Introduction

In July of 1993, rather early for the journalistic 'silly season', a polite fracas broke out in the newspapers over Jeremy Paxman's family tree. Mr Paxman, the well-known British journalist and host of *Newsnight*, wrote, 'The *Jewish Chronicle* has introduced me to ... "an amateur genealogist now living in Torquay", who wants to claim me as one of the chosen race.'[1] The *Evening Standard* ran the exclusive: 'Debate has raged since the *Jewish Chronicle* raised the question: is Jeremy Paxman Jewish? Here he gives his definitive answer'. Paxman's answer was that as far as he could tell he was not Jewish. He admitted to some uncertainty, however: 'The problem is that, like most of the British, I simply have no idea of my family history further than a generation or two back.'

To this admission, Auberon Waugh responded with shock and 'existential anxiety' in the *Daily Telegraph*:

Can it be true that most Britons have no idea of their own ancestry? Do they have no family Bibles or records? To what purpose did their great-grandparents go to all the trouble and expense of bearing and rearing children, only to be forgotten in two generations? How can people be sure they exist until they have established their antecedents?[2]

Raising the emotional stakes in this exchange of journalistic badinage, Bernard Levin responded in *The Times* to Waugh's reaction; *his* ancestry could be traced back only one generation on his father's side and two on his mother's. His mother's parents, escaping the Russian pogroms, came to England with the clothes on their backs, a mortar and pestle and a samovar – no documents and certainly no pedigree. Levin accompanied his article, 'Pedigree, what pedigree?', with a childhood photograph of himself, presumably to prove to himself and his readers that he actually does exist. As he says, 'it is almost literally true that I am my own ancestors'. Bernard Levin proudly stresses the orally transmitted history of his family which may have no written pedigree, but does have samovars and stories:

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No documents, but much reminiscence. As a child I sat hypnotised as my grandparents spun the stories of life in the Pale – real stories, that is, with real characters, real brutality and real comforting. Bron's autobiography . . . cannot provide anything like my grandparents' world; what is the calm of the Waugh archives to the thunder of Cossack hooves, for all that I have not a scrap of paper to back up my memories.[3]

The following chapters study the relation of family lines and the family tree to nineteenth-century narrative. This may seem a far remove from the journalistic musings outlined above, but the fortnight's fracas over Jeremy Paxman's pedigree serves to introduce and to show the connections between many of the issues which I shall address. The articles reveal tensions over pedigree which I focus upon in their nineteenth-century guises, but which are still evident in Britain today in diluted or convoluted forms. There is the privileging of the old, and usually noble or upper-class English pedigree (Levin presents this as Auberon Waugh's ancestry: 'there can be no doubt that his ancestors robbed churches for Charles I, and possibly for Cromwell too'); the privileging of written over oral pedigrees; and the association of orally transmitted pedigrees with minority elements who have experienced, or are experiencing, an uneasy assimilation into Great Britain.

Levin demonstrates the facility of the imaginative move from a consideration of pedigree to an involvement with narrative. He stresses that he may not be able to prove the existence of his ancestors with a written pedigree, but that they have left him an oral genealogy based upon stories of their kin and their native Russia. It is the importunate note in Levin's repetition that these are *real* – 'real stories, with real characters, real tragedies, real brutality', etc. – which repercusses through my chapters on Edgeworth, Scott, Disraeli, Yonge, Meredith and Hardy. These chapters deal in part with pedigrees, and with the stories which accompany or are inspired by pedigrees, many of which are in danger of being lost or forgotten. Levin emphasises the reality and validity of his undocumented pedigree. Confronted with Waugh's family records (and an ancestry which has amply documented itself) Levin questions the inevitable authority of the written, English upper-class genealogy, and the idea that one may not actually 'exist' without the pedigree to prove it. Nevertheless, Levin translates the oral records of his family into a written record when he documents his family history in that most traditional of English newspapers, *The Times*. As a journalist, Levin is fully invested in a written culture; he preserves his pedigree and proves its existence to a wide readership by writing it down.

