poses; and specific issues such as reading, composition instruction, scholarly critical editions, and computer-assisted criticism. Delany's essay "From the Scholar's Library to the Personal Docuverse" considers how a scholar might combine texts that exist in his or her personal computer and others that are available at public sites on the Internet in order to create a "personal docuverse" (defined by Delany as "a large collection of electronically stored and linked documents, connected to a computer network") that can be linked and searched however the scholar may choose. Using Joyce as his example, Delany outlines various models for such a docuverse. In another essay, Ian Lancashire argues that computer assistance on a critical study of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* might be far less mechanical than such studies are usually assumed to be.

In general, the essays in *The Digital Word* assume more knowledge of and commitment to computer technology as a way in which scholarship will be conducted in the future than do the essays in the earlier book; they are more technical and discuss more specialized issues. The essays tend to be more about the form that critical and scholarly work might assume in the computer than about the content, but one of their most important messages is that the technological form has a profound effect on content. Both books contain a good deal of useful practical information for people wishing to begin using computers or to use them in more sophisticated ways, and both books are very good places for scholars working on fiction, or for literary scholars of any kind, to begin exploring some of the likely directions in which criticism and scholarship are likely to move in the next few years.

Feng Jicai
*The Three-Inch Golden Lotus*
Translated from the Chinese by David Wakefield
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. Pp. 239
Reviewed by Jeffrey Twitchell

In the prefatory chapter to this novel on foot binding (originally published in 1985), Feng Jicai inserts a cautionary quatrain against jumping to conclusions about the story and its rather sensational subject matter: "If you're looking for lies, then all becomes lies;/If you're looking for truth, then all becomes truth;/But when you're really into the story,/You can't tell the difference between the two" (3). For foreigners, and a good many Chinese too, foot binding was a highly resonant symptom of the backwardness and cruelty of Old China. *The Three-Inch Golden Lotus* begins with a harrowing description of the actual process of binding in its most severe form, and the novel makes clear the general degradation of women's position in traditional Chinese society. Yet Feng is not primarily concerned with resurrecting an old evil as a means of commenting on issues of women's lot in China. As a social practice or political issue, foot binding is long dead, although one can still see some of its now elderly victims in many areas of China, and it has its analogue in the current debates over female circumcision. Granted the cruelty of the practice, the novel is more interested in what can only be called the culture

of bound feet—"a complete body of knowledge," as Feng puts it (2). Foot binding was not some residual barbarism, but very much the outgrowth of a highly sophisticated and refined culture. Even the brutal initiation process of binding the feet was not simply a matter of crushing them for smallness, for it was actually desirable to rot the flesh so that it could be remolded into the ideal aesthetic shape. The making and embroidering of the tiny shoes, the skillful showing off of the feet, the everyday care and even the binding of the feet were all highly evolved arts, as was the male appreciation of their beauty and eroticism. Much of the action of the novel revolves around several bound feet contests and their complementary intellectual competitions between the "lotus lovers," male enthusiasts of bound feet, as to who is the most knowledgeable and subtle connoisseur. In the course of all this, the narrative includes a great deal of history, lore, and literature about bound feet, as well as considerable discussion about how to judge the types and nuances of their beauty.

Feng is clearly fascinated by this ultra-refined, frequently bizarre, humorous, and just plain curious cultural practice. Yet simply describing it at such length cannot help but mock the intellectual and aesthetic absurdities built up around this mutilating practice. The novel is pervaded by a seductive nostalgia for a life that seems intent on aestheticizing the smallest details of everyday life, yet with the ever present sense of its excessiveness and imminent doom. Indeed, with the first rumors that there are anti-bound-feet campaigns afoot, the Tong family goes into abrupt decline. On his deathbed, the family patriarch orders that the young girls of the family have their feet bound in a desperate effort to guarantee the continuation of the old ways. Ironically, the campaign to uphold tradition is carried on by one of its victims, the novel's heroine, Fragrant Lotus, whose ultimately doomed efforts to preserve the practice is historically accurate in that not only was unbinding the feet extremely painful, and sometimes even more crippling, but there was considerable psychological investment in the belief that tiny feet were beautiful on the part of the women as well.

