



George Eliot's

mill on
the floss

adapted by

Helen

Edmundson



shared**experience**

Shared Experience have won an international reputation for their innovative productions. The company's distinctive style of performance and committed ensemble playing have inspired audiences around the world and brought widespread critical acclaim.

At the heart of our work is the power and excitement of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience - a shared experience. We are committed to creating theatre which goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

"Theatre doesn't come much more exciting than this" (DAILY TELEGRAPH)

Directed by

NANCY MECKLER and POLLY TEALE

Associate Director

REBECCA GATWARD

Designer

BUNNY CHRISTIE

Music

PETER SALEM

Lighting

CHRIS DAVEY

Company Movement

LIZ RANKEN

For Shared Experience

Joint Artistic Directors

Nancy Meckler
Polly Teale

Education & Youth Theatre Director

Sue Nash

Acting Education Director

Kate Saxon

Acting Youth Theatre Director

Eve Stebbing

Producer

Rachel Tackley

Marketing Manager

Ian Whitaker

Administrator

Jane Claire

Finance Manager

Bryan Lloyd

"A company intent on exploring the boundaries of performance" (FINANCIAL TIMES)

Shared Experience Theatre

The Soho Laundry, 9 Dufour's Place

London W1V 1FE

Registered Charity No 271414

Education Pack compiled by Gillian King

Designed by Dragonfly Design

Rehearsal photos by Jonathan Dockar-Drysdale

Web design : Kriss Buddle

"Pushing the boat of theatricality way beyond its usual moorings" (THE GUARDIAN)



shared**experience**

mill on the floss

CONTENTS

4 & 5	Who was George Eliot?
6	The Story
7 & 8	Rehearsal Diary
9	Poetry
10	Memory
11	The Victorian Novel
12 & 13	The Landscape of the Play
14 - 16	Witches
17	Directing - Polly Teale
18 - 20	Adapting the Play - Helen Edmundson
21	Movement - Liz Ranken
22 & 23	Designing - Bunny Christie
24 & 25	Music - Peter Salem
26	Shared Experience's Expressionism
27	Writing a Review
28	Youth Training and Access

Michael Matus



WHO WAS GEORGE ELIOT?

Mary Ann (later Marion) Evans was born in 1819, the same year as the future Queen Victoria. Her father was a Warwickshire estate manager earning a modest but comfortable living. Mary Ann went to school in Nuneaton and Coventry and was seen to be far cleverer than her older brother Isaac. As Mr Tulliver says of his daughter Maggie 'being so clever does no harm to a little girl, but once grown up an over-'cute woman's no better nor a long-tailed sheep - she'll fetch none the bigger price for that'. When she was 16 Mary Ann's, mother died and her sister married so she left school and kept house for her Father.

When her Father died in 1849, he left her an annuity of £120. After travelling abroad she became an Assistant Editor of J.S.Mill's *Westminster Review* before turning into a full time writer. She published *Scenes of Clerical Life* under the pseudonym George Eliot in 1858.

family/sex life

She lived as the common law wife of philosopher, writer and magazine editor George H Lewes. Her friends were scandalised by her behaviour as was her brother and he broke off all contact with her. In spite of this the relationship was very happy and fulfilling and it remained that way until Lewes' death. She then married John Walter Cross in 1880. He was her financial advisor and twenty years her junior. She practised contraception and decided not to have children.

appearance

With an over-large head, light brown hair, grey-blue eyes, a fair complexion and a long nose, she had a 'strong masculine face' according to Emily Tennyson, while Edmund Gosse spoke of 'a large, thick-set sibyl...massive features, somewhat grim'. Henry James called her 'Magnificently ugly - deliciously hideous...This great horse-faced blue-stocking.' She had a deep voice and her right hand was longer than her left. She always wore a black lace mantilla indoors.

sports/hobbies

Eliot enjoyed tennis and shuttlecock. She was also a good pianist and fluent in German. Another interest was phrenology; the study of the external shape of a persons skull, as a supposed indication of character and abilities. (She had a phrenological cast made of her head)

*magnificently
ugly -
deliciously
hideous...
this great
horse-faced
blue-stocking!*



health

Eliot suffered from depression all her adult life. She needed constant reassurance from Lewes, who always hid bad reviews and even 'mislaid' letters that might upset her. She also suffered from kidney stones and neuralgia.

work/daily routine

She chose George Eliot as a pseudonym because George was Lewes first name and Eliot because it was a 'good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word'. She wrote Adam Bede in 1859 and this was much admired by Queen Victoria. Eliot in turn admired Wordsworth and Scott. Free copies of her first book of fiction were sent to "celebrities" such as Thackeray, Tennyson, Ruskin Faraday, Dickens and Mrs Carlyle, but only Dickens guessed that it was written by a woman: 'If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself mentally so like a woman since the world began'.

