CHAPTER 3

“A Voice Like Music”

The Problem of Other Minds and Middlemarch

The breach from one mind to another is perhaps the greatest breach in nature.

—William James, The Principles of Psychology

1. THE REAL PROBLEM OF OTHER MINDS

George Eliot meditates on the nature of consciousness throughout her works of fiction with the insistence of a philosopher who cannot end the meditation. What does it mean to know? How does one know? What can one know? These are the questions that structure Eliot’s epistemological search, while her narratives embody their working-through. As works of biographical fiction, the novels named for characters (Adam Bede, Silas Marner, Daniel Deronda, Romola, Félix Holt) are primarily about the search for knowledge as a means of coming to self-knowledge. Middlemarch, in its representation of a community in the middle—the middle class of a mid-nineteenth-century English province—shifts the ground of the investigation, however, from “what do I know?” to “what do I know of you?”

1. Alan Palmer’s fine “Intermental Thought in the Novel: The Middlemarch Mind” explores how Eliot writes the community mind—the “intermental mind”—of Middlemarch by asking who constitutes this collective mind, how the rhetorical presence of this intersubjective mind works, what the judgments are of this intermental mind, and why Eliot writes a community mind—to what end are its effects on the central lives of its individual characters?
then his body, then God, then others and the world. Descartes knows that others exist, but not how they exist as themselves, in their own minds, or even if they have minds. What might it mean to know or feel the mind of another? What does it mean that we cannot? I take these to be the central questions to follow on the heels of Descartes’ skepticism, the questions philosophers group together as “the problem of other minds.” Stanley Cavell in “Knowing and Acknowledging” defines the problem of other minds this way: “What is this ‘knowing a person’? What does it mean to say, ‘I know he is in pain,’ and how does that differ from saying, ‘I know I am in pain?’” (253–54). And: “The skeptic comes up with his scary conclusion—that we can’t know what another person is feeling because we can’t have the same feeling, feel his pain, feel it the way he feels it—and we are shocked; we must refute him, he would make it impossible ever to be attended to in the right way” (246–47). While we can’t really seriously doubt existence—that part of Descartes’ radical skepticism no longer stirs much anxiety—we continue, I think, to take seriously the post-Cartesian discovery that we can’t experience the mind of another, and so can’t know what it means to be another or to experience the world as another does or to know, in particular, another’s pain. And however disturbing that discovery leaves us, the accompanying recognition—“If I can’t experience as does another his or her mind, then neither can another experience my mind as I do and so another cannot know me or my pain as I do”—leaves us with the shock and sorrow that we may then never be, as Cavell puts it, “attended to in the right way.” To recognize the problem of other minds means to recognize that we may never know another or be known as we do ourselves. It means to acknowledge that that which enables us to know—the mind—may be that which keeps us from knowledge of and by others. It means we are divided by our minds.

But why? Must we be? Explaining the phenomenon physiologically, at the space where body and mind meet, Antonio Damasio writes in *The Feeling of What Happens*:

> Life is carried out inside a boundary that defines a body. Life and the life urge exist inside a boundary, the selectively permeable wall that separates the internal environment from the external environment. The idea of the organism revolves around the existence of that boundary . . . I believe that minds and consciousness, when they eventually appeared in evolution, were first and foremost about life and the life urge within a boundary. To a great extent they still are. (137)

For Eliot, the problem of other minds is not just a philosophical ques-
tion, nor is it just about adopting a skeptical mood. Choosing to describe the experience of minds as narrative, not to define the nature of mind as philosophical argument, means representing consciousness as alive and particular and separate—held to a boundary—embodied. For George Eliot, the problem of other minds is a real problem of representation in *Middlemarch*.

The opening to chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* heralds what will be an ongoing concern throughout her writing career and so, too, will be of ongoing concern to her readers, namely Eliot’s stated project: how to “give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind” (177). As her readers, we turn and return to this bit of text because of its clothed mantle of intent—how the character Rector of Broxton fictionally figures the means for Eliot to write the real:

“This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!” I hear one of my lady readers exclaim, “How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice. You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things—quite as good as reading a sermon.”

Certainly, I could, my fair critic, if I were a clever novelist, not obliged to creep servilely after nature and fact, but able to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, my characters would be entirely of my own choosing, and I could select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But you must have perceived long ago that I have no such lofty vocation, and that I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (177)

To give a “faithful account of men and things” can occur only through the penetration by Eliot’s mind of the natures of those men and things. Here, she asserts, this happens through reflection. Eliot turns her mirroring mind toward the object of study, the character Rector of Broxton—what constitutes “him,” which reflects itself back to her mind as what she knows of “men and things,” which she then reports as faithfully as she can in the voice of the first-person narrator, “as if I were in the witness-box narrating my own experience on oath.” The mirror, while “defective[,] the outlines . . . sometimes . . . disturbed[,] the reflection faint or confused,” is what Eliot is bound to tell, is all she can tell, as if it is her own first-person experience. But it is not her own experience—the boundary of her
body, her mind, her being as the implied author divides her from other men and things. If Eliot’s desire is to write “a faithful account of men and things,” what she acknowledges is that she cannot, except as defective, disturbed, faint, confused interactions between the world without and a mirroring mind within. Eliot’s realism, therefore, is her acknowledgment of skepticism. However, her ongoing yearning to discover how we might know another and be known, and how she might make such a discovery transparent, reveals what I take to be the deepest longing of her writing: to transcend the terrors of separateness—one body from another, one mind from another, one human being from another.

William James describes the great source of terror to infancy as solitude, the source that accounts for the infant’s “expression of dismay—the neverfailing cry—on waking up and finding himself alone” (II, 418). I read George Eliot’s novels as adult expressions of dismay—the “neverfailing cry” of a consciousness waking up to the solitude that accompanies feeling unknown. For George Eliot to seek an answer to the problem of other minds reveals the problem of her own mind: can she transcend her own skepticism?

