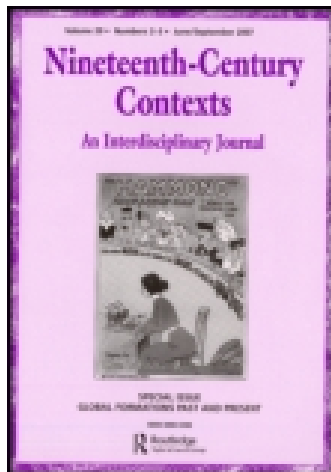


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“The Music Vibrating in Her Still”: Music and Memory in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*

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This is truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things
Tennyson, “Locksley Hall”

In *Daniel Deronda*, these two lines from Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall” translate a refrain from Rossini’s *Otello* where, writes Eliot, “Rossini has worthily set to music the immortal words of Dante—‘Nessun maggior dolore/Che ricordarsi del tempo felice/Nella miseria’” (*Daniel Deronda* 171; bk. 2, ch. 17; Dante, *Inferno* 5. 121–23). Deronda sings this as he rows down the Thames towards his first encounter with Mirah, the novel’s Jewish heroine (169; bk.1, ch. 7). Here, as in other of Eliot’s novels, musically evoked memory underpins moments of intensified emotion and empathy. In Rossini’s opera, Desdemona, grieving over Otello’s exile, hears a gondolier on the canal below singing of how present sorrow is increased by the memory of past happiness. For Mirah, who is about to drown herself, Deronda’s refrain embodies her remembered past and present sorrow. I wish to consider music and memory primarily as literary tropes, but I begin with this reminder that George Eliot’s allusions to music presuppose some element of musical memory in her audience. They are underpinned by a sense that her readers might remember the actual music she refers to as well as having some general apprehension, as we all do, of music’s power to evoke memory.¹ This essay explores the relationship between music and

memory in *The Mill on the Floss* before returning to the scene outlined above from *Daniel Deronda*. In Eliot's two most musically imbued novels, the effects of musical memory complicate issues of identity and undermine distinctions between consciousness and oblivion, future and past.

Eliot's use of musical allusion reflects her engagement with evolutionary science. I consider the significance for her work of accounts of music by Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, George Henry Lewes, and the psychologist James Sully. Eliot's own early evolutionary interest in music is apparent from the article which she wrote for the *Westminster Review* after she and G. H. Lewes met Liszt in 1854. Liszt introduced them to Wagner's music, and "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar" is an appreciation, in evolutionary terms, of Wagner's views on the historical and future development of opera. Eliot welcomed Wagner's progressive organicist theories about his art and, whilst not personally enjoying his music very much, joked that her own lack of enthusiasm for the "music of the future" might be explained by her ears having arrived at only a "tadpole" stage of development "unprescient of the future frog" ("Liszt" 102). In Eliot's novels, musical and personal development are frequently linked and the music of the future is shown literally to emerge from our (not unprescient) memories of the past.

In this essay, I first discuss how remembered music complicates the conflict of passion and duty in *The Mill on the Floss*, eroding distinctions between consciousness and oblivion. Biological theories of musical inheritance are shown to underlie this elision of memory and forgetting, with consequences for individual identity. In *Daniel Deronda*, where musical memory conspicuously dissolves categories of time and individuality, theories of inheritance are seen to contribute more overtly to a range of telepathic effects. These resist Herbert Spencer's dogmatic accounts of mental processes and indicate Eliot's closer sympathy with the more subtle psychology of writers such as James Sully and G. H. Lewes. Eliot's reactions to evolutionary science are illuminating, not because they allow assimilation of her texts within the framework of intellectual history, but because they show how interaction with scientific texts enhanced her representations of music and memory. Moreover, musical memory reveals unexpected affinities between evolutionary biology, Romantic aesthetics, and the uncanny.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, musical allusion is constantly linked with memory and with forgetting. Music's power to provoke or to transcend memory is emblematic of the individual's longing for harmony. Remembered music elevates Maggie Tulliver above the limitations of her immediate circumstances. The lingering imprint of carol singing when "[t]he midnight chant had helped as usual to lift the morning above the level of common days" sets Christmas above the "fustian" everyday world (*Mill* 135; bk. 2, ch. 2). After her first experience of hearing Stephen Guest sing, Maggie is transported into a "brighter aërial world again" away from the "jarring sounds" of the schoolroom where she teaches and from the memory of her "bare, lonely past" (*Mill* 338; bk. 6, ch. 3).

Maggie's conflicting desires, and the conflicting claims made on her, emerge through the singing of Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest. In their first meeting since childhood, memories of Philip's singing tempt Maggie and subvert her commitment to self-denial:

"I was never satisfied with a *little* of anything. That is why it is better for me to do without earthly happiness altogether. ... I never felt that I had enough music—I wanted more instruments playing together—I wanted voices to be fuller and deeper. Do you ever sing now, Philip?" she added abruptly, as if she had forgotten what went before. ... "O sing me something—just one song. I *may* listen to that, before I go—something you used to sing at Lorton on a Saturday afternoon, when we had the drawing-room all to ourselves, and I put my apron over my head to listen." (*Mill* 288–9; bk. 5, ch. 3)