Much female writing was considered frivolous; therefore taking a male pseudonym increased the likelihood of one being taken seriously. Another example of this taking place is the Brontes. They wrote under the names of Currer, Acton and Ellis Bell, (Charlotte, Anne and Emily)

Eliot vehemently denied she was the author until a man, named Joseph Liggins, was identified by a psychic medium as the author and he began capitalising on his new fame.

manner of death

Eliot caught a cold at a London Concert and died of a throat and kidney infection at 4 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea at 10pm on 22 December 1880, aged 61. She is buried in Highgate Cemetery next to George Lewes.



mill on the floss

THE STORY

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE STORY

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS is a work of almost startling sadness and is one of the most affecting stories of family loss, tragedy and the sheer meanness of fate in the history of the novel and is, in this sense at least, a close relative of WUTHERING HEIGHTS.

It was published in 1860 and is the story of Maggie Tulliver, our heroine, who is the daughter of a miller in the English Midlands. Like many nineteenth century literary girls, her intelligence and emotional capacity outflank those of her family and cause problems. She is devoted to her brother Tom but he is hopelessly limited in his understanding. Maggie then turns to Philip Wakem, who is the son of a local lawyer and physically disabled. Disaster strikes their relationship as Mr Tulliver and Wakem find themselves enemies over a legal dispute that leaves the former bankrupt.

After the early death of Mr Tulliver, Maggie leaves the mill for St Ogg's where her cousin Lucy lives. Lucy's betrothed Stephen somewhat unfortunately falls for Maggie and compromises her reputation while boating on the river. Maggie refuses to marry him and her life is as good as ruined.

Only a very limited group including Philip still show sympathy for her and only a dreadful flood in which Maggie tries to save Tom can lead the well-meaning but doomed girl to some kind of transcendence.

*her
intelligence
and
emotional
capacity...
cause
problems*

Hywel Morgan & Caroline Faber





EXTRACTS FROM THE REHEARSAL DIARY FOR MILL ON THE FLOSS

written by Rebecca Gatward, Associate Director

monday - week 3

Nancy ran an exercise with the actors to cement various elements of character in the company. Each actor had to think of their character as a colour and work physically with the impact that colour may have on their bodies. The actors worked on lying on the floor, standing, walking, using an object and vocally describing their object to another actor. They then worked as an ensemble meeting each other for the first time. All the while the actors point of concentration was the colour that they had chosen. It was fascinating to watch the effects of such a simple idea on the actors, colours that the actors came up with; Maggie 1 - Red, Maggie 2 - Mauve, Maggie 3 - Blood Red, Tom - Gold, Father - Brown, Stephen - Sky Blue.

tuesday - week 3

Worked on the Bible scene when Mr Tulliver realises he is bankrupt. Nancy set up an exercise to release Mrs Tulliver's anger and frustration with her husband. Her behaviour must have a profound effect on Mr Tulliver in the scene as he agrees to work under Wakem, his arch enemy. The exercise involved Hilary (Mrs Tulliver) playing the early part of the scene wanting to hit Mr Tulliver. She then found a level of agitation, anger and distress, which impacted on Pip (Mr Tulliver) and made him decide to relent.

wednesday - week 3

The actors worked with Liz, the Movement Director, to create Maggie's dream on the boat. Each actor started by physically making an abstract sculpture of their mothers in the space. They were then asked to move the sculpture backwards and forwards through an action that they associated with their mother, e.g. cooking, worrying. They then had to make the sculpture move through water. The same process was repeated with their character in the play. Once they had found the live sculpture the actors moved into these from a lying position in turn as characters appearing in Maggie's mind.

