PREFACE

Four of the essays in this issue of *Feminist Studies* document the global geography of feminist disruptions. From the locations of Iran, Galicia, Brazil, and the United States, women engage in political, literary, linguistic, and interpretative acts that somehow break apart, rupture, or interrupt the social conventions of their communities.

Hammed Shahidian's essay on the participation of Iranian women in clandestine, leftist politics in Iran between 1970 and 1985 ruptures the stereotypes of the veiled, submissive Muslim woman. Shahidian carefully traces the emergence of Iranian women's political consciousness and their attempt to strike a delicate balance between the revolution and their own goals as women resisting patriarchal traditions. In most instances, as Shahidian points out, although these activists encountered sexism within their political groups, confronting it was often subjugated to what they considered the "greater cause." As a result, advances toward feminist objectives were nominal. Despite the absence of changes of an explicitly feminist kind, Iranian women activists, scattered in exile around the world, acknowledge that the lessons they learned now inform an everyday praxis committed to forging a more aggressive feminist agenda.

Janet M. Chernela's essay is also about small acts. Through a single, solitary act of storytelling, Chernela argues, the male domain of mythmaking among the Wanano, a horticultural people in the Northwest Amazon, is briefly ruptured by one woman's "ideal speech moment." It is a moment that cannot be reconstructed and may never happen again. As Chernela points out, this exceptional status places the moment outside research structured by the scientific principles of social science. However, at the moment of its telling it becomes an "extraordinary occurrence" through which "the narrator creates a different participatory structure and an altered configuration of social relations within that structure." Such transfigurations form the foundation of feminist praxis.

Third Wave feminists are also engaged in altering the configuration of social relations, in this case with First and Second wave feminists. According to Jennifer Drake's review essay, "gen-x" feminists seek to interrupt the theories and practices of the past in order to create a more open-ended feminism. Their new vision is best expressed by Gina Davis, a contributor to the

volume *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism,* as she speaks of a need to "teach and encourage feminism without assuming that those who do not proclaim it–or who proclaim it in a way other than we might expect–do not use it, without assuming that those who are not its missionaries are living in 'sin.'" Drake sees several valuable and challenging benefits to this "both/and" brand of feminism, not least of which is its emphasis on pleasure and sexuality. Recognizing how Third Wave feminism differs from its progenitors may also enable us to understand better the appeal of the conservative "power feminism" espoused by such writers as Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf. Herself a "younger sister to the Second Wave, older sister to the Third," Drake hopes for an enlarged vision of feminism that is encompassing rather than exclusionary.

Often, creating new feminist visions requires reimagining old concepts and reassessing previous intellectual and artistic figures. This is precisely what the members of a cultural collective in Galicia set out to do as they grapple with how to formulate a Galician nationalism that is inclusive. As Sharon R. Roseman points out in "Celebrating Silenced Words: The 'Reimagining' of a Feminist Nation in Late-Twentieth-Century Galicia," the alternative magazine *Festa da Palabra Silenciada* serves as an "intervention into nationalist discourse," a feminist disruption that will affect the way in which Galicians forge a new national identity. By selecting Galicia as a site, Roseman aims to widen our knowledge not only of the geographic breadth of feminist praxis but also of the "gendered experience of nationalism." According to Roseman, *Festa da Palabra Silenciada*'s major contribution to Galician feminism has been the creation of an intellectual space where "women and girls feel free to talk together and to read one another." Roseman believes that *Festa da Palabra Silenciada* has lessons for women globally not only as "the discourse of a group that is challenging the hegemony of dominant political forces," but also because it provides those of us situated in other geographical and cultural locations with "examples of cultural resistance."

Like the essays we have clustered as "feminist disruptions," Gayle V. Fischer's "'Pantalets' and 'Turkish Trowsers': Designing Freedom in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century United States" explores material practices that disturb social forms, in this

case forms of dress. Fischer shows that a remarkably wide range of groups and individuals, from Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons to health reformers and women's rights activists, shared a commitment to garments that would offer women physical comfort and freedom. However, these disparate groups, which shared no common political program, also had no desire to blur distinctions between women and men. On the contrary, they created garments that emphasized gender differences through either eroticized or childlike designs; women's rights advocates, for example, favored "Turkish" costumes, evoking an exoticizing orientalism that conflicted with xenophobic constructions of "American" identity. All the "bifurcated" garments met with hostility, for even as the reformers tried to "feminize" their designs through styles that evoked weakness, eroticism, or innocence, the public perceived all reforms to women's dress as a threat to the system of sexual spheres.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary fashions, and their reconstruction by twentieth-century critics, are the subject of Susan S. Lanser's "Writing Women into Romanticism." Recent scholarship suggests that Romanticists have responded slowly to feminist intervention both because of the period's own complex gender dynamics and because subsequent constructions have defined Romanticism through men's practices. Drawing from six books focused on European women writing between 1780 and 1840, Lanser shows that British, French, and German women not only participated with men in the aesthetic, political, and social transformation with which Romanticism is identified, but they also often refigured Romantic ideology for distinctive purposes. Although rejecting the notion of separate feminine and masculine Romanticisms, she sees Romanticism as a movement with considerable potential for "feminist disruption." However, Lanser challenges the use of "Romantic" to label an entire period, arguing that this practice erases or misrepresents the contributions of many women (and men) who did not align themselves with Romantic ideologies.

Helen R. Klebesadel's paintings, featured in this issue's art essay, are similarly focused on the possibilities of investing old symbols with new imaginative power. Klebesadel dedicates her work to exploring the intersections between individual identity and social design. In her watercolors, conventional figures from

the "deadly" nightshade to the common crow take on revised meanings aimed to deconstruct and reconstruct women's alternatives. Working within a "surreal yet representational" mode in order to craft each painting as a narrative, Klebesadel charts a journey from the confrontation with women's anger and power figured in the Medusa, through the reclamation of passion and spirit that heals mind/body dichotomies, to the complicated struggle for liberation from social patterning. Klebesadel designs her art to evoke symbols familiar to a range of viewers and thus to encourage other women toward the creative reinvention of their lives. She tells us we cannot have what we cannot imagine. Ann Fisher-Wirth's poem, "Mapplethorpe," also testifies to the importance of the visual and verbal arts in breaking conventional silences.

The other works of poetry and fiction that we have selected for this issue symbolically refigure the struggles wrought by differences of gender and power in the context of female-male relationships. The irruption of women's power is figured through the magical realist parable "The Winged Woman" ("La Mujer alada") by the Peruvian writer Viviana Mellet, here translated from the Spanish by Kathy S. Leonard. Mellet's unnamed woman inherits her wings from her mother and passes them to her daughter in turn; the fate of the woman and her wings in the context of a conventional marriage takes on poignancy in Mellet's tale. Kate Light's representation of female-male relations in "The Idea of Love between Us" uses the image of a lighted candle to represent tensions between gendered conceptions of love. Ann Fisher-Wirth's "The Blue Window," coming to terms with patriarchal violence, recognizes the toll institutions take on individuals, while "The Blessing of My Beloved on My Body" celebrates the middle-aged body in convention-breaking erotic imagery.

Each of the contributions to this issue of *Feminist Studies,* then, enacts or identifies a cleft in the global fabric of patriarchal practices, locating a particular site of disruption with a particular strategic design. Together these pieces remind us of the courageous cultural negotiations in which women in diverse geographies have long been engaged.

Susan S. Lanser and Irma McClaurin,
for the editors