

susceptible to generational dissent in recent years as well. As multi-faceted as were the first and second waves, a new division has begun to critique the strategies of their forerunners, expressing concern for feminism's future. While not arising out of any identifiable mass-based, social activist movement, this new generation has begun to redefine, reform and change the nature of feminism itself, reevaluate the successes of their predecessors, and articulate the perceived failures of the second wave. Just as a number of definitive borders separate the ideologies of the first and second waves, women who came to feminism in the 1980s and 1990s have experienced the world in a strikingly different manner than their foremothers. As well, the hostility that often marks intergenerational relationships appears to be alive and well.

The mainstream press has latched on to the existence of these "new feminists." Unfortunately (and erroneously), popular discourse has often accepted the insurgence of third wave texts as a marker reporting the decline of women's liberation and the "death of feminism." In response to misconceptions of where feminism is headed, a number of recent feminist publications have attempted to bridge the gap between the waves and provide a more realistic account of the evolution and future of the women's movement. While effective dialogue across the waves has yet to be performed on a significant scale, Judy Rebick and Kike Roach's 1996 collaboration *Politically Speaking* is one of the better examples of what is required: mutually respectful conversations between women concerning issues pertinent to the movement as a whole.

Anna Bondoc and Meg Daly's edited collection, *Letters of Intent: Women Cross the Generations to Talk About Family, Work, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism*, is the most current publication of this sort. Utilizing cross-generational dialogue as their primary objective, the editors

compiled 22 epistolary exchanges between young feminists and their feminist predecessors in an attempt to halt the media's premature declaration of feminism's death. Ranging from the politics of inter-racial relationships to body image and self esteem to dealing with modern-day homophobia, the collection provides a diverse account of the sometimes similar but more often strikingly different realities of women's experiences. Perhaps, more significantly, the interchanges provided a forum for young feminists to articulate their frustration with how their feminist identity plays itself out in their everyday lives.

Bondoc and Daly recognized the importance of contextualizing the "letters" in terms of the wave metaphor: each of the "waves" were presented as distinct movements with characteristics unique to time and place located within a continuous, larger struggle for women's rights. While recognizing that intergenerational hostility within the women's movement exists, Daly stated that "[i]f our struggles remain isolated or if we refuse to listen to each others' conflicting agendas, we have no movement—just a slew of individual therapy sessions." "Instead," she argued, "we might build a feminism whose members accept that the movement is as complex, undecided, unclear, but as driven, impassioned, and necessary as the individuals who make it up."

An interesting, easy to read, and informative collection, *Letters of Intent* is not without limitations. As the editors themselves admit in their disclaimer, the decision to prompt the younger generation to write the initial letter to their preselected "mentor" created an unnecessary "mother/daughter" power dynamic, one which left a number of the contributors (and readers) uncomfortable. The older women were automatically allotted the last word on all issues, which leaves readers wondering how a prolonged exchange might have concluded. Further, some of the

opening letters appeared to be hesitant. Perhaps the younger feminists' desire to maintain respect and admiration for their legacies prompted many to be less frank with their critiques or concerns.

Letters of Intent illustrates that fruitful dialogue between feminism's waves is necessary, particularly in light of the current media attacks on the women's movement. But it also illustrates that discussions must take place within the context of gracious relationships, free of ideological one-upmanship, fear, and ranking. Not nearly enough experience-swapping has occurred. Understanding that each has and will face circumstances strikingly different from another and acknowledging that in respectful—and candid—dialogue is the first step in reconciling differences and moving forward.

YOUR MADNESS, NOT MINE: STORIES OF CAMEROON

Makuchi. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1999.

BY CHRISTINE SINGH

The nine short stories in this collection, which all focus on post-colonial Cameroon, are interconnected most obviously by subject-matter. Aside from the political and economic setting that foregrounds each story—specifically the troubles caused by the devaluation of the CFA (Cameroon's currency), which Eloise Briere clarifies in her introduction—the subjects of the stories are elucidated through certain major, uniting themes: the issue of language; Western influence or neocolonial ties; patriarchal oppression; and women's survival.