Forbidden by her brother to associate with Philip, Maggie has tried to conquer her desire to see him by imposing alternative remembered music, "by forcing her memory to recall snatches of hymns" (*Mill* 262; bk. 5, ch. 1). However, Philip's musical agency, which initially represents a threat to her sense of familial duty, later comes, through memory, to play a changing role in Maggie's struggle to resolve the conflicting claims inherent in "the shifting relation between passion and duty" (*Mill* 437; bk. 7, ch. 2). As Stephen's singing begins to exert a competing influence, Philip sings an aria which she remembers from one of their previous meetings, in which "the tenor is telling the heroine that he shall always love her though she may forsake him" (*Mill* 366; bk. 6, ch. 7). Maggie acknowledges his claim upon her. The memory of his singing has now become incorporated into her sense of duty to past ties stretching back to

the remembered Eden of her childhood. Her “tranquil, tender affection for Philip, with its root deep down in her childhood” now offers “a sanctuary where she could find refuge from an alluring influence which the best part of her must resist” (*Mill* 360, 361; bk. 6, ch. 7). Remembered music has become allied to a socialised sense of identity and of duty with which the natural “laws of attraction,” manifested in Stephen Guest’s singing, violently clash (*Mill* 350; bk. 6, ch. 6).

Music’s power over Maggie’s memory is highly ambivalent: a transcendent yet perilous influence. It has made her feel “the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight” (*Mill* 338; bk. 6, ch. 3). But Maggie is unable to withstand the influence of Stephen’s voice despite her conscious attempts: for “in spite of her resistance to the spirit of the song and the singer, [she] was taken hold of and shaken by the invisible influence—was borne along by a wave too strong for her” (*Mill* 367; bk. 6, ch. 7). “The music,” as Catherine Clément warns, “makes one forget the plot” (10).

Philip sings an aria from Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*, warning Maggie that her “dreamy reveries” are part of a dangerous moral torpor (*Mill* 366; bk. 6, ch. 7; 338; bk. 6, ch. 3). Eliot’s depictions of music’s power to erase conscious memory combines elements of Romantic exaltation, magnetism, physiology, and physics. The synaesthetic influence of Stephen Guest’s voice and gaze have a hypnotic power which survives in the form of a physically continuing effect. After hearing him sing, Maggie becomes “conscious of having been looked at a great deal...with a glance that seemed somehow to have caught the vibratory influence of the voice” (*Mill* 337–38; bk. 6, ch. 3). Maggie does not merely remember but feels the “music...vibrating in her still” (*Mill* 338; bk. 6, ch. 3). Whilst Philip Wakem sings in a “pleading tenor” possessing “no very fine qualities as a voice,” Stephen Guest’s vibrant bass makes the air “alive with a new influence” (*Mill* 366, 367; bk. 6, ch. 7). Images of sympathetic vibration repeatedly suggest that Maggie responds like a reverberating musical instrument “the inexorable power of sound...quivering through her whole frame” (*Mill* 366; bk. 6, ch. 7). In contrast, she is “touched not thrilled” by Philip’s singing, which, Eliot writes, “suggested distinct memories and thoughts, and brought quiet regret in the place of excitement” (*Mill* 367; bk. 6, ch. 7). In *Romola*, Eliot invokes the same contrast as the difference

“between the memory of music, and the sense of being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies” (251).

Yet memory and oblivion are not the opposites they seem. “Memory” is also at work within immediacy. Memory was, in fact, essential to the explanations of music’s immediate affective power presented by Eliot’s scientific contemporaries. Music, and memory’s role in our response to it, featured importantly within evolutionary debate during the mid-nineteenth century. Discussion was instigated by Eliot’s friend and contemporary Herbert Spencer, with whom she frequently attended the opera during the 1850s. His account of “The Origin and Function of Music” (1857) analysed music’s past development and current function as an agent of social progress. His essay provoked a series of responses from scientists (amongst them Charles Darwin) and from contemporary psychologists. Spencer was the most important populariser of the idea that the laws of evolution governed every sphere of existence including psychology and the arts. Memory was fundamental to his theories about our personal and inherited reactions to musical expression.

Spencer asserted an inevitable sequential progression from simple to complex states in the evolution of memory, as in everything else.² Memory, he explained in *The Principles of Psychology* (1855), is at first a weaker version of its originating psychic state, which, through repetition, becomes an automatic revival and so passes out of consciousness into “unconscious or organic memory” (559–63). It is then replaced by more complex and advanced forms of consciousness until these likewise become automatic. So the evolution of memory progresses.

Essentially, memory functions in Spencer’s account like any other form of habitual nervous response which becomes automatic action. As J. S. Mill recognised, Spencer’s theory provided a physiological basis for associationism. Mill wrote in 1864 to praise him for successfully “affiliating the conscious operations of the mind to the primary unconscious organic actions of the nerves” (qtd. in Young 150).³ Spencer’s essay on music begins with an account of the physiological basis of *all* emotional expression in which he extends the principle of “reflex action” to account for emotional response as well as for sensation (“Origin and Function” 359–62). He then analysed musical response as a series of physiological revivals of previous reactions to sound. He explained music’s power as arising

from remembered associations with cries of pleasure or pain ("Origin and Function" 359–84). Similar sounds heard subsequently would awaken identical nervous response to those evoked by the original expressive cry. This made memory, including unconscious memory as a form of reflex action, physiologically inherent to all musical response.