'Existential' anxieties inspired by the lack of pedigree are not limited to a modern sensibility. Because a family pedigree can be seen as the first element in an expanding series – pedigree, tribe (or region), race, nation (or: nation, race) – an individual's definition of self, his or her assertion of social existence, begins with the family tree. It is a first step in placing his or her identity in the context of the other elements in the series. In the following chapters I address the questions of what constitutes belonging, and of what makes people believe that they are kin, or part of a certain region, race or nation. Part of the answer to these questions lies in the constructions of narrative around pedigree, the stories which people accept, or indeed create around their ancestry. I investigate the relations of family lines and the family tree to nineteenth-century fiction, focussing upon how the family line/tree, working within the novel's plot, reflects class, regional, racial and national tensions within Britain at the time. I do not use the terms family line and family tree interchangeably; these two constructions of ancestry produce very different interpretations of who is kin and who is not. I shall clarify these terms as I go on, but at this point I should state that in the following chapters 'pedigree' and 'family tree' will be used interchangeably, as both evoke a multilinear model as opposed to the family *line*. I shall employ the terms 'pedigree' and 'family tree' when I am referring to ancestry or genealogy in general, because these terms include the family line.

Chapter One traces the incommensurability of Irish oral and English written pedigrees in the aftermath of Union of the two islands, as this is presented in Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812). Chapter Two explores the 'cult' of Mary Queen of Scots in nineteenth-century fiction and painting, and particularly in two novels: Walter Scott's *The Abbot* (1820) and Charlotte Yonge's *Unknown to History* (1882). Mary Stuart was perhaps the most charismatic of a line of royal women who served as role models for many nineteenth-century women, including Queen Victoria. This line of queens and princesses together constituted a 'matriarchal mirror' in which women could see reflected not only a number of the functions expected of them as women, but also roles which were supposedly outside their 'proper sphere'. Chapter Three, on Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847), looks at the family tree *as* fiction; the genealogist Baptist Hatton bestows social and political power upon his clients by 'inventing' pedigrees for them. In *Tancred*, Disraeli glorifies his own Jewish pedigree and places it (and therefore himself) within an expanding imperialistic vision of England's future.

My fourth chapter, on George Meredith's *Evan Harrington* (1860), re-
turns to the theme of Celtic versus Saxon pedigrees; although Evan is
noble according to his ancient Welsh pedigree, in England he is merely
a tailor's son. The decision to suppress part or all of this family tree has
in this novel (and in Meredith's own life) class and nationalist implica-
tions. Chapter Five looks at Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879), and at how the
expected unilinear narrative which follows the main line of the family
tree is disrupted by matrilineal narratives and 'besieging cousins'. I
argue also that the novel reveals Meredith's culturally comparative
stance, far advanced for his time, through the 'oriental' metaphors in
the novel, particularly the metaphors of sati and the Hindu widow. In
Chapters Six and Seven, Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and *The
Well-Beloved* (1897) both reveal an anxiety over the manner in which
genealogical and geological time scales can lead to the erasure of the
record of the individual human life. Following a consideration in previ-
ous chapters of 'peripheral' Celtic elements and of Jewish elements
which represent separation and difference within Britain, few things
could seem more quintessentially English than Hardy's 'Wessex'. But I
argue that the regional can present England itself as divided from
within. The intensive inbreeding on Portland in *The Well-Beloved* gives
the inhabitants of the 'island' a common pedigree, and makes of them,
according to Hardy, a 'separate race' from mainland England. Re-
gional difference, represented by an obsessively repeated pedigree in
these novels, divides Great Britain as effectively as the separate pedi-
grees of the Celtic nations or the Jews.

   An exploration of the fictions or myths which surround pedigree, and
of pedigree's place *within* fiction, reveal much about Britain's anxieties
over, and defence of itself as a unified nation. In recent years, there has
been much interest in the role of narrative and the imagination in the
construction of national identity.[4] Benedict Anderson, for example,
defines a nation as 'an imagined community – and imagined as both
inherently limited and sovereign'.[5] Harriet Ritvo and Jonathan Arac
write that this envisioning of the nation as spatially and culturally
limited was especially disturbed in the late eighteenth century and
throughout the nineteenth century in Britain:

The established European powers found their traditional self-definitions chal-
lenged by the imperatives of capitalism and empire. That is, expansion –
incorporation of the alien, either territorially or economically – was necessary
to maintain preeminence, but that same expansion could diffuse or undermine
the common culture on which the sense of shared nationality ultimately

depended. The resulting strain may have been particularly acute in Great Britain, threatened externally by Napoleon as well as by its own internal dynamics.[6]