PIP DONAGHY

Mr Tulliver

Dr Kenn

CAROLINE FABER

Maggie 3

Aunt Pullet

JESSICA LLOYD

Maggie 2

Aunt Glegg

HILARY MACLEAN

Mrs Tulliver

Lucy Deane

MICHAEL MATUS

Bob Jakin

Phillip Wakem

Uncle Pullet

JOSEPH MILLSON

Stephen Guest

Mr Stelling

Uncle Glegg

HYWEL MORGAN

Tom Tulliver

Wakem

PAULINE TURNER

Maggie 1



mill on the floss

DIARY

thursday - week 3

Worked on the scene when the children return home after the news of their father's illness. We all talked about what the children expected to find when they returned. The idea that the children were worried that their Father may have died came up and the actors played the early part of that scene with this in mind. This raised the stakes; the bailiff became more menacing to Maggie, as she was unsure of who he was - could he be an undertaker? The idea focused Maggie's frustration with her mother whose prime concern is the loss of her crockery.

friday - week 3

We were working on the scene where Tom discovers Maggie and Philip kissing in The Red Deeps. To establish the status between Tom and Philip, Nancy asked Hywel (Tom) to play the scene as if he had a gun. The scene was taken out of context and set in Philip's attic.

This focused both the private nature of the location and the power Tom has in the scene. The threat of the gun is a modern equivalent, which threw a huge element of fear into the situation. It helped the actors to imagine the effect Tom's threat would have had on Philip and Maggie in that period.

*the threat of
the gun is a
modern
equivalent,
which threw
a huge
element of
fear into the
situation...*

QUESTION

- ? What colour would you choose to describe your self?
- ? Do you agree with the actors' choice of colour for their characters?

EXERCISE

After you have chosen your colour, choose the opposite colour. Start from lying down, then stand and move; focusing on the colour only. Walk around the room; introduce yourself, sing/say a nursery rhyme. How has this colour switch changed your movement, energy and voice?

Pip Donaghy, Hywel Morgan & Joseph Millson

mill on the floss

POETRY

*For, like a plague, will memory break out;
And, in blank and solitude of things, Upon his spirit, with a fever's strength,
Will conscience prey...*

William Wordsworth 'The Excursion'

*One day my brother left me in high charge
To mind the rod, while he went seeking bait
And bade me, when I saw a rearing barge
Snatch out the line, lest he should come too late
Proud of the task, I worked with all my might
For one whole minute, till my eyes grew wide
Till sky and earth took on strange new light
And seemed a dream-world floating on some tide
A fair pavillioned boat for me alone
Blowing me onward through the vast unknown.*

George Eliot 'Brother and Sister'

QUESTION

? In the production there is a scene which shows Maggie gaining Toms' forgiveness for killing the rabbits. What methods does she use to win him over?

Hilary Maclean and Pip Donaghy





shared**experience**

mill on the floss

MEMORY

The early part of the novel often shows Maggie and Tom contented and happy. These scenes build a base that they as characters always refer back to and although their lives change drastically these happy experiences always remain a part of them. Some examples of this are when Tom forgives Maggie for letting his rabbits die and when they go fishing together;

'They trotted along and sat down together with no thought that life would ever change much for them: they would only get bigger and not go to school, and it would always be like the holidays; they would always live together and be fond of each other'.

Book 1 chapter 5

Hywel Morgan & Pauline Turner





THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

The Novels in this period reflected a society that was undergoing massive change and upheaval. The industrial revolution had firmly taken hold. The population was shifting from an agricultural base to an urban one, and great technological and scientific advances were challenging people's perceptions and understanding of the world.

Women in this time were the main consumers of fiction, but more importantly they became the main producers as well. The Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and Mary Shelley to name but a few.

The popular subject matter of the majority of Victorian novels was courtship leading to marriage set against a very domesticated, family orientated backdrop.

George Eliot pointed out that novel writing offered opportunities to women in a society which elsewhere constrained their activity: **'No restrictions can shut women out from the materials of fiction, and there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements'**.

The nineteenth century novel was the first art form in which women could take equal status with men.

However George Eliot didn't necessarily believe that this was a good thing, she wrote an essay entitled *'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists'*. In this she commented on the unrealistic stereotypes the female novelists presented to an uncritical female audience. It was an age when novels would be read out loud among families and the question was *'would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person?'* (OUR MUTUAL FRIEND - Dickens).

Thus for a large part of the nineteenth century the English novel was limited by the necessity to conform to a moral code which aimed to protect a predominately female readership from exposure to sexual corruption.



