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 portrays 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

of this study: marriage and the family, the rhetoric of ambivalence, women and work, and the "New Woman" novels of the latter part of the century.

The foregrounding of lesser-known writers such as Harriet Martineau, Mrs Oliphant, Mrs Humphrey Ward, and Charlotte Mary Yonge, among others, makes this a very useful collection, but it is not without its problems. Thompson's basic thesis is flawed by undiscussed assumptions about the feminist positions of the canonical few: George Eliot, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell. If the non-canonical novelists are complicated and conflicted, Thompson implies in her introduction, then the canonical authors are both simpler and more palatable to contemporary feminist sensibilities. None of these canonical writers can be considered feminist in any modern sense, however; Eliot, for example, refused to sign Barbara Bodichon's petition in support of the Married Woman's Property Bill in 1854. Charlotte Brontë expresses a strong sense of woman's proper place in *Shirley*, when the eponymous character refuses a proposal of marriage: "I will not accept the hand that cannot hold me in check." Similar assumptions about the canonical authors pervade the subsequent essays; Valerie Sanders, for example, in her contribution "Marriage and the antifeminist woman novelist" states that both Eliot and Charlotte Brontë "usually supply their heroines with second opportunities for [marital] contentment." Lucy Snowe, Romola di Bardi, Maggie Tulliver and Gwendolyn Grandcourt all spring instantly to mind; where is each one's second chance at happiness? Anne Humphreys in her essay "Breaking Apart: The Early Victorian Divorce Novel" categorizes Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as belonging to that trope where "a brutal and/or egregiously adulterous husband is repeatedly excused, forgiven, and often nursed by the heroic wife until finally he or she dies...." While Helen Huntingdon does in fact nurse her abusive husband Arthur on his deathbed, to categorize *Tenant* so simply is to ignore the radical nature of the text: despite her fundamental lack of any personal rights, Helen escapes with her child instead of excusing and forgiving. Blanket statements such as these detract from the reliability of the book: if the better-known writers are treated in such fashion, can the respective essay-writers be trusted on the less well-known texts?

Despite these serious caveats, *Victorian Women Writers on the Woman Question* remains an interesting and useful collection, and Thompson's stated intention of "expanding the limited landscape of Victorian novels by women, focusing renewed and serious attention on the women writers forgotten or neglected by literary history, and in the process also expanding and radically reevaluating our reading of 'the Victorian'" is a worthy one. The woman question was one of the major anxieties of the Victorian period, and excellent discussions of the major issues, such as the *Married Woman's Property Act*, or the reform of the divorce laws, inform the individual papers. One's reading of the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, for example, cannot help but be affected by the knowledge that remarriage even after divorce for Helen Huntingdon would have been legally impossible. Similarly, Sanders's discussion of conservative writers and marriage makes an excellent point,

> if antifeminist women were having doubts about the certainty of domestic happiness, the "gender crisis" of the 1880s onwards assumes even greater proportions than cultural historians have recognized.

The canonical authors did not operate in a vacuum; *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* helps to illuminate complex cultural issues, and female writers' varied responses to them, which contemporary criticism is too apt to view as a single monolithic structure. The issue of canon formation is both contentious and fascinating; certainly a broader range of nineteenth century women writers should be available for both study and sheer enjoyment. Thompson's thesis is, however, problematic and ultimately unconvincing; Eliot's and the Brontës' attitudes to the woman question are as conflicted and complicated as Harriet Martineau's or Charlotte Mary Yonge's. Although this books' treatment of non-canonical authors is interesting and varied, it does not allow the same courtesy to the canonical authors to whom it compares them.

CHAPTERS IN A LUCKY LIFE

Clara Thomas.
Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1999.

BY NAOMI BLACK

Reading *Chapters in a Lucky Life*, I found myself murmuring, there's something about Clara—Clara being Doctor Clara Thomas, F.R.S.C., Professor Emerita of English at York University, founder and leading figure in the field of Canadian Literature, known widely as scholar, teacher, friend, wise-woman. An undiminished 80, she has now written for us a longer version of the story she hinted at when she presented herself as "Lotta Gutsa," who was "the only tenured woman in her department" at "Bigan New University." This was in the 1985 essay, "How Jane Got Tenure." In it, Jane, the archetypal female graduate student, reflected that "Lotta Gutsa was weird in some ways, but she did have flashes of inspiration." Well, yes, but perhaps Jane was not in a position to appreciate the breadth of Lotta Gutsa's experience and the depth of her insights—as we are, now that we can have the pleasure of reading these memoirs.