“By virtue of my interaction with him, I now understand myself differently”; or, “Because of that exchange with her, I now imagine myself this way as opposed to that”—these are the moves of a shifting self-consciousness in which Eliot’s characters so often engage. They are about the gaining of self-knowledge through encountering another. As J. Hillis Miller writes, “By far the most important ‘events,’ for George Eliot’s characters, are encounters

2. Linda Raphael, in her work Narrative Skepticism: Moral Agency and Representations of Consciousness in Fiction, writes about the relation between Eliot’s realism and skepticism. We share an interest in Eliot’s reflections on what as narrator she can and cannot know, can and cannot say in her novel. I’m grateful to Raphael for her careful research, her understanding of character and how we as readers respond to character, and her philosophically driven consideration of how skepticism and narrative meet. While not defining the condition as “skeptical,” J. Hillis Miller writes about the self as unknowable to the other and writes about the other as unknowable in Middlemarch: “If what each person at bottom is, even for himself or herself at certain traumatic moments, is an unknown and unknowable alterity, the roar on the other side of silence, then one person cannot in principle know another. The other person is a cluster of signs held together as a fictitious order by the force of the other’s ego, projected unwittingly or unwittingly therefrom, and then misread by me on the basis of my own egoistic structuring of myself and my surroundings” (“The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Otherness in Middlemarch, EDDA 3 [1995], 242). This essay appears in revised form in Miller’s Others.

3. Tom Sperlinger’s finely attuned “‘The Sensitive Author’: George Eliot” discusses Eliot’s portrayals of sympathy through her own vulnerability to criticism. He writes: “Sympathy allows Eliot’s characters to support one another, which shuts out the glare in their own self” (259). And wonders: “Why is solitude, being left with oneself, so terrifying? In Middlemarch, even when characters are alone, they are protected by the novel. The interconnectedness of different lives means that no loneliness is absolute” (268). Sperlinger concludes that while for some the presence of Eliot’s “personal need” in her novels overshadows their own experience as readers, for others “Eliot is, for the same reason, a curiously intimate presence . . . [R]eaders of many kinds still find they can bring to her novels their urgent concerns, questions, needs, and terrors” (272).
with those clusters of signs that are other people” (“The Roar” 238). Perhaps the greatest instance in Eliot’s writing of how a character comes to know herself because of exchanges with another occurs in Daniel Deronda: Gwendolen Harleth’s self-consciousness depends on her repeated interactions with Deronda. Without their dialectic exchanges, in which he questions her about her sense of self and she responds with an increasing sense of uncertainty and possibility, one wonders whether Gwendolen would ever engage in the pursuit of self-knowledge. Middlemarch at times depends on the brush with another, but differently. Here the engagement becomes an application of the other onto and even into the self, so that Eliot imagines the possibility of the self knowing another mind, however briefly, as feeling the presence of the other residing within. All who come into contact with Bulstrode in Book Seven feel the encounter as a form of contagion from which they must cleanse themselves; Rosamond, by virtue of her momentary, shocked recognition of Dorothea’s nobility becomes, for a moment, noble herself; Fred comes to stop expecting luck to see him through, stops expecting the world to support him, in coming to understand what it means to be the “fair brother” who is Farebrother; Ladislaw knows what it is to be the “perfect crystal” in his feeling of devotion to Dorothea, which is a response to his experience of Dorothea as the “perfect crystal.” To imagine the boundary between minds as porous so that moments of mind-to-mind entrance, encounter, and exchange can occur requires a porousness of the body—the boundary that keeps mind from mind.

2. SOUND

The wearing of another’s consciousness seems at first to be a representation of visual experience in Middlemarch; Eliot’s use of the microscope as an organizing object and metaphor of the first part of the novel apparently asserts this. However, what is known by sight, even enhanced by the microscope or telescope, proves invariably to be a faulty means of making the other’s mind present. Eliot acknowledges the flawed results of knowing another through mirrored reflection in the opening paragraphs of chapter 17 that I cited from Adam Bede. While she asserts here that all attempts to mirror the other back to herself will be defective (because they will be subjective and therefore limited to her consciousness, a consciousness separate from the mirrored one), I take it to be significant that her words to define this process throughout the passage are only visual: “mirror,” “reflect,” “outline.” For Eliot, what is seen most of all reflects back the one who sees. In the way that Lydgate looks through the lens of a microscope in hopes of seeing
his preconceived idea of the “primitive tissue,” Eliot focuses the lens of a metaphoric microscope on scenes of provincial life in a minute analysis of its moments with an eye toward gaining access to an objective vision or greater consciousness of life. Both investigations are motivated by previ-
sions of a desired end. Throughout Middlemarch, however, Eliot questions
how far her desire to see things for “what they are” can go, even with
looking to detail with microscopic attention. She perpetually wonders: Do
any of us see another for who he or she really is? What does it mean that
a particular pair of eyes, connected to a particular consciousness, is doing
the seeing and analysis? What Eliot suggests is that we see not with greater
objectivity but with an intensified subjectivity:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves mak-
ing interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under
a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity
into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many
animated tax pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets
which make vortices for these victims while the swaller waits passively
at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens
applied to Mrs. Cadwallader’s matchmaking will show a play of minute
causes producing what may be called thought and speech vortices to bring
her the food she needed. (59–60)

Seeing through a microscope is difficult, even faulty. However, what one
sees are the causes and motivations that drive the self. Mrs. Cadwallader
needs to make a match; therefore, she thinks and speaks in such a way that
she will get what she desires—a match motivated by her. For Eliot, look-
ing to “see” the consciousness of another as a means of knowing another