THE LANDSCAPE OF THE PLAY

Lincolnshire has surprising contrasts of scenery. The Fens occupy most of the south. Drained and reclaimed from the 17th century, the Fens is an almost treeless region, criss-crossed by drains and dykes. There are two upland areas: a limestone escarpment, the Lincolnshire Edge, running north-south across the west of the county; and the rolling chalk Lincolnshire Wolds in the east, which rise to just over 150 m (500 ft). In between lies a low region of clay soils. The south-western area is well wooded and drained by the rivers Welland, Glen, Eden, and Slea. Along the eastern coast are dunes and sandy beaches. Wildfowl and birds find sanctuary here, and there are nature reserves at Gibraltar Point and Saltfleetby. Lincolnshire's main river is the Witham, 130 km (80m) long, which flows in a northerly direction to GRANTHAM and LINCOLN, where it cuts through the Lincolnshire Edge, then continues sluggishly east and south-east through the Fens to drain into The Wash.

QUESTION

? Does the geography of Lincolnshire directly affect the story? Would the play work in for example Holland? Small town America? Africa?

EXERCISE

Read the two descriptions of the fictional St Oggs and the old fashioned tourist guide book description of Gainsborough, allegedly the real St Oggs. How does George Eliot make her town come alive?

'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 ship, laden with fresh-scented fir plank, 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, tingeing the water with a soft purple hue'

George Eliot



mill on the floss

SITUATION

Gainsborough. An ancient market town threaded by narrow streets, it looks across the Trent into Nottinghamshire. A great array of wharves, warehouses and works are huddled along the front of the river, and astride it is an eighteenth century bridge.

A low, wooded ridge rises sharply above the town, sheltering it on the east, and there is pretty countryside close at hand; but Gainsborough itself is a workaday place, with great ironwork, factories, timber-yards and shipyards, extensive seed-crushing mills, and a considerable river trade.

Through the Humber is some 20 miles away, the tides are felt every day at Gainsborough and at Spring tides the curious tidal wave known as the Bore, or Aegir, comes rushing up at the height of several feet, to continue for 10 miles or more beyond the town with its force greatly reduced.

Tourist Guide

QUESTION

? How effective is the set in illustrating this world and the places Maggie lives and visits within it?

Hywel Morgan, Pip Donaghy and Joseph Millson





mill on the floss

WITCHES

Maggie: “bringing those things called witches or conjurors to justice; this is, first to know if a woman be a witch throw her into a pond: and if she be a witch she will swim and it is not in her own power to prevent it...”

from: The History of the Devil by Daniel Defoe

In THE MILL ON THE FLOSS there are references to witches, demonic possession and madness. Maggie is uncontrolled, wild, emotional, non-conformist. She does not fit into the mould of desirable feminine behaviour.

The 1800's have been described as the most restrictive of times for women, the narrowness of the roles and codes of behaviour had not been as severe before or since. This suppression of women can be seen in part within the context of the European witch hunts that preceded the century, the effects of which must have deeply scarred the psyche of women. The witch hunts played a key role in the decline of womens status. George Eliot and her heroine Maggie must have carried the history of those tortured, individual, non conformist women within them.

Witch hunts swept through Europe between 1435 and 1750. There had been trials of witches prior to that but these were individual cases, just as likely to be men as women. By the late 15th century the pattern changed and the vast majority of witches, some 80 - 90%, were women.

Although difficult to verify, experts agree that around 100,000 is a reasonable estimate of those killed as witches throughout Europe.

what is a witch?

The word witch comes from the Anglo Saxon word Wicca meaning wise one or magician. Most mediaeval communities would be familiar with a woman who would be considered to have certain powers. The sorceress or wise woman would perform the function of holistic healer, offering potions for physical and emotional well being.

In the 15th century the definition of a Witch changed. Prior to that it was thought that a Witch had innate supernatural powers. The change came when it was accepted that a Witch had been possessed by the Devil. This change in perception was driven by the Reformation in the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The influence of the Church was to have increasing influence over peoples lives.

*confused, in
fear and
often under
torture, the
accused witch
could name
names as a
part of their
confession...*



mill on the floss

WITCHES

In 1487 two Dominican Friars wrote a book Malleus Maleficarum - Hammer of the Witches. The book was intended to help inquisitors in their identification of witches. In it key characteristics of the Witch were identified as :

- 1) Using magic to harm others.
- 2) Attending secret Sabbath meetings.
- 3) Flying through the air at night.
- 4) Sealing a pact with the devil by copulating with him.

The Malleus Maleficarum also clearly identified those most likely to be witches as being women: *"that sex which by reason of temperament is inconstant, credulous, wicked, uncontrolled in spirit, and (because of it's feelings, which it governs only with difficulty) melancholic; (the devil) especially seduces stupid, worn out, unstable old women."*

why were women persecuted in this way?