In these chapters, a concentration on the internal dynamics within Britain, and a focussing upon the imaginative and fictional constructions around pedigree, become involved with, and are an important key to understanding, the imaginative constructions of Britain as a cohesive, unified nation. A pedigree easily leads out into the internal dynamics of regional and national difference within Britain, and while it is important that these issues surrounding the expanding elements of the series do not inundate or confuse the study of pedigree, it is essential to locate the areas where pedigree crosses and elucidates the racial, regional and national tensions which threatened to fragment Britain's image of herself as unified and insular.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the pressures of imperial expansion, and the accompanying incorporation of alien peoples and cultures, England saw herself as an island nation which was unified, marked out both spatially and racially from other nations. English pedigrees were presented from about the 1830s on as an ancient mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman, and many Anglo-Saxonist historians and ethnologists considered the Norman contribution to be negligible: the strength of Anglo-Saxon blood had won over 'weaker' strains. The Celtic elements in these pedigrees were either suppressed or ignored. This, however, had not always been the case. According to Grant Allen, writing in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1880:

Fifty years ago everybody spoke of the 'Ancient Britons' as our ancestors . . . The fashion for ignoring the distinction between British and English, a fashion derived from the Tudor kings and strengthened by the Union, led the whole world to talk of England as if it were in reality Wales. But during the present generation a great reaction has set in. Mr. Freeman[7] has never ceased to beat into our heads the simple fact that the English people and the English language are English, and not Welsh, or like any other thing.[8]

While Grant Allen claims that 'fifty years ago everybody spoke of the ''Ancient Britons'' as our ancestors', a hundred years previously a number of scholars and antiquarians had been asking whether Englishmen were not in fact of ancient Jewish origin. Howard Weinbrot argues that while 'the tale of Brutus the grandson of Aeneas as founder of Britain remains attractive through much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' some rejected this ancestral narrative because it tended

to make Britain 'an appendage of Rome' and also because it associated
Britain's empire-building with the cruel and violent methods of classical
empire expansion.[9] The 'Ancient Britons' or Celts, according to some
scholars, endowed Britain with an even nobler and more ancient pedi-
gree than that of Aeneas; according to Weinbrot, 'the Celts in general,
and the Scots in particular, were often associated with the Jews':

According to a widely held theory, the great Celtic peoples were offspring of
Noah's grandson Gomer, who ... peopled all of Europe and parts of Asia
Minor. They of course spoke Hebrew, which gradually evolved into Celtic.
These nations were guided by the Druids and their Bards, a learned, legislating,
and oral priestly class especially distinguished in Britain ... Alternatively, the
first settlers in Britain included the Phoenicians who came to trade for tin in
Cornwall and stayed to establish their own great eastern culture in western and
central Britain. This semitic people may have been Jews and certainly spoke
Hebrew. Whether on divine or secular schemes British Celtic ancestry was
Hebraic, unclassical and often anti-classical.[10]

These myths of origin bring together Britain's genealogical tree with the
most ancient and authoritative genealogies of Genesis:

Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth:
and unto them were sons born after the flood ... By these were the isles of the
Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in
their nations. (Genesis 10: 1 and 5)

The genealogical tree is also juxtaposed with another 'tree' of origins –
the linguistic tree: a sign that the British are a pure and chosen people
lies in the above theory that Hebrew is the original language of the
British, and that the Celtic languages are derived directly from the
Biblical language. Hebrew was thought to be the one language spoken
before the building of the Tower of Babel; it is therefore the holy and
God-given language, a suitable tongue for God's chosen people in the
British isles. By the nineteenth century, as Grant Allen states, it was no
longer the fashion to speak of the Ancient Britons (the Welsh) as the
ancestors of the English people, so the myths of origin which saw an
unbroken genealogical and linguistic line between the Celts and the
Jews were no longer gratifying to those of an Anglo-Saxonist persuasion.
Indeed, at least one work of prophetic history in the nineteenth century,
William Carpenter's *The Israelites Found in the Anglo-Saxons* (1874), aimed
to identify the English with the Hebrew people. The powerful authority
and sanction granted by ancient pedigree, and especially by those of
Genesis, is evident in the various claims made in the history of Britain,

and by the various nations within Britain, to those particular myths of origin. For the Celtic nations – especially after Culloden and the breaking up of the clans – in time of famine and massive emigration, a blood tie to the wandering tribes of Israel may have helped to explain and to give a moral, spiritual authority to the displaced and wandering state of their own tribes and nations.