In *The Physiology of Common Life*, which Eliot's companion Lewes was writing contemporaneously with *The Mill on the Floss*, Lewes gives accounts of reflex action and unconscious sensation which he illustrates with several audial examples (2: 57, 58, 59). Eliot's writing engages closely with a wide variety of scientific texts, but often manifests a particularly close rapport with Lewes's work (which was itself in dialogue with Spencer's thought). Of particular affinity with *The Mill on the Floss*, with its opening invocation of the "dreamy deafness" inspired by the mill, is a passage where Lewes describes our apparent inapprehension of the sound made by a mill wheel once we have become accustomed to it:

The mill-wheel, at first so obtrusive in its sound, ceases at length to excite any attention. The impressions on our auditory nerves continue; but although we hear them, we cease to think about them. ... It is held, indeed, that we cease to hear them, in ceasing to be "conscious" that we hear them; but this is manifestly erroneous. Let the wheel suddenly stop, and there is an immediate corresponding sensational change in us; so much so, that if it occurs during sleep, we awake. (*Physiology of Common Life* 2: 59)

Automatic sensation accounts for deafness as unconscious listening—for oblivion as unconscious memory.

Eliot's accounts of Maggie Tulliver's involuntary response to music in *The Mill on the Floss* portrays the individual as subject to unconscious biological processes, amongst which Spencer would include both music and "the laws of attraction." The latter provide Eliot's title for the chapter in which Stephen Guest's influence over Maggie Tulliver banishes conscious reflection (350, 354; bk. 6, ch. 6). Memory, which Maggie invokes against Stephen Guest, to counter his claims that the laws of nature justify love between them, can itself be seen ultimately to originate in involuntary nervous response (*Mill* 393, 394; bk. 6, ch. 11; 417, 418; bk. 6, ch. 14). "Love is natural" Maggie assents "but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too" (*Mill* 395; bk. 6, ch. 11). Equally

“natural” as the laws of attraction, memory emerges as potentially no more amenable to rational control. Both sexual passion and passionate allegiance to duty entail involuntary memory states. Just as she shows forms of memory at work within oblivion, Eliot resists a rigid categorization which would allow the absolute affiliation of rational consciousness with memory, and of irrational unconsciousness with passion. Conscious and unconscious memory states are dramatically opposed throughout the novel, but relations between them are as fluid as “the shifting relation between passion and duty” (*Mill* 437; bk. 7, ch. 2).

Spencer’s theory emphasised the physiological identity of emotional and of intellectual processes (including memory). These are also organically linked through their common ontogenesis:

[A]s, in the beginning, Memory, Reason, and Feeling, are different sides of the same psychical phenomenon; so, though by the continuous differentiation which accompanies development, they become more distinguishable, yet they never cease to stand in this same fundamental relation. (*Principles of Psychology* 585)

Spencer selects the example of musical response to demonstrate the “impossibility,” even from the “ordinary point of view” of “dissociating the psychical states which we class as intellectual from those which we class as emotional,” since “[n]ot only is it, that in the states of consciousness produced by music the two are inseparably united; but it is, that the state of consciousness produced by a single beautiful tone, presents cognition and emotion fused into one” (*Principles of Psychology* 585–86). However, Spencer seemed unconcerned by the possibility that this physiological equivalence of intellect and emotion might pose difficulties, or that we might experience conflict arising out of unconsciously retained memories as well as those memories on which we base our conscious identity and morality. Eliot shows a level of conflict, unacknowledged by Spencer, to be inherent to his model of evolution. Her depictions of musical memory challenge Spencer’s assumptions about the inevitably progressive sequence of conscious and unconscious states, showing them as inadequate to account for the potential of unconscious states to disrupt conscious memory. Moreover, the most immediate, apparently unreflecting musical response may involve recollections not merely of our individual past, but of our biological inheritance.

“Instinct, although in the individual it precedes Experience, is a product of what was experience in the ancestral organisms from which the individual has inherited his structure” (Lewes, *Problems* 1: 227). In the first volume of his *Problems of Life and Mind* (1874), Lewes expands his earlier account of automatic action in *The Physiology of Common Life*. He advocates Spencer’s “psychogenetical” analysis of mental processes, and emphasises the inherited foundations of individual instincts (*Problems* 1: 245). A view of instinct as hereditary is obviously fundamental to Spencer’s conception of progressively automatised mental faculties: including memory and musicality. Lewes explains our unconscious instincts as potential modes of response activated by individual experience, but inherited from ancestors for whom the same behaviour was conscious: “We learn by individual experiences, registrations of feeling, rendered possible by ancestral experiences” (*Problems* 1: 239). Similar views of inheritance were asserted by Henry Holland, who, like Spencer, had published his views before Eliot began writing fiction. Eliot drew closely on his theories in *The Lifted Veil*, which she interrupted work on *The Mill on the Floss* in order to write.⁴ In his *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (1852) Holland discussed current “theories of transmutation” under which “acquired habits, becoming hereditary, assume the character of specific instincts” (226).

Theories about music’s origin had long speculated that music was a development from ancient modes of emotional expression. Rousseau had famously asserted in his *Essai Sur l’Origine des Langues* that musical expression predated speech (507, 529). Herbert Spencer somewhat eccentrically argued that music was an evolution from the expressive elements of speech.⁵ What these explanations have in common is a sense that Music was an inheritance from some ancient language of emotion.