- 1) Notions of female sexuality - the Judao-Christian tradition saw womens sexuality as being associated with sin and spiritual death. Non conformist women would be feared for their erotic, uncivilised and socially inappropriate behaviour.
- 2) The power that the wise woman or folk healer held was considered suspect. One of the key roles for them was in the realm of childbirth and fertility. They would be midwives and perform abortions as well as offering potions and spells for fertility and contraception. The increasingly patriarchal society, and in particular the Church, was threatened by this female power.
- 3) Changes in the economic and political structure of Europe left those on the fringes of society more vulnerable. Europe was changing, it was a new era of reason and science and a capitalistic society was emerging with an emphasis on producing for profit. The poor were becoming poorer and the most vulnerable were single women, widows or the unmarried. Before this time communities would support the very poor through charity. In difficult times for all, beggars would be resented and if the beggar cursed on being turned away this resentment would be increased.



mill on the floss WITCHES

the accusation, trial and execution of witches

The pattern of accusation would have typical features; often a personal calamity such as unexplained illness, the death of an infant, or disease in cattle could be attributed to witchcraft. Floods and storms or freak weather could also be seen to be as a result of a malevolent supernatural force.

Any calamity, individual or social, any inexplicable phenomena, could be attributed to Witchcraft. In that way Witches could be the scapegoat for any of societies ills.

Once an accusation of Witchcraft was made the hysteria could spread throughout a community. Confused, in fear and often under torture, the accused Witch could name names as a part of their confession. Increasingly women were to become frightened of speaking out, of challenging, of seeming sharp-tongued or scolding; all characteristics associated with witches.

Since Witches were considered to be possessed by the Devil it was possible for their souls to be saved through confession. Unfortunately once they'd confessed they would still be condemned to death for the crimes committed whilst possessed. Confessions were acquired in different ways. Throughout Europe, torture was common and very violent. In England, where torture was illegal, the persecution of Witches was less hysterical. In some places it was thought that Witches could float, so one way of establishing guilt would be by putting this to the test; the accused would have their arms and legs tied and be thrown into a pond. If they floated they were confirmed as a Witch if they sank they were innocent - but dead! Once a confession was elicited a witch would be hung or burnt alive.

Cath Greenwood

Pauline Turner





mill on the floss

DIRECTING

POLLY TEALE *Co Director of Mill on the Floss*

Mill on the Floss was first performed in 1994. These are Polly's thoughts from week one of the very first rehearsals.

The first time I saw Shared Experience was when they came to my school. I was 13 years old. They performed THE ARABIAN NIGHTS. It was an extraordinary show; a group of actors without props or costumes or set created this incredible journey with nothing but their bodies and their voices. Meanwhile I remember the school dinner ladies prepared the dinner. You could hear the plastic plates going down on the table, and the smell of cabbage wafting over us...

When I first came to work here there was a sense of something exciting. It is about the energy of the actor and the effect of one person's physical presence on another. It also involves creating theatre that expresses the inner life of the piece and the character, rather than just telling the story of what happens on the surface of life. It gets you into an area of the imagination and experience, which goes beyond what you can communicate if you are working naturalistically. It is like being able to dream aloud, to express the characters deepest fears and longings. I think this approach works particularly well with adaptations. Often the power of a novel lies in its ability to take us into the private world of its characters.

The actual act of transforming the novel into theatre is very exciting. It forces you to find theatrical solutions. We have for instance, to find a way of creating a flood! We don't know yet how to do it!

We decided the play would primarily be about Maggie and her struggle to be herself. Helen Edmundson (The Adapter) had the idea of three Maggies. That was immediately an idea that everyone found exciting. She has gone away and written the first draft and we have been paring away at that, trying to strip it back.

The amazing thing about the novel is that it feels utterly immediate and contemporary in its psychological complexity. I feel an immediate connection with the young Maggie. The themes in it are very modern, or maybe it would be truer to say that important things continue to be important. 'How do you deal with your emotional life?' 'How do you change from being a child to an adult?' 'How do you find a way of living that is peaceful enough and yet passionate enough?' All these questions remain as powerful as they were then.



mill on the floss

ADAPTING

HELEN EDMUNDSON

The Adapter of Mill on the Floss

can you explain the process of adapting a novel for the stage?

