Introduction
Marian Evans in the periodical press

Thomas Hardy's success with the serialization of *Far from the Madding Crowd* in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1874 brought with it some unwelcome comparisons in the view of the emerging author. The *Spectator* was amongst those speculating that the work could be that of George Eliot: 'in every page of these introductory chapters there are a dozen sentences which have the ring of the wit and wisdom of the only truly great English novelist now living'. If not actually George Eliot, the reviewer asserted, this 'new light among novelists' obviously approximated her style.[1] There were other similarities noted: the depiction of customs and traditions of rural life; a focus on ordinary men and women; and carefully crafted realistic settings. Hardy, claiming to know more thoroughly and represent more effectively the labourers of rural England, did not relish being cast in the shadow of the revered novelist of his age. His next work, *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1875–6), also serialized in the *Cornhill*, was purposely removed from what was taken to be typical George Eliot territory and, he hoped, the endless *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner* comparisons. As Florence Hardy explained in her biography of her husband, he abandoned the pastoral mode (if temporarily), 'put aside the woodland story he had thought of' and 'made a plunge in a new, untried direction' – a social satire based on upper-class, urban life that proved, at least, 'amid the general disappointment at the lack of sheep and shepherds, that he did not mean to imitate anybody'.[2]

Hardy's situation was not unique: in July 1862, when *Romola*, her first serialized novel, appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* over a decade before Hardy's, Marian Evans was also striving to escape the hugely successful 'George Eliot' formula of English Midlands (so-called) pastoral stories. Only six years into her fiction-writing career, Evans wrote to her friend Sara Hennell about the restrictions that came with the 'George Eliot' brand: 'If one is to have freedom to write out of one's own varying unfolding self, and not be a machine always grinding out the same material or spinning the same sort of web, one cannot always write for the same

public'.[3] The complaint is a clear articulation of the tensions between Marian Evans and 'George Eliot', and between 'George Eliot' and her public, tensions that are played out in the pages of the periodical press throughout the 20 years or so of George Eliot's public life. From the 'overnight' success of *Adam Bede* in 1859,[4] her audience had speculated about her background, sought out interviews, requested photographs, sent her invitations to public events and solicited personal meetings as part of that growing frenzy of celebrity making that marked the later decades of the nineteenth century. Marian Evans, however, refused to cooperate with any efforts to make 'George Eliot' visible. Her biographers offer a range of complicated reasons for these refusals, as K. K. Collins summarizes: 'Depending on which biography you read, she hid as long as possible behind anonymity, then pseudonymity, from morbid shyness, desire for a fair hearing, market management, sensible self-protection, imaginative self-transformation, self-empowerment, personal heroism, dread of scandal, fear of dropping sales, attraction to mystery, or love of games.'[5] In many ways, too, though, Marian Evans was not simply keeping 'George Eliot' out of the public eye: she was also refusing to embody that public's versions of George Eliot.

With the triumph of *Adam Bede*, the relatively steady sales of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (published in volume format in 1858) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), the continuing popularity of *Silas Marner* (1861) and finally, with the phenomenal fee of £7000 from *Cornhill* proprietor George Smith for the serialization of *Romola*, by 1862, when Evans was writing to Sara Hennell about her desire to publish a different kind of book, she was financially secure. This meant, of course, that she was increasingly independent of the market that had fostered her initial success. But with the appearance of a book a year, such a relentless production rate, with its attendant commercial and cultural exchanges, had its costs, and Evans's choice of verbs in that letter to Hennell is particularly revealing: '*grinding*' out the same type of material like some industrial machine; or, the suggestive '*spinning*', an equally negative multiple signifier, signalling mechanical production, the wage-slave compelled to produce for a tyrannous public, or the problematic artifice behind the turning out of yarns to capture the same readers again and again in the same soft web. Marian Evans's 'varying, unfolding self', she implies, is held hostage to her good fortune in hitting a loaded seam from the outset with her dialogue-rich dramas of ordinary life set in the relatively recent past: her public cannot get enough, and, worse, as she sees it, seems to want only that same product from the writer of *Adam Bede*. The brazen baulking of public expectation that followed the move from the

