



# Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction

*Michael Ragussis*

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Michael Ragussis re-reads the novelistic tradition by arguing the acts of naming--bestowing, revealing, or earning a name; taking away, hiding, or prohibiting a name; slandering, or protecting and serving it--lie at the center of fictional plots from the 18th century to the present. Against the background of philosophic approaches to naming, *Acts of Naming* reveals the ways in which systems of naming are used to appropriate characters in novels as diverse as *Clarissa*, *Fanny Hill*, *Oliver Twist*, *Pierre*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, and *Lolita*, and identifies unnamings and renamings as the locus of power in the family's plot to control the child, and more particularly, to rape the daughter. His analysis also treats additional works by Cooper, Brontë, Hawthorne, Eliot, Twain, Conrad, and Faulkner, extending the concept of the naming plot to reimagine the traditions of the novel, comparing American and British plots, female and male plots, inheritance and seduction plots, and so on. *Acts of Naming* ends with a theoretical exploration of the "magical" power of naming in different eras and in different, even competing, forms of discourse.

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