Howard Weinbrot comes to an optimistic conclusion at the close of his long study, *Britannia's Issue*, about the contribution of the (supposedly related) Celtic and Hebrew strains in British culture:

Each [the Celtic and Hebrew] embodies those values in a non-English culture nevertheless essential for England. Each supplies a body of myths eminently adaptable to sublime and effective poetry that becomes a part of the nation's religious and emotional consciousness. Each contributes to the English assumption of a polyglot synthetic culture.[11]

Even if Weinbrot is using the word 'polyglot' in a Bakhtinian sense, it has an odd and disturbing ring at the close of a study which focusses particularly upon Scotland and (as discussed above) upon the linguistic tree. For, after all, if some eighteenth-century scholars held that the Celtic languages were purely derived Hebrew dialects, and therefore were languages which preceded the polyglot conditions after the Tower of Babel, then it is also true that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a fresh drive in the centuries-long campaign on the part of the English to reverse the Tower of Babel: those centuries saw a powerful political and cultural impetus on the part of England to eradicate the polyglot, to suppress the Celtic languages within Britain, making, through English, 'the whole earth of one language, and of one speech' (Genesis 11:1).

Weinbrot's study argues that James Macpherson's Ossian 'suggests how Britain was able to cope with apparent expansion into varied psychic worlds, and how, in current lingo, the "Other" was rendered oneself'.[12] While a study of Ossian does involve to some degree an exploration of Celtic poetry and oral traditions (even if in this case at least partly an 'invented tradition') it is also important to remember that Macpherson's poems are 'translations' from Erse into English. While *Fingal* (1762) and the other popular Ossianic poems made England and Europe aware of a (romanticized) ancient Celtic culture, strictly they did not contribute to Britain as a polyglot society. It may seem pedantic on my part to take 'polyglot' in its literal linguistic meaning here, but I do so because in a consideration of origins, the linguistic tree and the family

tree are closely related. As Rod Mengham points out in his *The Descent of Language* (1993) the linguistic tree and the family tree are never far apart; they both exist within and are affected by 'social frameworks and historical phases' and language is partly like 'family history . . . a social concept that can be repressively insisted on or subversively challenged with the possibilities of innovative change'.[13] I stress the problems in Weinbrot's optimistic conclusion that Britain is a 'polyglot, synthetic' nation because it erases the Celtic languages from the linguistic and genealogical trees of the British isles. To erase those languages from the linguistic tree is to obliterate the family trees, ancestral narratives and cultural traditions which were recorded in those Celtic languages. The linguistic trees and family trees were lost together, and although Weinbrot's book, this book and all the works discussed in this study are written in English, there are traces of ancestral narrative which cannot be recovered from Celtic culture, because the oral lines of transmission were broken. If these genealogical stories were recoverable, then Weinbrot's claim that Britain is 'polyglot' would be less difficult to swallow, and this study of genealogy in Britain would be a much fuller work.

Grant Allen's title for his 1880 article, 'Are We Englishmen?', hints at a society less at ease with the concept of Britain as cosily polyglot and synthetic. This question was a controversial and anxious one through the greater part of the nineteenth century. Some of the confusion surrounding this question lay in England's 'split personality'; the island nation defined itself not only as 'England', but also as 'Great Britain', comprising England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

Much of England's political anxiety at this time, and particularly in relation to Ireland, centered around the question of assimilation versus difference. (Ireland may have been particularly difficult to assimilate into a nation which had this schizophrenic definition of itself as both an insular and sea-defended nation and an archipelago of 'British isles', because it was an island unto itself). Were the Celtic elements within Great Britain assimilated provinces, or were they separate, different entities – nations in their own right? Grant Allen concludes his article by claiming that, 'though the British nation of the present day is wholly Teutonic *in form*, it is largely and even preponderantly Keltic *in matter*.'[14] This was a decidedly unpopular view; the majority in Britain regarded England as the central, dominant power which was Anglo-Saxon in its origins, and the Celtic elements as conquered and marginal. One of the few to concur with Grant Allen's conclusions was, as L. P. Curtis has noted, George Meredith.[15] His attitude to his own Celtic ancestry, and

to the question of marginal/Celtic and central/English tensions within Britain, is discussed in Chapter Four.

