

unlike other children, they were *chosen*. Suddenly Nathalie realizes that she has to know where she comes from, and she communicates that impulse to her brother David. Their quest takes each of them on a journey of discovery and self-discovery. What they do not anticipate is how the quest will affect their families—parents, spouses, and children—not to mention the families of their birth mothers. The changes that occur unleash tidal waves that spread ever-widening ripples through their entire lives, including their careers. Nathalie’s husband, Steven Ross, proprietor of a design company, for example, opens the narrative as he “contemplated his small and satisfying empire” (2), but, by the conclusion of the novel, his empire will be shattered. David, a landscape designer, married to Marnie Dexter from Winnipeg, will decide to relocate his family home and business in Canada. How they get from here to there makes for intriguing reading.

Trollope has perfected the slow curve. Beginning with stability, her novels build gradually to considerable intensity, revealing the truth of persons and relationships. She maneuvers a community of families deftly, moving effortlessly from group to group in realistic but memorable domestic scenes. Her style of writing is immensely readable, and her ability to convey the nuances of real relationships and domestic life is unsurpassed.

Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman, eds.

Acts of Narrative

Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003. Pp. 296. \$60.00 \$24.95

Reviewed by Daniel Punday

It is difficult not to be impressed by a collection of essays like *Acts of Narrative*. Its list of contributors is a mix of prominent critics and theorists. More than this, many of the essays included here are genuine contributions to specific areas of study within literary history and criticism. My personal favorites—which no doubt reflect my own theoretical interests—are W.J.T. Mitchell’s discussion of place and landscape in terms of the “spatial designs of a period,” Alan Liu’s discussion of technology and literary history using the unlikely subject of Sir Phillip Sidney’s “Apology for Poetry,” and Tom Cohen’s intriguing analysis of the language of tracking as a model for literary investigation in Faulkner’s *Go Down Moses*. Indeed, while the broad topic announced by the collection’s title might have leant itself to extremely general or theoretical essays, all of these essays have very particular foci. The freedom to focus on what seem to be quirky issues and texts allows these critics to do the sort of work for which they have become well known.

That said, the way in which this collection has been framed will probably strike most readers as puzzling. In his concluding essay for the collection, Jacques Derrida notes as an aside, "I am told that the texts collected here are supposed to take 'narrativity' as their leitmotiv" (199). Derrida's apparent hesitancy about what it is that gives this collection its coherence will likely be shared by most readers. The collection has no substantial introduction, but merely a brief preface consumed almost entirely by summaries of the essays included. The emphasis on *acts* of narrative in the title certainly promises attention to the uses of narrativity, to the work of creating a story or of moving through a narrative. And yet many of the essays in this collection seem more concerned with narrative categories than acts, as is the case, for example, in Dan Shen's discussion of the extent to which the term "focalization" applies to first- and third-person narration. Other essays, such as Ronald Paulson's analysis of Jacobite aesthetics in *The Rape of the Lock*, seem to have been included in the collection merely because they discuss narratives, rather than because they are concerned with narrative issues or categories themselves. Many of the essays seem to share an appreciation of J. Hillis Miller's work on narrative, and in places the collection veers toward being a festschrift in his honor; other critics, such as Paulson and Shen, make no mention of him at all.

The editors, contributors, and perhaps even some readers may object that *narrative* really does mean all these things. Ultimately, *Acts of Narrative* points to the very peculiar meaning that the term *narrative* has acquired in our contemporary literary theory. When the term emerged into academic study during 1960s structuralism, it was as part of an attempt to move away from traditional categories such as "the novel" and toward fundamental elements of discourse that could be studied scientifically, as the field of linguistics studies phonetics and morphology. In such an atmosphere, *narratology* was born as the scientific study of narrative. Since then, deconstruction and new historicism have challenged the possibility of such grand systematizing in literary study. We are left with an understanding of narrative that retains its transgressive qualities—*narrative* is broader and more apt to show up in unlikely places than stodgier concepts—but without confidence that we can, some day, define its fundamental elements and forms. As a result, narrative functions as a term on the boundary between many different subdisciplines within literary study—a point where critics, theorists, and historians can meet, even if we might wonder whether they are really talking about the same thing.