4. Other writers on Eliot’s realism focus much of their attention on how Eliot uses visual
forms of writing to define her realism, as in Gillian Beer’s analysis of Eliot’s use of visual metaphor/
imagery to discuss invisible ideas: “The imagery of transcendence, of the invisible world, is one
which George Eliot shares. The microscope and the telescope, by making realisable the plurality of
worlds, scales, and existences beyond the reach of our particular sense organisation were a powerful
antidote to that form of positivism which refused to acknowledge possibilities beyond the present
and apparent world” in Darwin’s Plots (141–42); or George Levine’s assertion about Middlemarch
that “That novel seems, encyclopedically, to partic ipate, in a vast range of intellectual activity. But
George Eliot does attempt to make that activity ultimately consonant with the scientific vision. Her
preoccupation throughout the novel with the problem of perception, for example, belongs in the
whole tradition of Victorian concern with what it means to ‘see,’” in The Realistic Imagination (257);
and Barbara Hardy in her attention to the “surfaces” of Middlemarch essentially analyzes Eliot’s use of
visual detail, as in, “When Dorothea feels the impact of the red hangings in St. Peter’s ‘like a disease
of the retina,’ an image which is clearly related to major themes, situations and other images, it is
essential that we recognize the pressure of the surface: this sight, this physical impact,” in Particularities:
Readings in George Eliot (40–41).
means seeing the other through the lens of the self. Seeing involves a negotiation between image and its analysis, an analysis based on the seer's past knowledge or experiences or desires. To see the other always to know a “negotiated” other, or reflection of the self.

What accounts in Middlemarch for the almost magical possibility of the movement of one mind to and even into another is sound. Characters that are alive in the moment to what they hear are most vulnerable to or most powerfully able to meet the mind of another. Eliot uses the metaphors of voice, deafness, musicality, and attunement to sound as the rhetorical space where the idea of the problem of other minds is staged. However, it is in her physical descriptions of how characters hear or make sounds, are deaf or are silent that she works through how one consciousness comes to know or not know another as a physical solution to the problem of other minds. Eliot makes the interaction between minds physical, where each remains separate at the boundary of his or her body, but where both meet through how one body emits sound and another body receives it in aural sensation. The sensation of sound carries with it the possibility for Eliot of experiencing the other's mind as that received sensation, not transformed through the self but potentially transforming of the self.

Eliot's contemporary Hermann Helmholtz, the great scientist of the physiology of perception and one of the founders of modern psychology, in

5. Beryl Gray’s pioneering study George Eliot and Music (1989) sets itself apart from the critical tradition that has made its primary focus “the awareness of Eliot's need to make us see” in her attention to Eliot's auditory imagination (ix). Gray and I share in the perception that it is through sound that Eliot writes her ethic of empathy. Gray says it this way: “The extent to which sound permeates and animates the novels has failed to permeate our understanding of them, and we have remained therefore partly deaf to that which George Eliot would have her own art 'teach.' For the ability to listen—to be stirred by the tones and modulations of the human voice, and to discern and respond to all forms of natural and humanly wrought harmony—invariably symbolises George Eliot's most cherished moral virtue: the capacity for human sympathy. The degree to which a character possesses this ability is the infallible guide to our judgement” (x). Delia da Sousa Correa's George Eliot, Music and Victorian Culture (2003) joins Gray's analysis as the only other book-length study that explores how, as Eliot says about herself, she wrote “as a person with an ear and a mind susceptible to the direct and indirect influences of music” (2). Da Sousa Correa's work distinguishes itself from Gray's in its attention to how Victorian culture trained Eliot's ear and mind in its susceptibility. Da Sousa Correa connects Eliot's musical allusions to the scientific discourse and discourse on women's relation to music of Eliot's day. She as well brings notions of German idealism to her reading of the presence of the “uncanny” and alludes to Eliot's interest in Helmholtz's work on sympathetic vibration. John Picker makes Helmholtz a central figure in his Victorian Soundscapes, particularly with regard to how he reads Daniel Deronda. Peter Capuano in “The Objective Aural-Relative in Middlemarch” explores Eliot's understanding of music through her translation of and interest in Arthur Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, an understanding of an “aural reality,” revealed in Schopenhauer's discussion of the relation of Will to music: “Music never expresses the phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself . . . [T]he object of perception . . . contain[s] particulars only as the first forms abstracted from perception, as it were, the separated shell of things; thus they are, strictly speaking abstracta; music, on the other hand, gives the inmost kernel which precedes all forms, of the heart of things” (924).
his 1863 work *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, writes about sensation, and in particular the sensation of sound, in groundbreaking ways that bridge the physiology of sound with the psychology of its experience, ways that continue to inform sound theory, ways that drew Eliot to him. Reading Helmholtz on music and visiting him in Freiburg with Lewes to observe a demonstration of his work, Eliot found a source for her understanding of sound in her attention to Helmholtz’s work on the sensation of tone. Helmholtz writes:

Sensations result from the action of an external stimulus on the sensitive apparatus of our nerves. Sensations differ in kind, partly with the organ of sense excited, and partly with the nature of the stimulus employed. Each organ of sense produces peculiar sensations, which cannot be excited by means of any other; the eye gives sensation of light, the ear sensations of sound, the skin sensations of touch. Even when the sunbeams which excite in the eye sensations of light impinge on the skin and excite its nerves, they are felt only as heat, not as light. In the same way the vibration of elastic bodies heard by the ear, can also be felt by the skin, but in that case produce only a whirring sensation, not sound. The sensation of sound is therefore a species of reaction against external stimulus, peculiar to the ear, and excitable in no other organ in the body, and is completely distinct from the sensation of any other sense.