Midlands tale of Silas Marner the weaver of Raveloe to a narrative about the Catholic daughter of an intellectual bibliophile in fifteenth-century Renaissance Italy that was *Romola* was a deliberate and dramatic signal of intent. Evans is adamant about her pressing desire to break free of her audience: 'Of necessity the book is addressed to fewer readers than my previous works, and I myself have never expected – I might rather say *intended* – that the book should be as "popular" in the same sense as the others', she explains to Hennell (*GEL*, 4: 49, emphasis in the original). This was Marian Evans trying to escape 'George Eliot'. Her decision to produce long verse dramas, such as *The Spanish Gypsy*, was another sign of her discontent with the narrow terms in which she was being appreciated and promoted. Lord Lytton, friend and correspondent of George Henry Lewes, insisted that in spite of poor reviews of her poetry, Evans should continue to explore other creative avenues than those directing her towards the production of 'great prose'. He dismissed the lazy critical practices that promulgated rather than contested established labels and offered an important defence of the artist's right to experiment while indicating the artistic constraints commercial success sometimes entailed. 'The British Public, as represented and educated by the critical press', he explained in a letter to Lewes in 1874,

> is always burying alive in their own reputations its greatest literary benefactors, by walling them round forever with materials taken from their own books. The development of every original genius is ever . . . impeded and obstructed by the Public's hasty classification of it, for the public, having an uncomfortable consciousness that such classifications are premature and imperfect, is always disinclined to acknowledge the necessity of abandoning them. Tennyson has been stunted and atrophied like a Chinese Oak by the fear of ever outgrowing the small flower pot of an established success. I hope that the author of *Jubal* and *The Spanish Gypsy* will not listen, and that you will not allow her to listen to those oafs who exhort her not to write Poetry because she can write such great prose. (*GEL*, 9: 127)

Lytton's concern in insisting that Evans should feel free to experiment with genres other than fiction was not to deny the cultural and intellectual centrality of George Eliot's great novels. Neither is it mine. This book, however, is about Marian Evans and her 'varying, unfolding self' before she became George Eliot, and about the closing down of that 'self' after her widespread success. It begins by attending to the ways that Marian Evans's various journalistic personae are played out, renewed, changed and exchanged in the first decade of her working life from the late 1840s to the late 1850s, before 'George Eliot' the novelist was conceived and set

into a constricted 'flower pot of an established success'. It will conclude with a consideration of how particularized versions of her most celebrated persona came to dominate the writer's career, to the detriment of the complexity of the work and to the annoyance of the writer herself as witnessed in her final attack on her public – the excoriating critique of the press, literary and celebrity cultures in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879).

Evans's critical relationship to the periodical press, always ambivalent, endured throughout her professional life. The press, of course, mediated her relationship with her wider audience: she was always extremely cautious about its efforts to breach the gap between her private self and her public profile, just as she was conscious from her earliest operations in the media as an editor and journalist, of the complicated, prescriptive and gendered restrictions that determined the profiles of successful, public women. Though her fictional mask had been revealed as the pseudonym of a woman writer as early as 1859, and though her gender was widely known within a year, Marian Evans's name was not used in the public domain. In Collins's phrase, she remained a 'reclusive Victorian giant'.[6] From the early 1860s, though, the press contrived to flesh out the connections between this pseudonymous figure, George Eliot, and the shadowy 'real' author. In the absence of a stable, knowable point of identification for the author, surveys of contemporary responses to Evans's work show that the George Eliot who circulated in the public imagination split into two narrow, opposing types extrapolated from the characters and narrators of her fiction and from the knowledge that she was in some way associated with the intellectually radical and heterodox *Westminster Review* and its circle. In one version, which identified the author with the narrator of her early work, George Eliot was the genius writer of touching pastoral dramas (her *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* and the first two books of *The Mill on the Floss*). Alternatively, when her connections with philosophical and scientific men associated with the *Westminster* were emphasized, she became the cool, intellectual and, for many, somewhat ponderous sage (author of *Romola* and *Middlemarch*). By the mid 1870s, Evans's desire to escape from public expectations of her work was increasingly common knowledge, fuelling that gossip about the authorship of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. As William Minto, editor of the *Examiner*, recalled: 'a new novel was due from the hand of the great authoress and rumour ran that she was experimenting on her reputation with an anonymous work'.[7] Anthony Trollope had already attempted such an 'experiment' by publishing anonymously two serials in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1866 and 1867.