Like Spencer, Charles Darwin provided a biological basis for this view of music. In *The Descent of Man* (1871) Darwin comments that “The sensations and ideas excited in us by music, or by the cadences of impassioned oratory, appear from their vagueness, yet depth, like mental reversions to the emotions and thoughts of a long-past age” (2: 336). He concludes that a significant part of music’s power is best understood as residing within our inherited memory of its original primary function, which was sexual (2: 336). The emotional intensity and mysterious sense of remembering

produced in us by musical expression become

to a certain extent intelligible if we may assume that musical tones and rhythm were used by the half-human progenitors of man, during the season of courtship, when animals of all kinds are excited by the strongest passions. In this case, from the deeply-laid principle of inherited associations, musical tones would be likely to excite in us, in a vague and indefinite manner, the strong emotions of a long-past age. (2: 336–37)

Darwin gleefully emphasises the evolution from memories of sexual display of all art forms employing the affective power of sound. His account of music concludes:

The impassioned orator, bard, or musician, when with his varied tones and cadences he excites the strongest emotions in his hearers, little suspects that he uses the same means by which, at an extremely remote period, his half-human ancestors aroused each other's ardent passions, during their mutual courtship and rivalry. (2: 337)

Darwin's theory of musical memory leads him to form an opposing view of music's origins to that proposed by Spencer. Music cannot have arisen out of speech if music bears the traces of a mode of expression which predates not only language but human existence—and thus consciousness. In a note on his discussion of music Darwin comments:

[S]ee the very interesting discussion on the Origin and Function of Music, by Mr. Herbert Spencer, in his collected "Essays," 1858, p. 359. Mr. Spencer comes to an exactly opposite conclusion to that at which I have arrived. He concludes that the cadences used in emotional speech afford the foundation from which music has been developed; whilst I conclude that musical notes and rhythm were first acquired by the male or female progenitors of mankind for the sake of charming the opposite sex. Thus musical tones became firmly associated with some of the strongest passions an animal is capable of feeling, and are consequentially used instinctively, or through association, when strong emotions are expressed in speech. (2: 336; n. 33)

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot gives an almost Darwinian account of music, albeit in advance of Darwin's statements concerning music's function in *The Descent of Man*. Darwin had also written briefly about music in relation to sexual selection amongst birds in *The Origin of Species* (1859), which appeared whilst Eliot was writing *The Mill on the Floss*. Darwin describes the use of song by male birds competing for the attention of females, and the female's habitual selection of "the most melodious or beautiful males" (*Origin* 89). In Stephen Guest and Philip Wakem's musical rivalry for Maggie Tulliver, Eliot provides a dramatic presentation of this "severest

rivalry between the males...to attract by singing the females" (Darwin, *Origin* 89). Darwin's more extended account of music in the *Descent of Man* incorporates a similar description of how "the male pours forth his full volume of song, in rivalry with other males, for the sake of captivating the female" (2: 336–37). Stephen Guest's musical seduction of Maggie Tulliver invokes Darwin's "inherited associations" with the "animal" passions of our "half-human progenitors" (*Descent* 2: 336–37). Maggie, the music of Stephen's voice "vibrating in her still," displays not just the physical continuance of sympathetic vibration, but biological connection, as Darwin says, with "the strong emotions of a long-past age" (*Mill* 338; bk. 6, ch. 3; Darwin, *Descent* 2: 337). In her elevation to a "brighter aërial world," Romantic transcendence and biologically inherited memory coincide (*Mill* 338; bk. 6, ch. 3).

Memory provides the basis for an evolutionary account of the mystery of music's affective power, which would otherwise invite explanation by recourse to belief in the existence of a spiritual faculty.⁶ However, the invocation of the traces of ancestral experience within personal memory, make the hidden processes of memory more, rather than less, uncanny. The mysterious and ancient origins of its mnemonic and affective power make Music—the "invisible influence" which possesses Maggie Tulliver—an appropriate analogue for the occult processes of memory (*Mill* 367; bk. 6, ch. 7). The mystery surrounding music's origins connects it with the forgotten beginnings of (pre)human existence, the irretrievable origins which shape our unknown future.⁷

Inspired both by Spencer's theory, and by Darwin's comments on music, the psychologist James Sully, another friend of Eliot's, also analysed memory as innate to musical response and crucial to our understanding of music's effects: "Musical sensation, in the mind of a mature man or woman," he writes in *Sensation and Intuition* (1874),

is something more than the immediate result of external stimulation. ... It involves the presence of innumerable adjuncts, namely, accretions of emotion, which serve to disguise its original character. The full influence of melody and harmony on the mind owes some of its virtue to dim recollections of past experience. (185)

It is probably to these "dim recollections of past experience," Sully concludes, that we must look to account for "the characteristic

mysterious effect of tone on our emotional susceptibilities. Mr Spencer has indicated this line of inquiry in his highly interesting essay, *The Origin and Function of Music* (*Sensation and Intuition* 185). As one of the most interesting psychologists of his time, Sully offers illuminating parallels for Eliot's invocations of memory and music. His elucidation of the ideas of earlier theorists takes into account some of the stranger aspects of memory traversed by Eliot's writing.

In his 1881 work *Illusions: A Psychological Study*, Sully was to comment on memory as the means by which we attempt to counter "extinction" in the "resurrection" of our past selves so that "we seem to ourselves for the moment to rise above the limitations of time (231-32). Sully emphasizes that the memories through which we "recover our seemingly 'dead selves'" are inevitably incomplete and partly illusory sequences (231). Our "consciousness of continuous personal existence" depends "only in part on memory, and mainly on our independently formed representation of what has happened in the numberless and often huge lacunae of the past left by memory" (241). Memory, Sully asserts, offers a "dramatic representation of our past history" (231-32).

