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Introduction

Susan Bruce and Katherine Smits

On June 13th ... some 13,000 Suffragists assembled on the Embankment and marched to the Albert Hall ... It was a striking pageant with its many gorgeous banners, richly embroidered and fashioned of velvets, silks and every kind of beautiful material ... [several] prepared by the Artists League for Women's Suffrage. Some were blazoned with the figures of women great in history, ... Boadicea, Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth; others bore emblems commemorating women's heroic deeds, or reforming achievements, – Elizabeth Fry ... and Mary Wollstonecraft, being amongst those ... After these came a contingent of international Suffragists; Australians, Americans ... and representatives from Hungary, Russia, South Africa, and other countries ... The professional women were led by ... scientists and a great band of medical women in the splendid robes of crimson and black ... the women writers headed by the Scriveners' banner ... Then came the artists, the actresses. Next, the nurses, all in uniform, and ... gardeners, pharmacists, physical trainers, typists and shorthand writers, shop assistants, factory workers, and homemakers. Next came the militant Women's Freedom League, the Women's Cooperative Guild, the National Union of Women Workers, and the members of various women's organisations connected with the political parties ... Altogether the procession was acknowledged to be the most picturesque and effective political pageant ever been seen in this country, and every newspaper spoke of its impressive dignity and beauty.¹

Among many possible feminist moments, we have chosen to open our collection with Sylvia Pankhurst's account of a demonstration that took place a week before the famous Hyde Park rally of 21 June 1908, organized by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in conjunction with other organizations. The Suffragette movement (or, the less patronizing, less feminizing locution Pankhurst uses, the 'Suffragiste' movement) is probably to western eyes the most famous feminist moment in history, one now iconic of feminism. But, as this passage shows, it was built on a long history and on

the participation of numerous women whose diversity, both of nation and of class, was remarkable. The historical figures Pankhurst mentions may be mainly British, but those joining demonstrations to demand the vote were not. By 1908, the Suffragette movement could make credible claim to be a global phenomenon, nineteenth-century activism for women's rights having emerged not only in Europe, the United States and the Commonwealth (New Zealand, then a self-governing British colony, was the first to give all adult women the vote) but also, less well known to western readers, in some Asian and Middle Eastern societies. 'The movement towards liberty then springing up amongst the women of the far east also inspired us,' Pankhurst writes; 'news of the women's cry for freedom came to us from North, South, East and West, and we felt ourselves part of a Universal movement' (91–92).

The triumphant energy of Pankhurst's passage celebrates not only the international character of the Suffragette movement but also its support across classes: the demonstration is composed of not only academics and professional women, but also nurses, shop assistants, factory workers and homemakers. In fact, the relationship of class to feminist arguments was a more vexed question for the Suffragettes than Pankhurst's passage suggests. Until 1918, only men of certain means – those who met a property qualification – were entitled to vote in the UK, and many feminists insisted, as did Pankhurst herself, that the campaign for women's right to vote be tied to that for universal suffrage (the rights of all adults to the franchise, irrespective of property ownership and class). Others, however, disagreed, arguing that the fundamental claims of women to the vote should be addressed separately to the rights of working-class men.² That this disagreement eventually split the Suffragette movement does not, however, undermine the magnitude of the moment Pankhurst describes, where women from all classes, from 'North, South, East and West', came together in a collective 'cry for freedom'.

The protests of the Suffragettes were embedded in a narrative that not only looked back to historical examples of famous women, but also forwards to wider claims to equality and freedom. In her preface to *The Suffragette*, Emmeline Pankhurst, Sylvia's mother, calls up in her imagination the women of a more egalitarian future. 'Perhaps the woman born in the happy days that are to come,' she writes, 'while rejoicing in the inheritance that we of today are preparing for them, may sometimes wish that they could have lived in the heroic days of stress and struggle and have shared with us the joy of battle, the exaltation that comes of sacrifice of self for great objects and the prophetic vision that assures us of the certain triumph

of this 20th century fight for human emancipation'. Her locution – 'this twentieth century fight for human emancipation' – signals her recognition that achieving the vote, while an end in itself, was also a symbol for a wider freedoms, a fact acknowledged outside the Suffragette movement as well as within it. 'These women are prepared to kill themselves with fatigue and exposure,' a journalist in *The Standard* observed at the time, 'not for the vote but for what the vote means' (216).