Ultimately, this tale is in the telling. Feng's fiction is well known for adapting an oral storytelling manner that allows for great narrative flexibility, freely digressing to relate stories within the story or to throw in just about anything the author finds of interest. Those who know Feng's other historical fiction, such as his novella *The Miraculous Pigtail* (1984), set during the Boxer Rebellion, will be familiar with his delight in the curious traditions, tall tales, and local color associated with his home city of Tianjin. There is, however, something more in this seemingly offhand manner since Feng is concerned with suspending the dogmatic prejudgments his readers would ordinarily be in the habit of making. In resurrecting the charged topic of bound feet, he is not primarily interested in using this practice yet again as an emblem of the corrupt Old China, nor, on the other hand, is he simply nostalgic for lost cultural traditions, but rather he deliberately offers an undigested mix of both and more. As the above-quoted quatrain indicates, throughout this lively narrative there are mischievous confusions of the true and the false. The anti-foot-binding campaigns are certainly correct in desiring the end to a cruel practice, but wrong in rigidly insisting on the immediate loosening of already bound feet, no matter what the physical and psychological consequences. Feng evidently believes in the moral power of humor and is unwilling to com-

pletely condemn even his most brutal characters. All of the inhabitants of his novel are interesting, and all are a bit foolish one way or the other.

Alison Booth, ed.
*Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*
Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993. Pp. viii + 393. $47.50; $17.95
Reviewed by Jane Campbell

The fourteen essays in this volume—thirteen on texts ranging from 1847 to 1982, and an Afterword—explore the relationship between narrative endings and the representation of female experience. Most of the authors practice "gyno-criticism," focusing on works by women authors, but there are also studies of *Vanity Fair* and *The Golden Bowl*. Ten chapters are by women, four by men. The authors examined include the already canonized (W.M. Thackeray, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, Henry James), the little known (Pauline Hopkins, Netta Syrett), and those with an indeterminate relationship to the canon (Harriet Jacobs, Edith Wharton, Katherine Anne Porter, Jean Rhys, Sue Grafton). All the essayists use feminist strategies, but their approaches are refreshingly varied, and no one theoretical perspective dominates.

One of the assumptions of the collection is that the conventions of realism do not, as some feminist critics have contended, cripple the writer (or reader) who wishes to disrupt the traditional plots of women's lives; conversely, the shattering of traditional narrative associated with modernism does not necessarily free the female subject. Within the nineteenth century, with what Alison Booth, in the title of her fine Introduction, calls its "sense of few endings" for women, writers found ways of subverting the marriage-or-death ending by marginalizing it, by calling social judgments about it into question, and by inserting, within the marriage plot, the narrative of female ambition. As the century approached its own ending, stories of female quest became more prominent, and the revisions of the old endings by twentieth-century writers were more varied and daring.

The chapters play off against each other in suggestive, unexpected ways. For example, Herbert F. Tucker and Alison Booth show how two marriage plots, those of *Aurora Leigh* and *Romola*, allow women to exert influence in a community larger than the domestic one. Lisa Jadwin, on *Vanity Fair*, and Stephen D. Arata, on *The Golden Bowl*, reveal how two very different figures survive the ending and resist definition, whether by the puppet box or by the museum sensibility. Ann Ardis's recuperation of two novels by Syrett, *Ann Page* and *Three Women*, demonstrates that Syrett opened up the genre of the closed, realistic novel of manners through plots which endorse "female ambition *and* eroticism" (271). In contrast, Peter J. Rabinowitz, looking at Grafton's "*'A' is for Alibi*," the most recent of the texts considered in the volume, argues that the author's appropriation of the detective genre is only partly liberating for her sleuth, for Kinsey Millhone is also trapped by the generic conventions through which we read. Like Porter's *Old Mortality*, Grafton's novel problematizes the reading process: Suzanne W. Jones points to