With regard to personal identity, musical memory conspicuously generates both coherence and disintegration. In *The Mill on the Floss*, unconscious memory is awakened by music in ways which both affirm and disturb the individual's sense of self. Philip's singing intensifies Maggie's sense of integration with her past. Musical communion with Stephen disrupts the musical associations which help bind her conscious sense of identity. The sequential and harmonic structures of music might seem to offer analogues for the unified ordering of memory and identity. Music also promises Maggie access to an underlying existential harmony, which might "link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it" (*Mill* 205; bk. 3, ch. 5). Yet, paradoxically, musical memory disrupts the very sense of coherence it helps to build.

Musical memories, enacting and arresting time, play a role in Maggie's construction of a "dramatic representation of [her] past history" (Sully, *Illusions* 232). Maggie's rejection of Stephen is effectively an attempt to "rise above the limitations of time" in a return to Eden (Sully, *Illusions* 232). Yet Edenic "memory" is, in the end, akin (physiologically literally so), to the "dreamy reveries" induced in Maggie Tulliver by Stephen Guest's music (*Mill* 366; bk. 6, ch. 7;

338; bk. 6, ch. 3). It shares in the same “enchanted haze” from which consciousness of past and future are excluded (*Mill* 407; bk. 6, ch. 13). The sound of Stephen’s “deep thrilling voice” lingers in visions of “easy floating in a stream of joy” which haunt Maggie on her return journey to St Ogg’s (*Mill* 421; bk. 6, ch. 14). Descriptions of Stephen’s voice resurrect the novel’s opening evocation of sound imbued dream-memory in which the “low placid voice” of the river and the thrumming of the mill provide “a curtain of sound” excluding “the world beyond” (*Mill* 7; bk. 1, ch.1).

Identity is rendered unstable by memory’s affinity with dream and illusion: also by its transience. A precarious narrative of unified selfhood, as much as the claims of duty, impels Maggie’s return to St Ogg’s and the ties of memory. “The consciousness of personal identity is said to be bound up with memory” affirms Sully:

I am conscious of a continuous permanent self under all the varying surface-play of the stream of consciousness, just because I can, by an act of recollection, bring together any two portions of this stream of experience, and so recognize the unbroken continuity of the whole. (*Illusions* 241)

“If this is so,” he continues, “it would seem to follow from the very fragmentary character of our recollections, that our sense of identity is very incomplete” (*Illusions* 241). Well before Eliot began work on *The Mill on the Floss*, Spencer had emphasised some of the implications of his physiological psychology for conceptions of permanent individual identity. In *The Principles of Psychology*, Spencer states that it is an “illusion” to suppose “that at each moment the *ego* is something more than the composite state of consciousness which then exists” (617–18). Lewes later discusses the implications for “disputes respecting the unity of consciousness, the simplicity of the Ego” of the following fact:

Although when viewed synthetically every sensation, every perception, every conception is a unit, viewed analytically, and genetically, it is a compound. There is no single sensation which is an element, i.e., irreducible. (*Problems* 1: 144)

Sully emphasises the distinction between what may be termed the “objective” physical continuity which science informs us we possess and our subjective sense of coherence. He pays tribute to “[m]odern physiology,” which, he maintains, “has done much

towards helping us to understand the nervous conditions of memory” (*Illusions* 237). “The biologist,” Sully explains,

regards memory as a special phase of a universal property of organic structure, namely, modifiability by the exercise of function, or the survival after any particular kind of activity of a disposition to act again in that particular way. The revival of a mental impression in the weaker form of an image is thus, on its physical side, due in part to this remaining functional disposition in the central nervous tracts concerned. And so, while on the psychical or subjective side we are unable to find anything permanent in memory, on the physical or objective side we do find such a permanent substratum. (*Illusions* 237)

Music embodies memory as continuous biological inheritance, but, in relation to psychological identity, it more often figures conflict and dissolution. Our “objective” physical continuity is, after all, the origin of rapidly changing mental states. “Even when listening to exactly the same tone,” writes Sully, “we do not maintain identical states of mind for a fraction of a second” (*Illusions* 252). The changing valency of Maggie Tulliver’s recollections of Philip Wakem’s singing, which variously represents temptation, passion, and the claims of past duty, illustrates memory’s inconstancy. Her responses to music suggest that the coherence of Maggie’s conscious identity is constantly threatened by the “objective” continuity of her biological being and inheritance. Eliot’s knowledge of science contributes to the generation of uncanny literary effects. Biological memory, in which past, present, and future objectively connect, lends a new aspect to music’s eclipsing of time and of identity.

“May it not happen that, by the law of hereditary transmission, which is now being applied to mental as well as bodily phenomena, ancestral experiences will now and then reflect themselves in our mental life, and so give rise to apparently personal recollections?” (Sully, *Illusions* 280–81).⁸ Sully proposes that biologically inherited memory provides the basis of Romantic yearning:

At the age when new emotions rapidly develop themselves, when our hearts are full of wild romantic aspirations, do there not seem to blend with the eager passion of the time deep resonances of a vast and mysterious past, and may not this feeling be a sort of reminiscence of prenatal, that is, ancestral experience? (*Illusions* 281)