The sensation of sound occurs because of the interaction between ear and external stimulus, or because of the way sound waves vibrate against the basilar membrane. Modern researchers of the physiology of sound, such as Mark Jude Tramo, confirm Helmholtz’s pioneering studies; Tramo writes in “Music of the Hemispheres,” “Residing in the cochlea of our inner ear is the basilar membrane. This membrane behaves like guitar strings of varying thickness, enabling groups of sensory receptors (hair cells) along its length to be activated in response to sounds of specific frequencies. The pattern of hair cell excitation is as orderly as the arrangement of keys on a piano, with equal steps along the chromatic scale mapped as equal distances along the basilar membrane” (55). In order for there to be sound, there must be atmospheric vibration, and in order for there to be sound heard, there must be a corresponding activation or vibration of the sensory receptors in the ear. An outside stimulus corresponds to a particular receptor in the

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6. Eliot notes in her journal that she and Lewes visited Helmholtz in Freiburg in 1868 to observe a demonstration of his tuning forks. Writing in a journal entry of February 24, 1869, Eliot reveals that she was reading “Helmholtz on Music.” Eliot published *Middlemarch* in 1871–72. For more biographical notes on Eliot’s attentions to Helmholtz, see da Sousa Correa, 34.
body to make a particular sensation. Helmholtz’s work on the physiology of perception, in particular his treatises on music and optics, explores how the correspondences between a physical stimulus and the body work to create sensation and perception.

Eliot draws on the idea of the interaction of external stimulus (sound wave) to physical organ (ear) as a means of working through how one consciousness meets or misses another. For Eliot, the ear is the porous space of the body, the boundary through which the voice, the messenger of the mind, can travel. Functioning as metaphors to represent open- or closed-mindedness and as literal embodiments, an “open ear” is the physical boundary that makes possible the entrance of the mind-sound of others into another’s consciousness, and “a closed ear” is the physical closing that makes a consciousness deaf to the mind-sound of others. As William James writes, “Almost the entire difference lies in the fact that the bodily sounding-board, vibrating in one case, is mute in the other” (II, 471). Casaubon, Rosamond, Bulstrode are almost deaf to any voice but their own. For them the “problem of other minds” remains a problem because of their inability to understand or, worse still, acknowledge the very existence of another mind—they cannot allow in an external stimulus. This happens because all three live inside self-narratives that preclude the possibility of their being alive to the presence of others and what they might experience if they could hear their difference. Bulstrode holds tight to the threads of his present-day story of piety to keep the sins of the past at bay; Casaubon clings to an ongoing narrative about the importance of his work to keep from meeting his fear that it amounts to nothing and to keep from knowing his own puny, faulty heart. Rosamond lives inside a preconceived romance in which she maps out the course of her life as heroine, manages everyone, and need never change her mind because of her certain belief in her narrative. Narcissists, all three know themselves to be the candle at the center of the other metaphoric mirror—the pier-glass of chapter 27. Whereas Eliot attempts to mirror other men and things in her mind, the narcissist imagines himself to be the sun, the center, the light around which all others gather to mirror back to the sun its reflection: “Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun” (264). All three candles/egoisms understand the random scratches to tell with certainty the narratives they cling to, until the narratives fail. It’s not that Rosamond, Casaubon, or Bulstrode is physically deaf or cannot make sound. All three hear and speak, but with such determination
to hear and to shape their sounds in a certain way that they do not hear other ways or other sounds that do not correspond to their preconceptions of or desires for a certain sound. Nor do the sounds they make ever erupt into displays of spontaneity; instead, they use their voices as a form of control. Artful, measured, Bulstrode always speaks in “undertones” and uses his voice to point to others’ errors (128); Casaubon pontificates in like cadences to the imagined sounds of a Pascal, Locke, or Milton, and desires that Dorothea be an “elegant-minded canary-bird” singing her uncritical awe of him (200); and Rosamond speaks always with the self-control taught her at Mrs. Lemon’s finishing school and is the model of a “finished” Mrs. Lemon’s girl (96).

There seems to be no center to Rosamond other than her mirror: “She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own” (117). If Rosamond is by nature mimetic—an imitation—she displays that most thoroughly in her relation to sound. Rosamond is known to be the “best musician in Middlemarch” (117). Her piano instruction happened at the hands of a Master Kapellmeister. Eliot writes:

Rosamond, with the executant’s instinct, had seized his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble music with the precision of an echo. It was almost startling, heard for the first time. A hidden soul seemed to be flowing forth from Rosamond’s fingers; and so indeed it was, since souls live on in perpetual echoes, and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an originating activity, if it be only that of an interpreter . . .

Her singing was less remarkable, but also well trained, and sweet to hear as a chime perfectly in tune . . .—she only wanted to know what her audience liked. (161)

Rosamond can hear with uncanny clarity the music of Kapellmeister—so much so that her piano performances live as his echo. Likewise, her voice reflects a chime perfectly in tune. Rosamond is an embodied, desired recording: she plays back the sounds of the world that she knows are well liked. Almost soulless, Rosamond’s is a well-liked copy, an interpretation. What she cannot do, however, is listen to what is generally not pleasing; nor can she make sounds as herself, not in imitation of others. The experience of intersubjectivity—knowing another and being known by another—depends on the acknowledgment of separate and mutual presence, or experiencing one’s own separate presence in simultaneity with the other’s separate, co-presence. There are no separate others for Rosamond to hear, finally, because Rosamond has no separate soul yet of her own to hear—only echoes.
Lydgate, upon first hearing her play, imagines Rosamond to be “something exceptional,” imagines her playing to reflect her own soul, realizes over time, through their marriage, that what he imagined is not so. In his mounting despair, Lydgate comes to understand that it is Rosamond’s impenetrability, her iron resistance to hearing his difficult words, his hard reasons, his unpleasant pleas—her incapacity, finally, to be moved by him—that is the yoke that undoes him. He wonders, “What place was there in her mind for a remonstrance to lodge in?” (666). Rosamond can neither hear his critique of her nor hear his own despair. She does not house models of those sounds and so cannot make their echoes. Until Rosamond’s brief encounter with Dorothea, we learn that there is no place, no room in her mind for Lydgate’s troubled consciousness because she has not yet desired to master through imitation its type—the sounds of pain.