I think the starting point for any adaptation is to ask oneself, "why am I doing this: what is it about this novel which really interests me and will interest an audience?" The answer to this question usually lies in the themes, the ideas which the writer was aiming to explore. There are often many of these, so I begin by trying, through research, discussion and thought, to identify the theme which I would like to focus on. This doesn't mean that the other ideas within the novel are lost or that I am reducing it completely, but it gives me a through-line, a touchstone for the way I tell the story. It enables me to make choices about which parts of the novel I use and which I leave out, and I often find that the other ideas creep in of their own accord and move around the central theme. It is also essential that my chosen central theme has dramatic potential - in other words it needs to have some tension or conflict within it. In the *Mill on the Floss*, I decided to focus on the idea of a woman being forced to change her behaviour, to stifle and modify herself, because her true nature is at odds with what society expects of a woman.

Having identified my theme, I then try to find a dramatic, theatrical way of expressing it and when I feel I have found that, I begin to write.

how faithful to the text were you in your adaptation?

I like to think that I remain faithful to the 'heart' of the novel, to the ideas the writer was trying to express, to the way she wished us to feel about the characters. But, my main aim is to make a living, vibrant, successful piece of theatre, so in lots of other ways, for example, structurally, I have to set the novel aside. This also means that I sometimes pick up on something which Eliot only hinted at, and give it a great deal of attention, or I may not give a lot of attention to an idea or character which features very strongly in the book.



mill on the floss

ADAPTING

why did you decide to have three actors to play the part of Maggie and what sort of difficulties has this posed?

Maggie changes drastically in the course of the novel, in a lot of ways, but there are some traits in her character that remain essentially the same. When she reaches adulthood she still has that little girl inside her who has a hugely deep and passionate nature. But she is forced to listen to what other people say about her and look inside herself to try to find a different way of dealing with life. This leads to her religious revelation and self-denial. When she comes out of this she has to change herself again in order to enter the world as a more assertive character who can stand up to her brother. That was the main motivation behind the split. It also gives me the opportunity to explore another theme of the novel, which is how much our childhood's shape our adult life. Being able to have Maggie as a child on the stage at the same time as Maggie as an adult means you can actually physicalise that pull.

what sort of problems did you have when you were adapting the novel?

It's important to realise that it is impossible to put in the amount of detail that you get in a book, but the stage does give you some advantages too. A character will be much better rounded in the novel, because people have the characters in their head and they create a picture. Whereas in the theatre you can create the character and present the audience with a ready made picture. But you can bypass a lot of the detail a novel has to go through. On the stage you can portray in an instant the fact that, for example, although a character like Tom is acting proudly he feels a degree of sadness; whereas that takes a long time to express on the written page.

how difficult is it to dramatise a book with a large number of characters using a small cast?

It was surprisingly difficult. There are so many characters that don't particularly further the story but are important to it in a peripheral way; like Bob Jakin, for example. Also the Aunts do so much to add to the comedy of the story and to show how Maggie is viewed in the outside world, but they don't have a central role in the plot. I toyed with the idea of cutting them entirely, and I have cut out one uncle, but then I realised it would somehow leave a big hole. If you're working with versatile actors, as we are, it's fine really. Though sometimes there are problems when two characters are played by the same actor and are meant to appear on the stage at the same time.

mill on the floss

ADAPTING

what were the most challenging aspects of adapting The Mill on The Floss?

One thing is that the novel deals with a person's life from beginning to end. The way Eliot bases the narrative makes it very difficult to dramatise. It's by no means a perfect novel as it jumps about in terms of whose mind we are following. For a whole section we follow Tom's life at school and Maggie is virtually forgotten. We hear nothing of her school days. Then Tom just drifts off the scene as Eliot gets carried away with Maggie's story. In a way I have to iron out these inconsistencies, which are more evident in the short space a play allows.

Another problem is that a lot of the readers are dissatisfied with the ending, with the way that Maggie drowns. I think Eliot felt that for Maggie, drowning was an ennobling form, in a way a positive thing, and the only real outcome for her...I still felt that it wasn't right for her to drown...I had to try and make the ending seem right and organic...

EXERCISE

Look at the novel The Mill on the Floss, Vol 2 Book 3rd 'The Family Council'. In small groups adapt this into a scene which should last no longer than 5 minutes. This can be a written or practical drama exercise or both.

Pip Donaghy and Hywel Morgan



mill on the floss

MOVING

LIZ RANKEN *Movement Director*

as the movement director on the productions what did you feel were the main challenges?