Deep resonances of a vast and mysterious past: in *Daniel Deronda*, published like Sully’s work, after Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, Eliot lays

specific emphasis on music as the embodiment of ancestral and racial heritage. The singer Mirah represents the memory of the Jewish race, mourning its loss and reviving the claims of the past. She performs "O patria mia," a possible allusion to Verdi's *Aida* and also to *Nabucco*, where Hebrew slaves lament the memory of their lost land: "O mia patria...membranza si cara e fatal!" (*Deronda* 451–52; bk. 5, ch. 39; Verdi, *Va Pensiero, Nabucco* Act 3).⁹ Her brother Mordecai, reborn into the legacy of the Jewish martyrs, declares that his soul "sang with the cadence of their strain" (*Deronda* 465; bk. 5, ch. 40). Music enacts racial memory as unconscious biological inheritance. The image of memory as sympathetic vibration, which in *The Mill on the Floss* makes Maggie Tulliver a resonating aeolian harp, becomes emblematic of a people's innate "ancestral life," which, even if unrecognised,

would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious moanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. (*Deronda* 697–98; bk. 8, ch. 63)

In *Problems of Life and Mind*, Lewes illustrates his "biological doctrine of Innate Ideas" by describing the way in which external influences activate inherited musical aptitude, modifying the structures of an organism to produce "what may be called a musical instrument" (1: 165, 164). *Deronda's* figuration of ancestral memory specifically unites Romantic concepts of spontaneous inspiration with inherited instinct. Mordecai too invokes the "inborn half of memory" as an "inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames" (*Deronda* 497, 498; bk. 7, ch. 42). If spontaneous response has its roots in memory the distinction "between the memory of music, and the sense of being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies" is destabilized (*Romola* 251).

The final part of this essay returns to *Deronda* singing the memory imbued lines alluded to at the head of this essay. It outlines some of the ways in which allusions to music and memory of the kind developed in *The Mill on the Floss* acquire a new intensity in the musical scenes of *Daniel Deronda*. Music's power to elicit memory and confound linear progressions of time becomes more palpable. Music and memory also become implicated in telepathic levels of

sympathetic communication, which, as much as the internal conflict portrayed in *The Mill on the Floss*, disrupt notions of a unified subject. Eliot's engagement with science has become incorporated into writing which suggests affinities between physical explanation and the impulse of Romantic poetry to commune with the uncanny.

Mirah is transfixed as Deronda rows past her on the Thames: the Gondolier's refrain embodies her personal and racial history. A kind of *Leitmotiv* throughout the chapter, it prefigures her state of feeling before she appears in the novel. It also foreshadows her imminent meeting with Deronda, their shared inheritance and joint personal and vocational future. Eliot's allusions to Rossini's aria are the equivalent of her own description in "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar" of the use in opera of "a particular melody or musical phrase as a sort of Ahnung or prognostication of the approach or action of a particular character" (104). As for Deronda, having seen Mirah first as "an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to," he experiences an intense moment of sympathetic memory, becoming conscious of Mirah for a second time on his return up the river, and realising that she intends to drown herself (*Deronda* 171; bk. 2, ch. 17).

Unconscious biological inheritance operates in parallel with other uncanny effects of musical memory in *Daniel Deronda*. The way in which music opens doors from the present onto both past and future is a metaphor dramatized in the scene where Gwendolen poses as Hermione in a tableau of *The Winter's Tale*. A thundering chord from the piano at the words "Music, awake her, strike" causes a secret panel to fly open revealing the terrifying apparition of a dead face (*Deronda* 54; bk. 1, ch. 6). Music acts here as a classic agent of the uncanny, according to Freud's definition, as that which "ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light" (345). Music "awakens" Gwendolen to exhibit the signs of a mesmerised state of terror which she can account for only as "a brief remembered madness" (*Deronda* 56; bk. 1, ch. 6). The memory which provokes this response remains unspecified. It is generally illustrative of her capacity for "spiritual dread" (*Deronda* 57; bk. 1, ch.6). What the novel later makes explicit, is the proleptic significance of what was remembered. The memories associated with the dead face and fleeing figure which music unveils, are simultaneously prophetic of Gwendolen's implication in the drowning of her

husband. "Some feelings are like our hearing" says Mirah of this anticipatory aural power: "they come as sounds do, before we know their reason" (*Deronda* 201; bk. 3, ch. 20).

Music, the most fleeting of the arts, exists only in time. Sequential memory—awareness of repetition and contrast—is intrinsic to our apprehension of music. Dependent on constructing rhythmically measured time for its very existence, music itself strangely alters our perception of time. Deronda's dawning recognition of Mirah, is simultaneously a moment of "darting presentiment" (*Deronda* 173; bk. 2, ch. 17). The harmonic and melodic structures of music mean that our listening derives coherence both from memory of what has passed and anticipation of what is to come. This may be part of the reason why musical experience transcends our perceptions of linear sequence, so that, as with Gwendolen in the scene just described, we might be said to "remember" the future. Music, like memory, establishes and suspends temporality.