3. SYMPATHETIC VIBRATION

By contrast, when Dorothea muses about Will Ladislaw, after she learns of the codicil to the will and feels its effect—her “sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw” (490)—she realizes, “he was a creature who entered into every one’s feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance” (496). Will does what the skeptic claims he cannot—enter into “every one’s feelings,” as their feelings, without forcing his own. Because Will is always present to the array of stimuli that surround him, his openness makes him vibrate with an immediate responsiveness to what enters him. His eyes see, but his porous, open ears prompt a deeper sensation, make a deeper corresponding vibration. Will gets it wrong when he meets Dorothea—her words about his pictures, her attachment to Casaubon—“[He] had made up his mind that she must be an unpleasant girl” (80). Mind and eye mix. Will cannot yet encounter Dorothea, but catches her sound. We learn for the first time in the novel of Dorothea’s voice, something no one until Will has heard: “But what a voice! It was like the voice of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp” (80). And later when Will observes Dorothea as a tearful statue in Rome, leaning into her hand, he can, like his friend the painter Naumann, appreciate her for the moment as a living painting. However, it is Dorothea, the living woman, to whom he is most responsive. Will asks Naumann, “This woman whom you have just seen . . . how would you paint her voice, pray? But her voice is much diviner than anything you have seen of her” (191). Will feels her aliveness through his encounter with her voice—how it enters him, stirs him, vibrates within him.
Helmholtz differentiates music from noise when he asserts that noise makes “rapid irregular, but distinctly perceptible alternations of various kinds of sounds, which crop up fitfully . . . On the other hand, a musical tone strikes the ear as a perfectly undisturbed, uniform sound which remains unaltered as long as it exists, and it presents no alternation of various kinds of constituents” (7–8). If Dorothea’s voice is like music, we can imagine an undisturbed, uniform sound that remains unaltered as long as it exists. However, we can’t hear her voice—just that it is like an Aeolian harp, angels, the Messiah: “‘She speaks in such plain words, and a voice like music. Bless me! it reminds me of bits in the Messiah—‘and straightway there appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying’; it has a tone with it that satisfies your ears’” (552), Caleb Garth rhapsodizes. Her “voice like music” holds for Caleb the deepest of emotional experiences. Yet, how are we, as Eliot’s readers unable to hear Dorothea, to understand this? Susanne Langer, the modern philosopher of aesthetics, who makes the relation between music and emotion her great topic, links feeling to form:

Music is not the cause or cure of feelings, but their logical expression. 
(Philosophy in a New Key 218)

The tonal structures we call “music” bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling—forms of growth and attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm, or subtle activation and dreamy lapses—not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. Such is the pattern, or logical form, of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal analogue of emotive life. 
(Feeling and Form 27)

Hearing Dorothea’s sounds perhaps feels for both Caleb and Will as if they are being touched by something divine because her music is the tonal analogue of feeling blessed. For Martha Nussbaum music feels more like a dream that carries us not to the divine but to the most vulnerable, feeling parts of ourselves—

Music can bypass habit, use, and intellectualizing, in such a way that its symbolic structures seem to pierce like a painful ray of light directly into the most vulnerable parts of the personality. Lacking the narrative and objectual structures to which we are accustomed in language, it frequently has an affinity with the amorphous, archaic, and extremely powerful emo-
tional materials of childhood. And it gives them a sharpening, an expressive precision, what Mahler calls crystallization, that they did not have when covered over by thoughts, in their still-archaic form. One enters the “dark world,” in which language and daily structures of time and causality no longer reign supreme; and one finds the music giving form to the dim shapes of that darkness. Another way of expressing the point is that music seems to elude our self-protective devices, our techniques of manipulation and control, in such a way that it seems to write directly into our blood. (Upheavals of Thought 269)

In the way that a dream can penetrate so deeply and disorient so fully, music for Nussbaum has the power to carry us back to the darkness of the amorphous, the archaic—to infancy—to being again a bundle of defenseless, unknowing feelings in the dark world of utter vulnerability. The authors of “The Music of Nature and the Nature of Music,” like Langer and Nussbaum, acknowledge that we find meaning and emotion in music. To understand that relation, these contemporary scientists do not suggest analogues but instead turn to the brain of our preverbal past: “Such an impenetrable vagueness about this most basic of human creations seems to signal that the roots of music lie closer to our lizard brain than to our more reasoning cortex, that music has a more ancient origin even than human language” (Gray et al. 54). Hearing the music of Dorothea perhaps feels divine, perhaps feels like a dream, perhaps feels archaic because of how it strikes the ancient, preverbal emotional chords of the “lizard brain” of those who can hear her. William James describes how when we listen to the human voice perform one of the verbal arts or when we listen to music, we feel our bodies respond, which we experience as our emotional response: “In listening to poetry, drama, or heroic narrative we are often surprised at the cutaneous shiver which like a sudden wave flows over us, and at the heart-swelling and the lachrymal effusion that unexpectedly catches us at intervals. In listening to music the same is even more strikingly true” (II, 457). 