It was one way of testing the genuine appeal of his work: as a popular and well-established author, Trollope reasoned, 'It seemed to me that a name once earned carried with it too much favour'.[8] Trollope's assessment of the symbolic, cultural and economic capital invested in a literary name motivates my account of Marian Evans's career before the emergence of her most successful persona, 'George Eliot', and addresses the difficulties of being 'George Eliot' when that name carries too much of a certain type of 'favour'. Like Thomas Hardy, and Evans herself, for much of this book I am trying to escape George Eliot to draw out more fully the ongoing biographical, cultural and formal significance of Marian Evans's work in the periodical press. The book contends that it is worth revisiting the first decade of Marian Evans's working life in particular to understand better the influence of the periodical press on her emergence as a writer and on her subsequent responses to writerly fame, a fame fuelled by the preoccupations and methods of the periodical press that fostered her early career. Evans's work as a journalist, editor and serial fiction writer in the periodical press deserves attention in terms other than those that consign this work to the category of pre-history of the novelist who followed. Rather than compositing Evans's early personae into a period of apprenticeship, or oversimplifying her early journalism by reading it only for content, as a prolegomenon for the novels, I suggest the value of a focus on the context and form of an early corpus that encompasses a variety of public voices, all shaped by the periodicals for which Evans worked from the late 1840s to the late 1850s.

'We care about George Eliot now because of her novels,' George Levine declares in his introduction to the twenty-first-century *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*.[9] Naturally, the minor journalist with a relatively short-lived career as an editor, the serial fiction writer who produced only a handful of stories for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, would be unlikely to command sustained attention either in the nineteenth century or now without also being the novelist George Eliot. And naturally too, we understand that all aspects of Evans's working life informed the construction and perception of her trademark literary persona. Her periodical journalism is indeed of interest to her wider career, not necessarily or not only for its content, as has so often been argued, but for the ways the stylistic complexities of some of her journalistic voices inform the layered intricacy of her fictional narratives. But this book suggests that 'George Eliot' has overdetermined the ways that we read Evans's other personae, obscuring almost entirely her editorial work and marginalizing the journalism to the status of background landscape. It suggests that this periodical work needs

to be considered as a vital correlated strand in the creative life of the not fully knowable but contingently real Marian Evans.

Before George Eliot, then, examines the relationship between Marian Evans and the periodical press as another way of understanding the making of the professional writer. There has yet to be an extended account of how the periodical industry, the medium of intellectual, cultural and commercial life in the nineteenth century, shaped the professional career of one of its best-known writers. Here, I hope to show, using the evidence of her letters from this period and her literary and editorial work, that Evans consistently demonstrates an awareness of the play of the text in practical, material terms, one alert to audiences, constructed as markets by corporate periodical and publishing industries. Evans's ever-shifting entanglements with those corporate bodies in the first decade of her working life as a journalist, an editor and as a serial fiction writer for *Blackwood's Magazine*, give some indication of why this period of her life is so revealing: her work from this time is embedded more obviously in the pragmatic business of collective cultural production than the later novels might seem to suggest with their more supposedly stable *individual* authorship and apparent generic integrity. I say 'apparent generic integrity' because of course, although she is known primarily as a novelist, in fact only four of her works appeared originally in novel form, and only one of those, *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866), was both conceived and published in the standard three-volume format. *Adam Bede* was first envisioned as a serialized story for *Blackwood's*; *The Mill on the Floss* was also first imagined a periodical serial; and *Silas Marner* was so short it appeared as one volume.[10] That said, this book is about Evans and her work rather than an analysis of the periodical climate in which she wrote, or a 'case study' that 'grounds theoretical considerations of the periodical as a cultural form'.[11] While acknowledging the inseparability of the writing from its environment, then, I want to emphasize specifically the sometimes contentious, occasionally compromised, always creative relationships with that environment implicit in Evans's negotiations of the business of writing for specific audiences throughout her life. I do not mean to suggest that the work unveils an *ur*-George Eliot, called Marian Evans, a stable centre at the heart of the chaotic life of a 'bread scholar', freelance journalist and fiction writer. The personae constructed – the 'character of Editress';[12] the ambiguously gendered reviewer; the casuist and companion of her clerical scenes who is at once obvious and opaque; and her final outing in drag as the pompous city bachelor, Theophrastus Such – are often as evasive, fractured and inconsistent as her critics have asserted of the narrative voices of the novels, and as Rosemarie

Bodenheimer has illustrated so brilliantly of the letters of Mary Ann Evans.[13] In turning to Evans's early working life in the first three chapters of this book and to the terms in which her success was categorized in the final two, I am also reconfiguring the writer in the context of debates about the professionalization of women's work more generally in the nineteenth century. A first step in this process is to attend to the periodical context that offered the writer a pathway to her professional career.