"Two thoughts, or acts of memory ... cannot be presumed to exist at the same instant," maintained Henry Holland (58). Eliot's writing by contrast, particularly in her final novel, asserts that "Macbeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment, referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling" (*Deronda* 36; bk. 1, ch. 4). Frequently signalling the coexistence of antithetical mental states, musical memory in *Daniel Deronda* not only reveals the disunity inherent to physiological accounts of psychology, but challenges assumptions about necessary sequence in psychical life. The tableau scene of Hermione reveals a divided Gwendolen, later to describe herself as "like two creatures" (*Deronda* 643; bk. 7, ch. 56). Her "liability ... to fits of spiritual dread" seems to her "an unexplained exception from her normal life" (*Deronda* 57, 56; bk. 1, ch. 6). Gwendolen "forgets" herself in a fit of "remembered" madness. Here, as in Deronda's unconscious embodiment of his race, music brings memory into overt alliance with oblivion. The mesmeric effects which are implicit in Maggie Tulliver's entrancement by Stephen Guest's voice and gaze, also become more explicitly evoked. The musician Klesmer exerts Svengali-like mesmeric power over Gwendolen as Hermione, transforming her into "a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered" (*Deronda* 54; bk. 1, ch. 6). Mirah stands statue-like arrested by Deronda's singing.¹⁰

The telepathic effects of music and of musical memory are unsettling in themselves. They are rendered more strange by being fleeting and mutable. An example of the fluidity of memory occurs in the mutation of Deronda's recollection of Mirah's singing at a concert. Originally this was an intense moment of sympathy with Gwendolen when, as Deronda remembers, her "appeal had seemed to melt into the melodic cry—*Per pietà non dirmi addio*" (*Deronda* 712; bk. 8, ch. 65). Now in love with Mirah, Deronda's memory is transformed by the realisation that "the melody had come from Mirah's dear voice" (*Deronda* 712; bk. 8, ch. 65). Previously, Deronda's memory of communal transcendence in a synagogue, signaling his Jewish inheritance and future, has been swiftly cut across by "the frigid idea that he had probably been alone in his feeling" (*Deronda* 340; bk. 4, ch. 32). The resurrection of inherited racial memory does not preclude personal fragmentation. Elusive and intermittent, moments of musically induced memory and prolepsis generate a sense of the uncanny and leave us uncertain as to the nature of communication embodied in musical memory and its literary evocation.

In Book Two, "Meeting Streams," music and rivers intertwine in Eliot's invocations of memory and consciousness. Music troubles boundaries between, as well as within, individual identities. When Mirah hears Deronda's refrain, she is unaware of the music as originating outside herself: Deronda's voice has "entered her inner world without her having taken any note of whence it came" (*Deronda* 171; bk. 2, ch. 17). The musical scenes in *Daniel Deronda* in which individual identities dissolve are amongst some of the striking instances of literary experimentation in Eliot's last novel. In addition to undermining distinctions between conscious and unconscious thought, as between past, present, and future, they show her taking her preoccupation with sympathetic communication to new extremes. Musically induced moments of telepathic melding in *Daniel Deronda* suspend distinctions not merely between individuals, but between individuals and their material environment. In this, Eliot's writing continues to interact with, as well as to challenge, scientific thought—again manifesting particular kinship with Lewes's texts. In his essay on "Spiritualism and Materialism" for example, published the same year as *Daniel Deronda*, Lewes proposes that the subject/object distinction is logical rather than real,

so intimating the merging of identities invoked by Eliot. He suggests that the material world “ceases to be an alien” once we realize that our knowledge of it is none other than “knowledge of our own affections”:

Our inferences respecting it as Notsself are by the hypothetical representations of the possible modes of Feeling which the Notsself would excite in us under conceivable changes of relation. (479–80)¹¹

At the end of her poem *The Legend of Jubal* (1870), Eliot had evoked a synaesthetic “moment’s freedom won/From in and outer” (113). In *Daniel Deronda*, the existential harmony longed for by Maggie Tulliver is momentarily achieved through dissolution of the individual subject. Deronda’s proleptic recollection of Mirah follows an instant of transcendent self-oblivion evoked in musical terms. As Deronda unconsciously sings the Gondolier’s song, the landscape becomes “an unfinished strain of music” (*Deronda* 173; bk. 2, ch. 17). This “unfinished strain” bridges thought and externality. Deronda, drifting with the tide and “forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at,” reflects on “how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape,—when the sense of something moving on the bank opposite” makes him “turn his glance” towards Mirah (*Deronda* 173; bk. 2, ch. 17). Mirah’s recollection of him is also musical, quoting the Rossini: “I saw you before ... ‘nella miseria’ ... ‘It was you singing?’ ... ‘Nessun maggior dolore’ ... The mere words themselves uttered in her sweet undertones seemed to give the melody to Deronda’s ear” (*Deronda* 174; bk. 2, ch. 17).

Connections between music and memory illuminate some of the most complex and intriguing aspects of Eliot’s writing. Music in *The Mill on the Floss* shows the uncanniness of submerged physical memory lurking within the subjective memories from which we construct ourselves. In *Daniel Deronda*, musical incarnation of memory powerfully unsettles logical relations. Music’s association with premonition and coincidence and its dissolution of time and identity become a conspicuous part of the experimentality which pervades Eliot’s writing in this novel. Her continuing engagement with evolutionary theory—with our past and future

inheritance—interacts with a growing preoccupation with telepathy and second sight intimating that the “forecasting ardour,” essential to Science itself, partakes of the Jewish scholar Mordecai’s “visionary excitability” (*Deronda* 477; bk. 6, ch. 41).

Mordecai leans over the parapet of Blackfriars bridge in a passage which echoes Deronda’s instant of half-conscious musical transcendence as he rows on the river. Deronda’s future appearance is anticipated—he already lodges in Mordecai’s memory as the embodiment of a long-held vision of a Zionist successor. Deronda will row out of the dissolving haze on the river and again musical allusion precludes a moment of proleptic memory, as landscape and thought blend together “into a fine symphony to which we can hardly be said to listen” (*Deronda* 442; bk. 5, ch. 38).

