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.
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.

This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
ANCESTRY AND
NARRATIVE IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITISH LITERATURE

Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy

SOPHIE GILMARTIN
For Daniel and Shirley Gilmartin
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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.
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).


**Chapter 2**


**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).
Textual note: the novels

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:


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.