The language issue is raised by the

fact that English is spoken in two western provinces, and French in the remaining eight provinces of Cameroon—the only African country to have two European official languages. Neither language is spoken exclusively or accurately by Cameroonians, and both are often spoken in the same sentence; pidgin, and various native mother tongues are also blended into this unique Cameroonian speech. Makuchi, a Beba woman of Cameroon, unmasks the beauty and grace of the hybridized language in “Market Scene,” where pidgin, English, and French all commingle harmoniously and effortlessly while Sibora, a respected, slightly feared, almost majestic woman relates incidents of scams at the market. (A glossary at the back of the book helps to clarify any difficult words.) Yet in “Accidents Are a Sideshow,” where a car accident causes a linguistic war, Makuchi reveals the political side of the language issue, especially the difficulty of using a minority language.

The theme of Western or neocolonial influence, found metaphorically disguised in the title of the book as “your madness,” creeps through most of the stories, whether it be symbolically, as in “Slow Poison,” where AIDS is referred to as “the whiteman’s slow poison,” or more concretely, as in “The Forest Will Claim You Too,” where French and Asian loggers destroy the forest to the extent that indigenous healers can no longer find ingredients for their herbal medicine, and where “timber babies” are born to single mothers. Neocolonial influence is also seen both symbolically and concretely in “American Lottery,” where Paul, an educated Cameroonian boy, raised on American television shows and billboards of the Marlboro Man, and accustomed to American names for local regions, such as Santa Barbara or Dallas, dreams of going to America, where all problems are assumed to simply disappear.

Patriarchal authority dominates “The Healer,” where Makuchi por-

trays the plight of women who are unable to bear children. And in “Your Madness, Not Mine,” the title story, where Jikwu’s mother has no autonomy against her husband, patriarchy governs again. Yet, as if wanting to give some hope, “Election Fever,” where Miandee teaches her granddaughter some tricks of the politics trade, and “Bayam-Sellam,” where Mi Ngiembuh successfully maintains her own business and then triumphantly leads a sort of revolution, are both stories in which two strong, independent women clearly have agency, and act perhaps as role-models to overcome various difficulties in Cameroon.

But aside from thematic similarities, perhaps what strings these stories together is the foundation on which they are built. While it is true, as Briere states, that Makuchi “wields her pen like a pioneer’s axe in the forest, clearing new spaces in literary discourse that invite us to consider realities we would otherwise never know,” thereby bringing to light realities that would ordinarily go hidden, the manner in which she does this is perhaps a more engaging method of uniting the stories. Makuchi’s characters are vibrant and alive, for they act out their author’s plans with authentic voice and conduct. Diverting twists shock the reader into reflection, such as the outcome of Azembe’s “healing” powers in “The Healer,” and innovative plots and suspense keep the reader absorbed, as in “Bayam-Sellam,” where one is anxious about Mi Ngiembuh’s success. And yet nothing is affected or insincere, but rather well-researched, and well-constructed.

The most impressive feature of *Your Madness, Not Mine* however, which is the basis for the vibrancy and the thematic unity, is Makuchi’s use of similes and metaphors. Not only do they clarify portrayals by comparing or paralleling separate images, but, in these nine stories, the similes and metaphors are uniquely African. In “American Lottery” the

departure of Paul’s brother to America is compared to bored holes, “like those left behind on plantain leaves after the passage of hailstones,” and rain, in “Election Fever,” is compared to “a million stalks of elephant grass advanc[ing] steadily.” Such images, deriving from the local landscape, are scattered throughout the collection. They not only connect these nine stories together by creating them in a single, coherent context, but they also capture the flavour of Africa that is fresh, new, and authentic.

VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

Nicola Diane Thompson, Ed.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

BY LESLIE AMBEDIAN

The novel was very much the literary province of women in the nineteenth century, yet few Victorian women novelists have achieved canonical status. Nicola Diane Thompson’s collection of essays explores this imbalance by focusing attention on female novelists’ approaches to the “woman question,” or rather, the complex of issues, such as divorce, property, suffrage, and education, that collectively make up the “question.” Thompson argues that,

[non-canonical] Victorian women novelists’ inherently complicated and conflicted positions on the ‘woman question’—in conjunction with the evolving horizon of expectations toward what we now call feminism, are responsible for their noncanonical status.

Thompson identifies four major foci