7. Damasio helps explain James’s recognition of the pleasurable response of the emotional body to voiced art and music in Looking for Spinoza: “There is an intimate and telling three-way connection between certain kinds of music, feelings of either great sorrow or great joy, and the body sensations we describe as ‘chills’ or ‘shivers’ or ‘thrills.’ For curious reasons, certain musical instruments, particularly the human voice, and certain musical compositions, evoke emotive states that include a host of skin responses such as making the hair stand on end, producing shudders, and blanching the skin. Perhaps nothing is more illustrative for our purposes than evidence from a study conducted by Anne Blood and Robert Zatorre. They wanted to study neural correlates of pleasurable states caused by listening to music capable of evoking chills and shivers down the spine. The investigators found those correlates in the somatosensng regions of the insula and anterior cingulate, which were significantly engaged by musically thrilling pieces. Moreover, the investigators
Part II: George Eliot and Other-Consciousness

hear her. Eliot uses Dorothea’s voice to distinguish one soul’s quality and breadth from another. To feel the thrilling quality of Dorothea’s sound marks her hearer as one with a like quality and breadth of emotion: Caleb feels a shiver like that which he feels listening to the Messiah; Will feels her resonating through him like the Aeolian harp; Lydgate feels her sound as a soul-piercing cry made part of his somatic memory. “Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion” (469), Eliot writes. These are the men in Middlemarch whose good is akin to Dorothea’s.

However, Eliot wants us not just to imagine what it sounds and feels like to hear Dorothea: she wants us to wonder what it means for a mind to hold music—what it means for words and music to meet—as a poetry of being. As Dorothea’s readers, we are closest to her sounds when we hear the plainness and directness of Dorothea’s language, mostly from her exchanges with Will about art or the good, as in:

“I have a belief of my own, and it comforts me.”

“What is that?” said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

“That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don’t quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.”

“That is a beautiful mysticism—it is a—”

“Please not to call it by any name,” said Dorothea, putting out her hands entreatingly. “You will say it is Persian, or something else geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it.” (392)

Dorothea’s simple words—“perfectly good”; “It is my life”; “I have found it out, and cannot part with it”—are her belief, her life, what she has experienced, what keeps her alive. They are the verbal expression of her deepest self. She refuses Will’s desire to move toward the complexity of a learned language to analogize her belief or to place her words in some intellectual context: Dorothea literally pushes the intellectualizing process away with her hands. Dorothea’s nature compares with Eliot’s description in “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar” of the great artists and musicians who are inspired not through their intellects, but for whom “the symbol rushes in correlated the intensity of the activation with the reported thrill value of the pieces (which individual participants hand-picked) and not the mere presence of music” (102–3). Damasio draws on the research of Jaak Panksepp, “The Emotional Sources of Chills Induced by Music,” Music Perception 13 (1995): 171–207, and Anne Blood and Robert Zatorre, “Intensely Pleasurable Responses to Music Correlate with Activity in Brain Regions Implicated in Reward and Emotion,” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 98 (2001): 11818–23.
on their imagination before their slower reflection has seized any abstract idea embodied in it" (88–89). The “symbol” for Eliot is involuntary and comes from a place of inspiration and passion, not from an idea. We can read Dorothea’s simple sentences and understand that her words are the traces of her soul brought forward from within carried through her sounds—the mixed media of her soul’s expression. Her words mean her feelings, as her voice makes their sounds. The music of Dorothea, therefore, is her being—simple, direct, unalterably intent on pursuing her truth—“a poem,” Will calls her.

Strangely, perhaps, Caleb can hear Dorothea and be moved by her in the way that he is moved by the sounds of business. What for Helmholtz is the noise of industry, for Caleb is a symphony: “The echoes of the great hammer where roof or keel were a-making, the signal shouts of the workmen, the roar of the furnace, the thunder and splash of the engine, were a sublime music to him” (250). Caleb knows what it means to feel stirred by the stimuli of the labor that supports the social body: alive to its presence, he carries its sound within him as music. Labor for Caleb is consciousness of the social body. His attunement to the music of labor and its beneficent effects lead him to an idea: if he can bring consciousness of the social body to Fred’s consciousness, then he will make a man of Fred. Eliot writes of the moment when the idea stirs inside Caleb in the way that Helmholtz writes of the idea of sympathetic vibration:

Deep in the petrous bone out of which the internal ear is hollowed lies a peculiar organ, the cochlea or snail shell—a cavity filled with water, and so called from its resemblance to the shell of a common garden snail. This spiral passage is divided throughout its length into three sections, upper, middle, lower, by two membranes stretched in the middle of its height. The Marchese Corti discovered some very remarkable formations in the middle section. They consist of innumerable plates, microscopically small, arranged orderly side by side, like the keys of a piano. They are connected at one end with the fibres of the auditory nerve, and at the other with the stretched membrane . . . [figure 1]

In the so-called vestibulum, also where the nerves expand upon little membranous bags swimming in water, elastic appendages, similar to stiff hairs have been lately discovered at the ends of the nerves. The anatomical arrangement of these appendages leaves scarcely any room to doubt that they are set into sympathetic vibration by the waves of sound which are conducted through the ear. Now if we venture to conjecture—it is at present only a conjecture, but after careful consideration I am led to think
FIGURE 1 Original description of figure: A, left labyrinth from without. B, right labyrinth from within. C, left labyrinth from above. Fc, fenestra cochleae or round window. Fv, fenestra vestibuli, or oval window. Re, recessus ellipticus. Rs, recessus sphaericus. h, horizontal semicircular canal. ha, ampulla of the same. vaa, ampulla of the front vertical semicircular canal. vpa, ampulla of the back vertical semicircular canal. vc, common limb of the two vertical semicircular canals. Av, cast of the aquaeductus vestibuli. Tsf, tractus spiralis foraminosus. *Cast of the little canals which debouch on the pyramis vestibuli

it very probable—that every appendage is tuned to a certain tone like the strings of a piano, then the recent experiment with a piano shows you that when (and only when) that tone is sounded the corresponding hair-like appendage may vibrate, and the corresponding nerve-fibre experience a sensation, so that the presence of each single tone in the midst of a whole confusion of tones must be indicated by the corresponding sensation. (Helmholz 136, 141) [figure 2]

Helmholtz observed that when a sonorous body is struck and its sound waves are carried to a corresponding receptor (a stringed musical instrument or the hair cells of the cochlea), vibrations are induced in the receptor and a like sound and harmonics are made. He called this sympathetic vibration or resonance. Eliot writes: “I am not sure that certain fibres in Mr. Garth’s mind had not resumed their old vibration towards the very

end which now revealed itself to Fred” (561). One can almost imagine Caleb’s mind vibrating in response to an idea that is likewise vibrating in Fred’s mind. Eliot is interested in the moments of attunement that occur between minds—the scene with the railway workers becomes an idea for Fred’s labor, which functions like the sound waves of a sonorous body carried from Garth’s mind to Fred’s corresponding and hence sympathetic mind. She uses Helmholtz’s idea of the sympathetic vibration of sound to create a physiologic ground for mental attunement—what it means to be on the same “mental track”—a metaphor made real. The idea is yet to be spoken, but Fred vibrates in response to Caleb, in his like, corresponding presence.