The challenge of a reconstruction is to ensure that the movement is alive and fresh for the performers; to manage to retain ideas that were good, whilst at the same time facilitating development of the work, facilitating the actors to contribute their own unique ideas and for the creative team to feel they are developing as artists. Another challenge is to balance the input of Nancy, Polly and myself.

what differences between the Maggies' have you developed?

Maggie 1 represents the younger child, so the movement is released, very emotionally present with little sense of self censorship, she is true to herself which leads to a conflict with society and especially with the constraints imposed on women.

In Maggie 2, she subjugates the passion of Maggie 1 with a sense of following spiritual ideals. There is a suppression of her ego and individuality -movement is more contained, bound and often self punishing.

In Maggie 3, the sensual passion releases Maggie's movements into more flowing free movement, there is often a water reference in her movement with a sense of embracing sensual pleasure and creativity, she is far more aware of responding to others than Maggie 1.

QUESTION

? *From the production, can you give examples of when characters' inner feelings are betrayed or illustrated by physical movement?*

EXERCISE

As a Victorian woman, Maggie often has to subdue her passions to fit in with society's expectations. Looking at the descriptions of Maggie 1 and Maggie 2 above, split into two groups. Group 1 create a frozen picture of Maggie 1, group 2 present Maggie 2. Bring the pictures alive (they can be as abstract as you like). What would Maggie 1 say to the woman she becomes? How would Maggie 2 respond? How do they physically differ?

Can you cite examples of the Maggies' interaction with each other in the production?



BUNNY CHRISTIE

The Designer for 'Mill on the Floss'

the start

When I started designing for MILL ON THE FLOSS, I read the novel and then made notes about the characters or the descriptions of atmospheres and locations. I was very interested in the fact that it is set in the countryside, very rural not at all industrial. I would jot down images from the novel and from these ideas would come more images that I wanted to portray.

researching and problem solving

I spent a lot of time in the library researching the clothes of the period, the furniture and the social history. I also went to visit a mill as part of my research. That was very interesting because I could see the mechanism at work, and everything was covered in a layer of flour. I could smell it. It was powdery white and soft. Everything was made of wood. In contrast, when I went outside everything was really wet and sodden. I don't think I would have come up with lots of the ideas if I hadn't visited the mill.

I also have to consider the flood. I need to come up with an idea of how I want it to look then I have to think about that technically to see if it is possible. If I want a rising water level that is visible how would I do that and what would be the best materials to use? How much would they cost and how heavy would they be? How many people would it take to lift up a piece of fabric?

influences and ideas

I have been influenced by the works of Boyd Webb - he is an artist who makes installations. He does quite a lot of work representing water and we tried to look at how to represent water in our production. Webb uses carpet a lot in his designs. You wouldn't really think that you could make a suburban carpet look like a beautiful wave... but he does that. He also creates art with things floating, things submerged and layers of things. I was also particularly interested in the layers he creates when I was thinking about the river. What is on the top and what is on the bottom of the river? There is also quite a lot in the novel about linen - linens are very important to the whole family especially Mrs Tulliver. Also the furniture is covered in dust sheets and again there is whiteness, a covering of dust over everything.

beginning - building the set model

I did a lot of sketches and talked to Helen, who got interested in having an upper level. She became very involved with this idea and began incorporating it into her writing. I took the idea on and began to think about how to use it.



shared**experience**

mill on the floss

DESIGNING

I looked at all sorts of bridges and structures and did some drawings. Then I began to make the model. I had this idea for a floor cloth and became quite interested in a kind of backdrop of sky. We then got interested in cutting things right down, and also looking at them sinking into the floor. This made them smaller and therefore easier to move, to jump on, or to sit on. It meant you didn't have a great big wardrobe, you could have half a wardrobe, which made it look like it was floating or sinking.

costumes and characters

I know what the look is, and I know what the hairstyles are like, and then I'll talk to each of the actors. We talk in detail about their characters. What is nice is that they say 'She's tidy' or 'she's very meticulous' or 'she'd have a bit of herself covered up'. As most of the characters are working people they won't be dressed in high fashion. We will have bone dresses but we won't have them that highly corseted. We're so much more physical than they would ever have been, so you also have to think practically.

final thoughts

In rehearsals there are so many people working on the play, I feel like I'm the visual representative. I am the one who looks at the visual perspective while other people are looking more at the movement, music, character angles and so on. Shared Experience is very much as the name suggests.