What the vote meant for the Suffragette movement was not only the right to participate in elections, but also the right to be heard in public debate. More broadly, it stood for women's demands for legal and civil equality: for the rights to own property independently, to resist threats of bodily violence, to retain independence once married and to gain full access to education and the professions. That these feminist claims were cast in terms of 'rights' reflects the nineteenth-century development of a European and American discourse of human rights, increasingly recognized in international agreements. Such a framing facilitated links between women's rights and the rights of those colonized or subordinated on the grounds of race, class and – in the later twentieth century – sexuality. Sometimes, as with the Suffragette movement itself, these overlapping claims provoked discord. But from the latter part of the twentieth century, feminists have increasingly embraced the complex interrelation between subordination on the grounds of gender and subordination based on race, class or sexuality; several of our chapters address this intersectional dimension of women's experience of subjugation.

The pageant Pankhurst describes is a happy emblem for our volume, which begins with a medieval Italian French noblewoman, Christine de Pizan and ends with Luisa Valenzuela, a contemporary Argentinian novelist. It encompasses both 'first-wave' feminism – the suffrage movements – and 'second wave' – the diverse women's movements that emerged in the 1970s – but extends before and after these.³ Like the pageant participants, our authors include philosophers, polemicists, poets, novelists and homemakers. Most are women; many are from Britain and the United States, but also included are several Europeans, a Lebanese Arab and a Muslim from what is now Bangladesh. Many wrote before the term 'feminism' existed, it being first coined in the 1830s by Charles Fourier, a French utopian socialist; some of the concepts 'feminism' denotes today would be foreign to many of these authors. Nevertheless, even where the concept of feminism is not yet 'thinkable', all our authors are explicitly conscious of their respective societies' gender divides, and all challenge aspects of gender inequality. Some lodge their challenges

politely and quietly, or with humour, others with energy and anger. Some focus on women's political and civil claims; some on religion; some on sexual freedom. But, among their diverse concerns, we can identify themes recurrent across histories and nationalities: women's rights to education and participation in public life, their just treatment in the family and their rejection of the view that women are the property of men.

Feminism is so global a phenomenon, its history so extensive and so august as to impose on us constraints of extreme selectivity. For this reason, we have excluded the great body of academic feminism that emerged in response to second-wave feminism. Academic feminism has rewritten the landscape in which academics and students, at least in the Humanities and Social Sciences, teach, learn and research: it has transformed the canon; insisted on attention to gender in what, and in how, we read; and influenced, profoundly, several generations of students. But there exist many anthologies of academic feminism; accordingly, we have confined ourselves to authors whose interventions in their worlds were aimed at audiences wider than academia alone.⁴ We begin in the early modern period, which saw both European state formation and widespread debates over women. Nadia Margolis explains how Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* intervened in one such debate, the 'Querelle des femmes', countering clerical misogyny with the argument that the sexes were culturally as well as biologically formed, and that women, intellectually equal to men, should be permitted participation in public debate. Our second early modern woman, Anne Bradstreet, is important, argues Susan Bruce, not merely because her poetry articulates the private 'female' experience of loss that was part of the domestic life of most of her peers, but because in negotiating the boundaries between access to public and private audiences, Bradstreet modulates her voice in ways which persist in the construction of gendered identity to this day.

Christine de Pizan answered a patriarchal clerical tradition; Bradstreet wrote in a period which saw substantial public debate over women pursued in much more populist fora.⁵ The editors of *Patriarchal Moments* (a companion volume to this⁶) point out that the term 'patriarchalism' derives from the Judeo-Christian conception of God-the-Father and Biblical patriarchs but extends well beyond sacred texts. Consequent on the rise of printing, such debates in the Renaissance became more demotic: the analogy between Biblical patriarchalism and state and familial patriarchalism (where the King was father to the state, just as God was father to humankind and fathers kings in their own families) became subject to question and defence in the

texts of authors such as John Milton, Robert Filmer and John Locke, as well as in popular pamphlets. Key questions in such debates included whether women enjoyed the capacity of reason. Already apparent in the works of Christine de Pizan and Bradstreet, such concerns became increasingly articulated in the discourse of rights and freedoms, as we see in Patricia Springborg's examination of Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest* (1694), in which Astell defends women from the claim that the superior power of men legitimated their domination of women. Also attentive to the notion of freedom is Vicki Spencer's chapter on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account of her visit to the Turkish baths in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763): for Montagu, the bath house is a place where women can express themselves freely, unconstrained by the gaze of male spectators.

