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978-0-521-56094-8 - Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy

Sophie Gilmartin

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This study addresses the question of why ideas of ancestry and kinship were so important in nineteenth-century society, and particularly in the Victorian novel. Through readings of a range of literary texts, Sophie Gilmartin explores questions fundamental to the national and racial identity of Victorian Britons. What makes people believe that they are part of a certain region, race or nation? Is this sense of belonging based on superstitious beliefs, invented traditions, or fictions created to gain a sense of unity or community? As Britain extended her empire over foreign nations and races, questions of blood relations, of assimilation and difference, and of national and racial definition came to the fore. Gilmartin's study shows how ideas of ancestry and kinship, and the narratives inspired by or invented around them, were of profound significance in the construction of Victorian identity.

Sophie Gilmartin is Lecturer in English Literature at Royal Holloway, University of London. She works mainly in the fields of Victorian literature, art and cultural studies.

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought—in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

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Frontmatter

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For Daniel and Shirley Gilmartin

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Frontmatter

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Sophie Gilmartin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Textual note: the novels</i>	xii
Introduction	1
1 Oral and written genealogies in Edgeworth's <i>The Absentee</i>	23
2 A mirror for matriarchs: the cult of Mary Queen of Scots in nineteenth-century literature	54
3 Pedigree, nation, race: the case of Disraeli's <i>Sybil</i> and <i>Tancred</i>	102
4 'A sort of Royal Family': Alternative pedigrees in Meredith's <i>Evan Harrington</i>	130
5 Pedigree, sati and the widow in Meredith's <i>The Egoist</i>	163
6 Pedigree and forgetting in Hardy	195
7 Geology and genealogy: Hardy's <i>The Well-Beloved</i>	226
Conclusion	246
<i>Notes</i>	252
<i>Bibliography</i>	267
<i>Index</i>	276

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-56094-8 - Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy

Sophie Gilmartin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Illustrations*

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Daniel Maclise, <i>The Marriage of Eva and Strongbow</i> (c. 1854).
Courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland. | page 26 |
| 2. Frontispiece to the 1812 edition of Maria Edgeworth,
<i>The Absentee</i> . | 49 |
| 3. Joseph Severn, <i>The Abdication of Mary, Queen of Scots</i> ,
c. 1831. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum. | 79 |
| 4. Richard Westall, <i>The Departure of Mary Queen of Scots to France
When a Child</i> , probably c. 1794. Courtesy of the Victoria and
Albert Museum. | 84 |
| 5. Richard Westall, <i>The Flight of Mary Queen of Scots into England</i> ,
probably c. 1794. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum. | 84 |
| 6. William Hennessy, illustration to Charlotte M. Yonge's
<i>Unknown to History</i> , c. 1892. | 95 |
| 7. 'New Crowns for Old Ones!' cartoon from <i>Punch</i> , 15 April
1876. | 116 |
| 8. 'Empress and Earl, or One Good Turn Deserves Another',
cartoon from <i>Punch</i> , 26 August 1876. | 117 |
| 9. Edwin Longsden Long, <i>The Babylonian Marriage Market</i> , exhibited
at the Royal Academy, 1875. Courtesy of Royal Holloway
College. | 176 |
| 10. Richard Redgrave, <i>Preparing to Throw Off her Weeds</i> , exhibited
at the Royal Academy 1846. Courtesy of the Victoria and
Albert Museum. | 183 |
| 11. E. K. Johnson, <i>A Young Widow</i> , 1877. Courtesy of the Print
Room, the Victoria and Albert Museum. | 191 |
| 12. Henry Alexander Bowler, <i>The Doubt: 'Can These Dry Bones
Live?'</i> , exhibited at the Royal Academy 1855. Courtesy of the
Tate Gallery, London. | 208 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-56094-8 - Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy

Sophie Gilmartin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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A part of chapter 8 of this book has appeared in the journal *Victorian Literature and Culture* (25)1 (Spring 1997)

Unfortunately, Tess O'Toole's *Genealogy and Fiction in Hardy* (Macmillan, 1997) was published too late for Chapters 6 and 7 of this book to engage with her arguments.

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Sophie Gilmartin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Textual note: the novels*

Editions of the novels which are the focus of this study are as follows:

Chapter 1

I have used the 1832 edition of Maria Edgeworth's *Tales and Novels* rather than that of 1812. Edgeworth revised the later edition of her works considerably, and this is particularly the case with *The Absentee*. I have, however, compared the two editions to explore the significance of Edgeworth's revisions. (*The Absentee, Novels and Tales*, vols. 9 and 10, London, 1832).

The edition used of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* is a facsimile of the first edition of 1806 (*The Wild Irish Girl*, 1806; New York and London: Garland, 1979, 3 vols.).

Chapter 2

Charlotte M. Yonge, *Unknown to History: A Story of the Captivity of Mary of Scotland*, 1882; London, Macmillan, 1898.

Scott, Sir Walter, *The Monastery*, and its sequel, *The Abbot*, both originally published 1820 in 2 vols. each. This edition (Roxburgh), Edinburgh, 1885.

Chapter 3

The 'Hughenden edition' of Disraeli's novels is a reliable edition of his collected novels, based upon an earlier edition overseen by the author which was also published by Longman (*Novels and Tales of the Earl of Beaconsfield with Portrait and Sketch of His Life*: vol. 6, *Coningsby*; vol. 7, *Sybil*; vol. 8, *Tancred*, London, 1881).

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Sophie Gilmartin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Textual note: the novels

xiii

Chapters 4 and 5

I have consulted the Standard Edition of George Meredith's works, published by Constable:

Evan Harrington, 1861; 1914

The Egoist, 1879; 1915

Celt and Saxon, published posthumously, 1910; 1919.

Chapters 6 and 7

I have used the 'New Wessex' edition in hard cover of Hardy's complete novels, published by Macmillan in the 1970s:

Far From the Madding Crowd, ed. Christine Winfield; intr., John Bayley, 1975.

Life's Little Ironies and *A Changed Man*, ed. F. B. Pinion, 1977.

A Pair of Blue Eyes, ed. and intr. Ronald Blythe, 1976.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles, ed. and intr. P. N. Furbank, 1975.

The Well-Beloved, ed. Edward Mendelson; intr. J. Hillis Miller, 1975.

In chapters 6 and 7 I have discussed a number of Hardy's poems, and here I have used *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson, London, Macmillan, 1976.