If, as James Mussell has observed, 'the dominant critical approach to the nineteenth-century press still treats it as an archive of content, waiting to be found',[14] here, in reading Evans's periodical work as periodical work rather than as prefaces to her novels, I want to contest any retrospective trajectory limiting the value of these early writings by designating them as merely subtextual clues or theoretical statements of intent that function only to help unpack the fictional forms to follow.[15] One of my aims is to emphasize the formal and contextual constraints that shaped both periodical writing and the periodical writer. Inevitably, perhaps, although Evans's articles do not in fact lay out a theory of realism, they are read as helping to reveal those aspects of Evans's writing that distinguish her fiction. But we have long been reminded of the dangers of reducing the writer Marian Evans to any simplified political or ideological positions or compact artistic credos, most consistently perhaps by George Eliot's feminist critics from the mid 1980s, including Gillian Beer, Jenny Uglow and Elizabeth Ermarth. As Gillian Beer puts it, along with Evans's demonstrable 'respect for organicism and her passionate need for interdependence' throughout her work, there is 'an indefatigable awareness of misunderstanding and equally, of the impossibility of writing within a single discourse'.[16] David Carroll's *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* offered an important elaboration on these points, reading Evans's experiments with a range of discourses as a central impetus of her constantly evolving work: 'deprived of orthodox certainties', yet refusing at any cost the tyranny of dogma and false coherence, he argues, she strived continuously for fuller understanding in testing, probing writing.[17] More recently the broader significance of the 'conflicts of interpretations' in her work has led to a critical debate between those viewing Evans as a product of her Victorian contexts and those arguing for her proto-modernism or even proto-postmodernism. Evans was apolitical in the sense that she did not promulgate or support particularized formal systems of belief, political or religious, as Avrom Fleishman contends in his 'developmental' account of an intellectual life, a life that is marked by 'change and expansion, refinement and response to challenges from without and within'.[18] This faith in inquiry, while conscious of its limits,

makes George Eliot a great Victorian in Fleishman's reading. Conversely, K. M. Newton, focusing on the sceptical edge to that inquiring mind, suggests that the radical experimental writings that resulted from her restless questioning point to her status as 'perhaps the only Victorian writer who can be seen as a fully modern figure', going so far as to suggest 'if the term "modern" is extended beyond the twentieth into the twenty-first century, Eliot as artist and thinker in some respects even moves beyond most of her "modernist" successors'.[19] Victorian, proto-modernist or proto-postmodernist, that 'varying, unfolding self' of Evans continues to provoke contradictory responses. One of the interests of mid-nineteenth-century periodical writing of course is that the roots of what are often identified as modernist or postmodernist traits are already present in Victorian journalism. Along with obvious political, commercial and ideological efforts to interpellate audiences and to assert particular taxonomies of culture, the Victorian periodical press also demonstrates its alertness to the ephemeral, self-reflexive meta-commentaries on its own authoritative practices, a less rigid separation of aestheticism and populism than was common by the end of the century, and a more porous attitude to genre history. I am less interested, therefore, in positioning Evans in a particular periodizing frame than in situating her work in the context of the periodical culture that from the nineteenth century has helped to refine, renew and revise our approach to literary culture.

This periodical work requires attention too because, despite the caveats about her refusal of rigid theoretical positions that (rightly) feature in critical studies of George Eliot's novels and her intellectual life, Evans's journalism in particular has been read with overwhelming frequency as a more or less simple blueprint for her fiction — as a type of novelistic manifesto. Almost always, it is invoked to indicate the novelist's rehearsal of central ideas in George Eliot's bigger, better work. Her early articles are excerpted regularly to provide statements of belief on realism, on women writers, on the function of art and so on, beliefs, it is argued, that determine the subsequent production of her realist novels. These tendencies ignore not only Evans's resistance to fixed theories but also the more complex interdependence that exists amongst genres, and in particular the interdependence between an article and the periodical in which it was published. The 'blueprint' theories reduce the journalism and her three 'Scenes of Clerical Life' to a one-dimensionality that is belied when these works are resituated in their original contexts. One consequence of the non-contextual approach is that critics reading the journalistic statements as manifesto pieces about the novels conclude eventually that the so-called