But it was with the French Revolution that the discourse of rights found its true moment. Olympe de Gouges's 1791 *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* mirrors the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, celebrating, Joseph Zizek explains, revolution as an emancipatory instrument and grounding issues familiar to eighteenth-century political parlance in sexual difference. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), written in the same politico-historical context, returns to a perennial concern of early feminists, articulating Wollstonecraft's conviction that women, like men, possess the faculty of reason. Kari Lokke shows how Wollstonecraft counters the patriarchal arguments of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Milton: for Wollstonecraft, woman is not a part of man but a whole unto herself who should be free to develop her reason independently.

As Wollstonecraft confronted Rousseau and Milton, so Anna Doyle Wheeler's and William Thompson's *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women: Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery* (1825) is written, its subtitle declares, *in Reply to a Paragraph of Mr. Mill's Celebrated 'Article on Government'*.⁷ Jim Jose explains the significance of the *Appeal's* treatment of women's status as slaves, of the sexual inequality upon which women's subordination rests and of the domestic violence that underpinned their subordination. But from this text, we move to another version of domesticity entirely and a very different genre. The nineteenth-century rise of bourgeois individualism and of the novel as the hegemonic literary form for the exploration of that individualism allowed authors to focus in new ways on the domestic aspects of female lives. Alexandra Lewis's discussion of

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) investigates how the novel's attitudes to marriage, desire, property and work have been addressed in criticism from 1847 on, and shows how it raises issues about the patriarchal ideal of 'the angel in the house' and the place of passion in feminist criticism; Susan Hays Bussey examines how Harriet Jacobs negotiates attitudes to hegemonic ideas about marriage and maternity in the context of enslavement, in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The formulation of gender concerns in terms of rights, however, persisted throughout this period: as Katherine Smits shows, John Stuart Mill's 1869 *The Subjection of Women* lodged an impassioned argument for women's civil and political rights, explaining how inequalities affect the subordinated, and how socialization shapes not only behaviour but also identity.

Tensions between gender and class were debated throughout Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Catherine Dollard's essay explores the ways in which Clara Zetkin, a key player in Germany's powerful socialist movement, articulated a clear distinction between the causes of bourgeois and proletariat women in her 1896 speech to the International Workingmen's Congress: for Zetkin, the industrial era exacerbated female subjugation along class lines, marriage becoming even more imperative for bourgeois women, while proletarian women becoming ever more vulnerable to the capitalist appetite for cheap labour. A very different approach is taken by Shirley Samuels to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's enigmatic short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Samuels asks whether reading the text as a civil war story might shed light on some of its many ambiguities: many women, like Gilman herself, underwent the 'rest cure' developed to treat veterans of that conflict suffering from what we would now call post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Gilman is also famous for her feminist utopia *Herland*. That text is not the topic of an essay in this collection, but readers may wish to seek it out so as to juxtapose it with Rokeya Hussain's short, humorous utopia, *Sultana's Dream* (1905), which is. Maitrayee Chaudhuri locates this text in the context of colonial India and its politics and explores how that context fundamentally shapes feminist arguments. This is a utopia which imagines a 'Ladyland' run by women where men are as invisible in public life as, in Hussain's 'real' world, are women who observe purdah (like many Muslim women, Hussain herself wore the veil). Critics of veiling see it as a way of rendering women invisible⁸ and recent controversies over the veil might suggest that debate over the practice is a new phenomenon. But, as miriam cooke's discussion of Nazira Zeineddine makes clear, the debate has a far longer history, and the practice has

been in and out of favour since the nineteenth century. Zeineddine's *Unveiling and Veiling* (1928), the first book about women's rights in Islam written by a woman contends that the Qur'an and Sunna, rightly interpreted, supported women's equality with men and did not prescribe veiling.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf addresses another way in which women have been rendered invisible: women, Woolf observes, have only rarely told their own stories. Amber Regis follows the legacy of Woolf's arguments through contemporary feminist life-writing and criticism, showing how they enabled the rediscovery of genres previously overlooked and tracing the afterlife of Woolf's call to think 'poetically and prosaically' in the narrative criticism practised today by some feminist life-writing critics. From here, we move to Glenda Carpio's chapter on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). The novel, for Carpio, exposes a contrast between the reader's views and those of the community in which its heroine, Janie, exists: the reader, unlike the more judgemental community in the text, sees how Janie's sexuality emerges against a background of a gender violence which is between black communities and intrinsically connected to racial violence. And, while Carpio focuses on the interconnections between gender and racial violence, Céline Leboeuf explores the sex/gender distinction fundamental to many feminist accounts in the twentieth century. Leboeuf takes issue with the conventional interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's famous phrase 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (*The Second Sex*, 1949) arguing that that Beauvoir does not strictly separate sex and gender but sees human bodies as interpreted and constructed through the social experience of each individual.