But even more than a metaphor made real, sympathetic resonance embodies empathy—makes it possible—because it gives empathy a physiology for Eliot in Middlemarch. From the voicing of one’s pain to its reception by another and resonance back, the embodiment of empathy happens for Eliot in the sound waves that travel across body boundaries potentially carrying from mind to mind. Damasio offers a neurologic account of embodied empathy through what are known as mirror neurons: “Those neurons can represent, in an individual’s brain, the movements that very brain sees in another individual, and produce signals toward sensorimotor structures so that the corresponding movements are either ‘previewed,’ in simulation mode, or actually executed. These neurons are present in the frontal cortex of monkeys and humans, and are known as ‘mirror neurons’” (Looking 115). The movement from taking in another’s pain by hearing its account or seeing it causes the body to feel a mirrored pain in response because the mirror neurons represent its presence and the body executes its experience in an “as-if” way—Damasio’s notion of the “as-if-body-loop.” The mirror neurons and the as-if-body-loop make empathy possible—the pain of one felt in the body of another as if one’s own pain. “Mirroring” as a holding and reflecting back of the object prompts the association of a visual signaling back and forth. Damasio writes of “the movements that very brain sees in an individual’s brain”; William James writes that “the sight of suffering or danger to others is a direct exciter of interest, and an immediate stimulus, if no complication hinders, to acts of relief” (II, 410). But sight is only one form of its image-making/sensory enactment. For Eliot “mirroring” means resonating, a resonance prompted not by seeing another’s pain, but by hearing it and vibrating back in sympathy. “The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath.” However defective, disturbed, faint, or
confused the process of reflective mirroring is for Eliot—because of its nature as a looking-at experience—resonating in sympathetic vibration is for Eliot not defective, not disturbed, faint, or confused. To resonate with means to know the other, to be one with the other—at least for that moment of resonance.

Lydgate hears Dorothea’s cry about the dying Casaubon:

“Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been labouring all his life and looking forward. He minds about nothing else. And I mind about nothing else”—

For years after Lydgate remembered the impression produced in him by this involuntary appeal—this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully illuminated life. (289–90)

The sound of Dorothea’s pain enters Lydgate; it is impressed inside him; Lydgate and Dorothea as corresponding sonorous bodies become “kindred natures”; their minds meet in sympathetic resonance. Dorothea’s sounds continue to stay in Lydgate and resound later in his memory as “wondering impressions,” as part of his somatic memory. Inside him, months later he hears, “Advise me—think what I can do,” and from the sound waves outside he hears in response to his plea to Rosamond to help him in their times of growing financial hardship and in his moment of mounting despair, “What can I do, Tertius?” (593–94). The conditions must be right for sympathetic resonance to occur—a corresponding sonorous body must be present to vibrate to the emitted sound waves—something like what Eliot means by having like “complexions of the soul.” Lydgate cannot keep himself from Dorothea’s pain; he takes her in not by choice but because as a corresponding sonorous body, he hears and then holds her cries within. The movement of sound waves from Dorothea to Lydgate starts to free her mind of pain’s hold because of this re-embodiment of her pain in him—her mind met and held by his mind. Rosamond, by contrast, cannot open herself to Lydgate’s pain. She does not choose, as Eliot puts it, this complete missing of his “mental track”—she just does. Not a corresponding sonorous body to Lydgate and so unable to hear him, Rosamond cannot hold him within and resonate back. Without this sonorous resonance, the boundary between Rosamond and Lydgate hardens and their minds divide.

Lydgate’s pain is dropped. It falls back into the silence of Lydgate’s mind after the waves of sound find nowhere else to vibrate. Unheard and unheld by another, Lydgate’s silenced pain expands to fill his mind, to silence his
other voices, and to shake his sense of worth, until the appearance of a corresponding sonorous body in Book Eight. Dorothea returns to share in the emission and vibration of Lydgate's sound—now his cry from soul to soul:

“Not because there is no one to believe in you?” said Dorothea, pouring out her words in clearness from a full heart. “I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable.”

It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on Lydgate's ears. He drew a deep breath, and said “Thank you.” He could say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him.

“I beseech you to tell me how everything was,” said Dorothea fearlessly. “I am sure that the truth would clear you.”

. . . He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it . . .

