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

Porter's demonstration of "the problem of unconsciously playing out old plots, even after one has become a feminist reader aware of their dangers" (295). Two essays on Black narratives—Sharon Davie's on Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Carla L. Peterson's on Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*—illuminate not only each other but other texts as well. Davie's discussion of double voicing recalls Jadwin's highlighting of Becky Sharp's double discourse, while Bonnie Zimmerman, writing on *Daniel Deronda,* and Peterson both identify ways of using historical romance to interrogate the culture's gender system: Eliot by providing a "feminist chorus" to "undermine the complacency of the androgynous male story" (167), Hopkins by both stressing female bonding and suggesting the possibility of equality within heterosexual marriage. Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers,* Christine L. Krueger contends, refuses closure by ending *before* its ending, with a speech by its central character critiquing both marriage and the assumptions of the Victorian novel. Similarly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* ends both before its own ending—with Bertha on the point of burning down Rochester's house—and before that of *Jane Eyre,* the book which Rhys, in what Caroline Rody argues is an anticipation of postmodern techniques, radically revises. On the other hand, Wharton's *House of Mirth* concludes, after Lily Bart's ambiguous death, with a space which its society leaves empty; its last word, says Shari Benstock, can never be spoken. U.C. Knoepflmacher's Afterword extends the discussion, introducing *Villette, Frankenstein,* and *To the Lighthouse* as further revisions of woman's story and seeing Woolf's ending, Lily's final brush stroke, as reasserting, not resolving, "insecurities and contradictions" (361).

True to its subject, which Booth describes as "*unending* bids for ultimate authority" (3), *Famous Last Words* is an open-ended text. Every reader with an interest in narrative will find much to admire, learn from, and carry further.

Olga Anastasia Pelensky, ed.
Isak Dinesen: Critical Views
Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993. Pp. xvii + 354. $39.95
Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

The Danish author and painter Karen Blixen, known better internationally under her pseudonym, Isak Dinesen, always refused to allow her character or her writing to conform to any category. Consequently, critics have approached Dinesen's relatively small oeuvre only hesitantly. In addition, critical reception has been hampered by the fact that a Danish author writing in English occupies a problematic position in a practice that traditionally organizes literature and criticism according to national origins and standards. *Isak Dinesen: Critical Views* gives an overview of this critical reception by collecting twenty-six essays, originally published between 1952 and 1992, with a heavy emphasis on pieces from the early 1980s, which saw a rise not only in critical but also in public interest in Dinesen's writing, exemplified by the Hollywood version of her memoir, *Out of Africa.*