Jessica Lloyd and Joseph Millson



PETER SALEM

The Musical Composer for Mill on the Floss

how often do you watch/take part in rehearsals and when does the score become fixed?

When I'm working on a new production I try to be in rehearsal as much as possible but things can be extremely slow at the beginning of a rehearsal period and when the staging and performances become more fixed - towards the end - that's when most of the composing and recording etc. has to be done so it's a bit of a balancing act.

I always try to come into rehearsal when a section I haven't seen is being run. I like to bring in music to try in rehearsal when actors feel settled enough to take on another element or want some sound for a section to help them work on it. Any songs, dances etc. which involve actors clearly require me to be in rehearsal quite early on to work on them with the cast.

Now I often video sections of the play so that I'm in touch even when I'm working in my studio. With any luck the score is 'fixed' by press night!

is the music taped or will you be using live music and sound effects?

Most of the music/sound is recorded. There are live elements - mostly piano playing and singing - but these are not generally used as underscoring. They tend to be actual moments of music making by the characters.

The score for The Mill on the Floss combines sounds or sound effects with what might be considered conventional 'music'. There are no separate 'sound effects' just as there are probably very few passages of 'music' which do not include concrete 'sounds'.

How do you begin composing? Does a melody or theme just 'pop into your head' or does research into the musical period of the novel play a part?

I suppose I begin by looking at the text, at the recurrent imagery in the text and at what is happening in the rehearsal room for things which might trigger off some ideas... I then scratch my head, stare out of the window a lot and drink lots of coffee. With any luck something starts to happen.

I guess you could say a theme pops into my head - though it usually needs some work doing to it before I allow it to pop out of my head onto paper and



mill on the floss

COMPOSING

into sound - especially for things like songs, dances and the odd melodic theme, but a great deal of the music for Mill on the Floss is more textural than that and more to do with sound and the qualities of sound, to do with making an aural image rather than with tunes. The idea which pops into your head is usually the starting point, the seminal theme from which you create other cues.

With any play set in a particular period of history I think you have to be familiar with the music of the period, it will inform the soundworld that you use but, apart from the songs and the music for the ball (and even then...), there is not much pastiche in the music for Mill on the Floss.

what challenges/difficulties lie in having three Maggies?

I'm trying at the moment to think of a thematic approach for Maggie. There are places where she transforms and I think musically there has to be some transformation so that any sound linked with her transforms during the play.

Maggie is an interesting character because both music and sound mean a lot to her, so I have to try to find a way of getting that in. Creating that idea, that sound in her head is very important. She has an extraordinary imagination; she sees and experiences things very vividly and sound is one of those things.

There also has to be something related to the theme of water: perhaps even using buckets of water to create some kind of sound. Otherwise a lot of music will be done on tape and I have got my water effects ready! But I also want to musicalise the water so that it becomes even more vivid. It's as though Maggie hears things and sees things in water. Obviously it is something that is with her through her life. It has all sorts of overtones of fatalism and destiny: and also a natural force, which is like Maggie's own life force which goes on regardless.

*I want to
musicalise
the water
so that it
becomes
even more
vivid...*

QUESTION

? What sounds or instruments would you use to symbolise each character?



mill on the floss

EXPRESSIONISM

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of barely suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place **feels** like than what it realistically **looks** like. In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale

Polly Teale, Co-Director



WRITING A REVIEW

guidelines for writing a review

Say what you saw
Say what you think
Reflect on your responses
Write freely from the heart

Don't worry about given theories
Create your own theories

Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
Question that moment
Find out what it says to you
Say why it spoke to you

consider...

The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
The set, the costumes, the style of the production

the objects...

The wooden doll
The riding crop
The linen
The tea cup
Books
The bags of flour
The rag doll

the themes...

The characters
The story
The ending...

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

Send your review to
Shared Experience Theatre
The Soho Laundry
9, Dufour's Place
London W1V 1FE

or

e-mail: youththeatre@setheatre.co.uk



shared**experience**

mill on the floss

YOUTH TRAINING AND ACCESS

The company's Youth Theatre, based at the Soho Laundry and supported by Westminster City Council, is a hotbed of creativity. Young Performers come to stretch their physical and imaginative muscles in courses led by artists from within the company. It runs a wide variety of workshops and projects designed to put members in touch with the physical style of the company's work.

Contact Shared Experience on 020 7434 9248
youththeatre@setheatre.co.uk