Dorothea's voice, as she made this childlike picture of what she would do, might have been almost taken as proof that she could do it effectively . . . he gave himself up, for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous sympathy, without any check of proud reserve. And he told her everything. (762–63)

Lydgate can come to consciousness of himself again because he is held by Dorothea's belief in him, belief that she knows his consciousness still to be his. Her knowledge of him is given to him through her words, which enter him, resonate, and create a spaciousness for him to meet himself again. And he meets himself through his words, which he offers both to Dorothea and to himself. While Lydgate may have rehearsed the story in his head, the utterance makes Lydgate's story concrete. He can give the story to Dorothea for her to hold; as it is spoken out loud to her, Lydgate can hear the story for himself; and he can feel the return of his being somewhere between the waves of sounds they share. The Aeolian harp has strings tuned in unison, on which the wind produces varying harmonics over the same fundamental tone. I read it as a metaphor for the body “mirrored” in sound in an as-if-body-loop exchange that occurs between Lydgate and Dorothea—his pain held in her, her belief given back to him—resonating between their voices and their hearing. Dorothea's voice, this sound first heard by Will to be “like the voice of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp” (80), now invites Lydgate's voice, the wind. So her belief in him—the fundamental tone—meets his story—the
varying harmonics. Lydgate can hear the sounds of his own consciousness for himself because they have been prompted to expression and held in the steady supportive tone of Dorothea’s belief in him, as the strings that resonate in response to the wind of his voice. Dorothea’s presence enables Lydgate to know himself again because he can hear himself again through her hearing sympathetic resonance.

In the way that Lydgate has no choice but to feel himself impressed by Dorothea’s pain because of their “kindred natures,” Dorothea has no choice but to feel Lydgate’s pain. However, Dorothea’s experience of resonance with Lydgate leads to a moral act. Dorothea offers herself to Lydgate, first as his hearer and then as his advocate. Most of all what she gives him in that space of offering is her belief in him. Lydgate’s belief in himself has been hurt by the weight of carrying his pain alone and in silence; Dorothea’s voiced belief in him reanimates its sounds within him, gives him the chance to know the sounds of belief again within and for himself. For Eliot, if sympathetic resonance makes feeling empathy a real possibility, choosing to judge and to act from that feeling endows empathy with the potential for moral judgment and moral action, what I take Eliot to mean by “the good.”

4. BEING AND RESONANCE

Whereas Will “warbles” at the piano or lies on the rug and hums when in the company of Rosamond, when in the presence of Dorothea, Will feels no such easy pleasure of expression. He knows moments of intimate expression he’s never before experienced, moments of fiery emotional outpouring, and moments in which he turns to stone. With the imposition of silence between corresponding souls, where the possibility for sympathetic resonance is withheld, comes the sensation of “two creatures slowly turning to marble in each other’s presence” (543). The codicil imposes Casaubon’s living death between them—it takes the form of silence. Eliot writes, “[E]ach was looking at the other, and consciousness was overflowed by something that suppressed utterance” (630–31). The aliveness that Dorothea and Will discover between them happens when they talk. For the lovers, not to speak means that what constitutes their aliveness, how they make their sounds together, is dampened. What remains is for them to be killed by the passion that cannot be uttered—the silence turns them to stone—or leads them to stage multiple partings in hopes that a sound will at last escape that starts the resonating cycle. In irritated response to Dorothea’s “Please remember me,” Will’s “As if I were not in danger of
forgetting everything else” (634) frees Dorothea’s consciousness. It’s as if the entrance of his words inside her causes her to become larger: “At that moment the parting was easy to bear: the first sense of loving and being loved excluded sorrow. It was if some hard icy pressure had melted, and her consciousness had room to expand; her past was come back to her with larger interpretation” (635). Will’s speech—the entrance of his love inside her—melts the hard icy pressure (Casaubon’s dead hand and not yet knowing Will’s heart) that had squeezed Dorothea’s consciousness into something smaller. The sound waves that carry the verbal expressions of his love don’t just enter her consciousness, but transform it, expand it, and make her feel herself to be more. The silence between Will and Dorothea, two corresponding souls, is broken. Will’s words and sounds enter Dorothea and, in sympathetic vibration, her consciousness breaks open to know a new freedom of feeling and being—a lover.9

Other minds remain for the realist, as for the skeptic, unknowable—another person’s pain cannot be felt as he or she would feel it. In Middlemarch, there is no getting away from other minds. “[A]ny one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another” (95). For George Eliot, it is the human lot to converge—one human life affects others and one human life is affected by others. Any suffering or joy in Middlemarch reveals that preparation of effects from one life to another—a burst into expanded consciousness and the joy of feeling alive, or just a burst and the sorrow of feeling broken—trace in Middlemarch how a mind comes to know and feel known by another and expands, or fails to do so and breaks. Pain is just one part of a person’s consciousness that may go unknown or unfelt by another, or that may resonate with another when a corresponding mind appears to hear the pain and bears it in mind and resonates back.

9. Catherine Gallagher pays needed critical attention to Dorothea’s “strange yearning” toward Will Ladislaw for its erotic nature, for how it makes Dorothea not transcendent but immanent, embodied because sexual in her fine “George Eliot: Immanent Victorian,” 71–72. Perhaps less erotic but equally embodied because surgical, in much the same way that Will’s words melt the hard icy pressure inside Dorothea, when Dorothea goes to Rosamond to speak on behalf of Lydgate, Eliot writes of the effects of the entrance of Dorothea’s tones inside even the immoveable imitation that is Rosamond as a bursting—though “as if a wound within her had been probed.” Momentarily, she even makes Rosamond feel what it is to be a corresponding sonorous body to Dorothea—

Dorothea, completely swayed by the feeling that she was uttering, forgot everything but that she was speaking from out of the heart of her own trial to Rosamond’s. The emotion had wrought itself more and more into her utterance, till the tones might have gone into one’s very marrow, like a low cry from some suffering creature in the darkness. And she had unconsciously laid her hand again on the little hand that she had pressed before.

Rosamond, with an overmastering pang, as if a wound within her had been probed, burst into hysterical crying. . . . (795)
For Eliot, imagining and bearing another’s pain is possible only if one has the capacity to imagine and bear one’s own. “We should be very patient with each other, I think” (82) is an understanding Dorothea must learn over the course of the novel to feel for herself.

“Consciousness begins as the feeling of what happens when we see or hear or touch,” writes Antonio Damasio (The Feeling 26). To be aware of one another, to know one another, to enter into and affect one another happens in Middlemarch when characters hear others as themselves.