Our next three authors are all white, North-American, middle-class and Jewish, but their writings are worlds apart from one another. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, argues Rebecca Plant, appealed to white, middle-class American women because it articulated the reasons for their discontent, exposing the vacuity of the post-Second World War ideal of suburban domesticity they had been encouraged to pursue. Plant explains the book's influence on feminists who later proposed consciousness-raising as a tool for transforming personal misery into political action. Political agency is also the focus of Claire Hurley's essay on Adrienne Rich's 'Diving into the Wreck'. Writing at the pivotal moment of second-wave feminism, Rich explores questions of motherhood, sexuality and female complicity in patriarchy, embodying the idea that 'the personal is the political' and utilizing poetry to deconstruct patriarchal language forms and contest normative representations of the female. Andrea Dworkin's views

of female complicity in patriarchy take that complicity to be fundamental to the social construction of gender. Helen Pringle shows how in Dworkin's *Intercourse* (1987) that construction creates accomplices in, rather than victims of, oppression: by participating in 'the fuck', women are subordinated not only through rape, pornography and prostitution, but through sex itself, and genuine freedom in the context of heterosexuality becomes very difficult to achieve.

Reading this volume's chapters chronologically will provide a (partial) history of feminist arguments. But, readers might also juxtapose chapters from different periods and contexts. Our volume concludes, for example, with Valeria Wagner's account of Luisa Valenzuela's short novel *Bedside Manners* (*Realidad nacional desde la cama*), whose engagement with national literary history and the lasting effects of the dictatorship's 'Process of National Reorganization' is articulated through a feminist lens. Valenzuela foregrounds the analytical potential of feminism through the figure of her passive, bedridden, protagonist; that focus on domestic spaces is also apparent in Gilman and in Brontë. Montagu compares the women-only Turkish bath house to the male realm of the English coffee house; Hussain imagines a utopian, female-only public space. Christine de Pizan, Bradstreet and Woolf all address the question of the audibility of the female voice in the public as well as private sphere; Wollstonecraft and Zein nedine, writing in very different times and cultures, both defend women against patriarchal claims that they are lacking in reason. Astell and Wheeler, both white, but writing in very different periods, compare women's situation with slavery; Jacobs uses her actual experience of enslavement to challenge the normative ideals of female behaviour, as well as the institution of slavery, and Hurston, an African American woman, interrogates a post-slavery world in which gender and racial violence are intimately related. Several authors explore patriarchy's control over women's bodies: Zeineddine through the issue of veiling, Gilman through that of the psychological destruction produced by physical confinement and Dworkin through her examination of 'the fuck'.

These are just some of the ways one can read this volume. There are many others, for feminism has fundamentally changed the way we think about politics. We explore this in more detail in the postscript to this volume. The chronological ordering of feminist texts here leads us to ask, though, to what degree should we read them as reflecting a story of progress from benighted patriarchal past to egalitarian, enlightened present? There has been some progress: Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her campaign for women's education, having survived the Taliban attempt to kill her for her

endeavours for that cause; violence against women and sexual abuse may remain both common and brutal worldwide, but campaigns against such abuses are vocal and unceasing. But, despite the reiterations of women's right to participate in politics, only a scant dozen of almost 200 countries have, in 2015, a female head of state. Globally, women are disproportionately represented among the lowest paid and very scarce among the highest. Wollstonecraft may have argued in the eighteenth century that women possessed as much as men the God-given faculty of reason, but only in 2015 did the Anglican Church finally consecrate its first woman bishop, an achievement which speaks to the perseverance of the women who fought, for years, for that victory, but also to the entrenched opposition which resisted it for so long. 'You've come a long way, baby,' an advertisement for Virginia Slims cigarettes (featuring a glamorous woman, smoking) declared patronizingly in 1968. Perhaps. But, there remains a good stretch of ground left still to cover before we finally arrive in what Emmeline Pankhurst imagined as 'the happy days that are to come'.