penetrating

study, at times startlingly modern, of the interplay of certain complex and complicated motives and forces at work in both the individual life and in human society.

—DAVID G. PITT, M.A., PH.D.,
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Memorial University of Newfoundland,
June, 1964

The Mill on The Floss

GEORGE ELIOT

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Contents

Book First

BOY AND GIRL

1. 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. 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 lies high in this little withy plantation, and half drowns the grassy fringe of the croft 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 unresting 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 playfellow 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. 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. That was what I was thinking of when I gave notice for him to leave th' academy at Ladyday. I mean to put him to a downright good school at Midsummer. 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 scholard, 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 law suits, 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, 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. 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 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 washing, 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: whativer 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 hangin' 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 mangled beautiful, an' all ready an' smell o' lavender as it 'ud be a 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