The image of the family tree, and the etymology of 'pedigree' serve to construct the pervasive metaphors of this study. 'Pedigree' is derived from the Old French *pied de grue* or 'crane's foot', which resembles the multiple and connected lines of a family tree.[16] The picture of the crane's foot, with its claws branching downward, differs from that conjured up by the term 'family line'. The latter image ignores those tiny ligaments which represent collateral families who can be traced back to the common ancestor with as much validity as the primogenitive heir who is directly 'in line'. Each scion (a word also derived from the Old French, meaning shoot or twig) can serve as a cutting either to be grafted on to by another family line, or planted to become the progenitor, the origin of its own family line, with its own history and stories of origin. Before becoming too involved, however, in the metaphors of crane's toe and twig, the point I wish to make is that both these images of tree and crane's foot conceptually lead away from the direct linear descent of the family line which carries down from father to son. Instead these terms provide a view of multiple kinship lines spreading across the page of the pedigree, representing cousins removed, daughters married, younger sons and spinster aunts.

Lord Illingworth, in Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), describes the Peerage as, 'the best thing in fiction the English have ever done'.[17] The pedigrees of noble families, both fictional and non-fictional, have always inspired story-telling. These stories may consist of the pedigrees themselves, as in the account at the beginning of Chronicles in the Old Testament, or may relate the battles and manipulations of a royal head to keep the dynastic line going, whether in Shakespeare's history plays, or in gossip about the royal family in today's tabloids. Lord Illingworth is referring not so much to these pedigree-inspired stories as to the dependence, in a society which is structured upon a system of primogeniture, upon the virtue of the females who give birth to the heir to the estate. It may be the 'fictions' or lies of these mothers which perpetuates the peerage; the heirs may be illegitimate, but the mothers will not say so, and all the fathers can do is trust the word of their wives. It is upon that trusted word that the peerage (and therefore much of the nation's rule), and the system of primogeniture relies.

Lord Illingworth, himself a fictional aristocrat, associates the nobility with fiction. Many popular novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed the career of a noble or upper-class protagonist. With

the introduction of the noble hero or heroine at the beginning of the novel, the reader has certain expectations concerning the ensuing narrative pattern. The adolescent Jane Austen plays with the reader's expectations in her two-page-long 'Novel in Twelve Chapters' entitled *The Beautiful Cassandra*. She introduces her heroine:

Chapter the First

Cassandra was the daughter and the only daughter of a celebrated milliner in Bond Street. Her father was of noble birth, being the near relation of the Duchess of —'s butler.

Will this 'novel' follow the narrative patterns which we expect for a noble protagonist, or (as she is a milliner's daughter) will it follow our expectations of the picaresque? In the second and third chapters of *Cassandra*, Austen holds the reader in suspense over these questions; the narrative shows signs of following the fortunes of the picaroon and signs of following the fortunes of the 'gentle' heroine.

Chapter the Second

When Cassandra had attained her sixteenth year, she was lovely and amiable, and chancing to fall in love with an elegant bonnet her mother had just completed, bespoke by the Countess of —, she placed it on her gentle head and walked from her mother's shop to make her fortune.

Chapter the Third

The first person she met was the Viscount of —, a young man no less celebrated for his accomplishments and virtues than for his elegance and beauty. She curtseyed and walked on.[18]

In chapter two we pause in expectation after the phrase 'chancing to fall in love with—', and in chapter three, after her meeting with the attractive Viscount. If she is a noble, 'gentle' heroine we expect her to fall in love with the Viscount and finally to marry him. Instead she falls in love with a bonnet and walks unconcernedly past the Viscount. Her future career includes stealing 'three ices' and knocking down a pastry-cook. Cassandra's actions are often those of the picaroon, but the language of sensibility used to describe her, and the manner in which her pedigree is produced in chapter one, lead us to expect a 'traditional' narrative concerning a gentle-blooded heroine.

I describe this linear narrative which traces the career of the noble hero or heroine as 'traditional' because the expectations which are