theories do not often 'fit' the fiction. For instance, in her brilliant analysis of George Eliot's social realism in the 1860s, Catherine Gallagher observes: 'Despite her explicit professions of faith in a readable universe, her very earliest fiction manifests a deep scepticism about the legibility of facts, the apprehendable significance of appearances.'[20] I hope to show that when read in context, there are no straightforward 'explicit profession[s] of faith' by Marian Evans in her journalism or in her early fiction; her scepticism is embedded in her work from the outset and no clear contradiction of articles of faith, therefore, emerges after the 1860s.

The territorial definitions imposed by genre, however, often throw up false barriers between different aspects of any writer's work that can blind us to how individual works can inform each other in ways other than any bias towards genre (such as that towards the Novel in nineteenth-century studies) at any given critical moment allows. Lyn Pykett, for instance, has emphasized how more scrupulous attention to the periodical's influence disrupts traditional hierarchies and long-standing disciplinary fields: 'It not only challenges the boundaries between hitherto separately constituted fields of knowledge, but also challenges the internal hierarchies and subdivisions within discrete academic disciplines.'[21] Amongst other factors, this type of periodical-focused scholarship demonstrates ways that the overarching ideology of an individual periodical or the commercial and cultural status of particular types of periodicals can shape the articles, stories, serialized fiction or political or scientific work published first in their pages.

It is limiting to read Evans's early work for content only, for passages of criticism that anticipate the later novels, while discounting the broader contexts. Rather, given her lifelong attention to forms of writing and to audiences, I suggest that Evans's early work is important for the ways it privileges the relationship between message and medium, for the evident fluency with which the writer shapes her material to suit its context, and for the carefully constructed appeal of her public personae. In the overtly competitive, commercial environment of the nineteenth-century press, Evans consistently demonstrates her appreciation of her audience's 'horizon of expectations', to use Hans Robert Jauss's expression, indicating with this metaphor the inescapably dialectical aspect of all literary production. 'A literary work,' he explains, 'even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics and implicit allusions.'[22] Such a dialectical approach to the reading of texts is a commonplace in

dynamic criticism of the novel or the poem but is still underrepresented in criticism of journalism, presumably because of continuing doubts about the status of such work as 'literary'. But it is in her work as a journalist and editor in particular that Evans's negotiation of corporate expectation and individual assertion is most dramatically demonstrated. Furthermore, her practices as a journalist laid the pattern for the complex and duplicitous relationship she managed with her public throughout her writing life, manifested most conspicuously in her use of the pseudonym 'George Eliot'.

One way to account for this writing life, in all its 'richly mixed tones',[23] is to consider the multidisciplinary nineteenth-century periodical press where she began her professional writing career. This approach is not intended to splinter George Eliot into one of her component parts, a concern Nina Auerbach raises about the proliferation of interdisciplinary studies on George Eliot from the mid 1990s.[24] Though I will not be addressing George Eliot's novels here, there are congruent points to what I will outline as Evans's negotiation of genre, context and audience expectations in her periodical work, and in the responses to her various personae in her later life that can open up the possibility for rereadings of her fiction, and in particular, of the narrative voices of that fiction. Far from wishing to reduce the writer to one of her component parts, my intention is to point to the diverse ways in which she engaged with and constructed personae both to mediate and to remake her attendant literary and cultural fields. George Eliot/Marian Evans was always, in a sense, splintered, continually being made and remade. The periodical industry, equally fractured and ever evolving, was the matrix from which this writer emerged as a professional and professionalized author. It is also this industry that received the full force of her criticism in her final work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, in a revealing return to the role of the press in the making of celebrities, like her.

Content and form: the periodical's 'habitus'

The influence of the periodical on nineteenth-century literary culture has long been established. Socially and culturally pervasive by mid-century, always implicated in the turns of the historical moment, its capacious, multi-generic identity presents complex critical challenges. Over the past 40 years or so, work on periodical literature has purposefully set about redressing the perceived bias of traditional Victorian scholarship towards author-based criticism and, as Laurel Brake put it, 'the high ground of