Confronting his inability ultimately to account for music’s affective power, Darwin cites Spencer’s acknowledgement in “The Origin and Function of Music” that music has a mysterious influence which “arouses dormant sentiments of which we had not conceived the possibility, and do not know the meaning” (*Descent* 2: 336). Both scientists quote Richter’s assertion that music “tells us of things we have not seen and shall not see” (*Descent* 2: 336). Spencer proposed that his development theory could account for Romantic notions of mysterious musical transcendence: the more advanced evolution of the musician’s sensibilities explains the unfamiliarity of what the listener hears (“Origin and Function” 374–75). The musician is thus an intimation of the future of humanity. Allusions to Richter affirm more than they dispel the role of Romantic transcendence and prophecy within musical experience. The musician at least, can provide telepathic visions of our inherited musical potential. We hear our common future embodied in their memories. Such accounts provide a biological basis for the possibility of “remembering” the future.

“The driest argument has its hallucinations” (*Deronda* 478; bk. 6, ch. 41). In evolutionary accounts of music, our biological inheritance, which holds the seed of an undiscovered future, is rendered strange by the mystery of music’s origin and power. George Eliot’s writing unites engagement with materialist science and with the uncanny. Her evocations of musical memory suggest that an element of the uncanny haunts scientific explanation just as it pervades her texts.

NOTES

1. Frequent references to music in Eliot's correspondence affirm that music was as enriching an element in her life as it is a source of allusion throughout her writing: "At Dresden, we could hear thoroughly enjoyable instrumental music every evening for two-pence, and I owed so many thoughts and inspirations of feeling to that stimulus" (Eliot to Sara Sophia Hennell, 21 May, [1859], *George Eliot Letters* 3: 71). The purchase of a fine grand piano marked an important milestone in Eliot's successful career as a writer, and this event is followed in her correspondence by numerous references to the enjoyment and benefit she was deriving from regular practice. When her step-son Charles Lewes came to live with them, he and Eliot spent most of their evenings playing Beethoven together. See Eliot to Sara Sophia Hennell and Cara Bray, 6 October 1861; Eliot to Mrs Richard Congreve, 23 October 1861; Eliot to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, 4 December 1863; Eliot to Cara Bray, 4 December 1863; Eliot to Mrs Richard Congreve, 23 October 1861 and 19 January 1864 (*George Eliot Letters* 3: 456, 460; 4: 118-19, 120; 3: 460; 4: 127).
2. In "Progress, Its Law and Cause," Spencer explains that he is taking theories of organic development from German embryologists, such as Wolff, Goethe, and Von Baer, and applying them more generally (see *Essays* 2).
3. Mill is also paying tribute to Alexander Bain, whose work, like Spencer's, was aimed at uniting psychology and physiology. In *The Senses and the Intellect*, Bain draws on musical examples to illustrate the connections between sensation and thought (202-09, 310-11, 347-48, 431). Both Bain's and Spencer's work connected mental activity and nervous response in a way which gave a physiological account of association psychology. However, Spencer was unique in providing it with "a whole new basis in evolutionary biology" (Young 151; see also 94-120, 150-51, 161).
4. Sally Shuttleworth has identified significant parallels between Holland's ideas and Eliot's portrayal of Latimer in *The Lifted Veil* ("The Malady of Thought" 5-6). She notes that Lewes made extensive use of Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology* in *The Physiology of Common Life*, which he was working on contemporaneously with Eliot's composition of both *The Lifted Veil* and *The Mill on the Floss*.
5. Spencer maintained that "it is absurd to suppose that, along with the undeveloped verbal forms of barbarism, there existed a developed system of vocal inflections," concluding rather "that, along with the higher and more numerous verbal forms needed to convey the multiplied and complicated ideas of civilized life, there have grown up those more

involved changes of voice which express the feelings proper to such ideas" ("Origin and Function" 379–80).

6. In *Darwinism*, A. R. Wallace, Darwin's co-discoverer of Natural Selection, selected the musical and mathematical faculties to demonstrate the existence of just such a spiritual essence (467–78).
7. Gillian Beer discusses the impact of Darwin's emphasis on oblivion and forgetting in her essay on "Origin and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative" (20–21).
8. Compare this with Freud's speculation in *Moses and Monotheism* that we "retain an impression of the past in unconscious memory traces" and that "there probably exists in the mental life of the individual not only what he has experienced himself, but also what he brought with him at birth, fragments of phylogenic origin, an archaic heritage" (qtd. in Beer 177). Freud was familiar with Sully's work.
9. This chorus is still the best-known music from Verdi's 1842 opera *Nabucodonosor (Nabucco)*, which adopts the old Testament account of the Hebrews of the sixth century BC longing for release from their captivity and enslavement in Babylon as symbolic of Italian longing for national freedom. Eliot in turn makes Italian nationalism symbolic of Zionist aspirations.
10. "Indications on clair-voyance witnessed by a competent observer are of thrilling interest and give me a restless desire to get at more extensive and satisfactory evidence," remarked Eliot in a letter to George Combe, 22 April 1852 (*George Eliot Letters* 8: 45). By the time she wrote *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot knew some of the future leaders of the Society for Psychical Research, including F. W. Myers and Edmund Gurney, who were intent on collecting just the kind of evidence Eliot wished for.
11. Lewes expressed similar views in *Problems of Life and Mind* (1: 188). Sally Shuttleworth discusses Lewes's work as providing appropriately complex psychological models for Eliot (*George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science* 192–94).

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