

From lace making to social activism: the resourcefulness of campaigning women philanthropists

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The names of Mrs Meredith and Susanne Day are relatively unknown in this century but yet their considerable philanthropic contributions to Irish society of their time deserve notice, not just for the economic and social aspects of their endeavours but also for the contrasting literary styles in which their records are rendered. Ellice Pilkington's description of the United Irishwomen's work provides evidence of further variety in philanthropic approach and scope,¹ as do the press reports of the Women's Watching the Courts Committee. Even a brief examination of the disparate involvements by these women will yield up interesting contrast in individual attitudes; moreover, it will demonstrate that, as they strove to highlight state deficiencies, or to compensate for the paucity of societal supports, these activists shared more than benevolence and determination.

Making forceful print contributions in newspapers, or founding lace schools or countrywomen's associations have not been traditionally or automatically identified as philanthropic pursuits. However, it will be one of the arguments of this contribution that the concept of philanthropy must be definitively expanded to include the work carried out by such pioneers, and that their particular philanthropy had some distinct qualities: in diverging markedly from the bountiful lady image, their methods and philosophies are intrinsically constructive and progressive in economic and social ambition, rather than being conservative and thereby facilitating maintenance of class-based poverty and ignorance. Furthermore, it can be contended that among the important ingredients in their campaigns were both a shrewd political awareness of potential resistance and a tactical excellence in circumventing opposition.

While 'Mrs Meredith' is a name that deserves to be inscribed on any list of remarkable Irish women philanthropists, she is still a woman who needs some introduction. Susanna Lloyd, daughter of the governor of Cork Gaol, was born in 1823. She founded a successful lace-making school in the city, subsequently married a doctor and became Mrs Meredith, the authorial name that appears on the title page of *The lacemakers: sketches of Irish character, with some account of the effort to establish lace-making in Ireland; & The redeemed estate* (1865).² The absence of first name would seem

1 Ellice Pilkington, 'The United Irishwomen, part II: their work', *The United Irishwomen: their place, work and ideals* (Dublin, 1911). 2 Mrs Meredith, *The lacemakers: sketches of Irish*

to indicate the writer was somewhat accepting of 'feme covert' status, even that she was a passive, conventional type. The records tell a different tale. The lace industry, established by herself and others in the wake of the Great Famine, had practically died off by the time Mrs Meredith wrote her account but that history brings alive the dynamism of its main players and underscores the lively commitment of its author to ongoing progress and to unceasing involvement in philanthropy.

Detail of the industry apart, there are notable features of Meredith's approach in which one can perceive a philanthropy that differs from a common understanding of that word at the time. The dedication of her book opens with the words that it records 'the efforts of Irishwomen to help themselves' – a commitment that is hardly descriptive of a top-down, lady bountiful approach. In addition, the book makes 'suggestions' concerning provision for 'industrial instruction for the female poor of Ireland'. It is quite clear from the introduction to the account that the lace school she founded, the Adelaide school, moved rapidly from being a school to being an industrial concern with, at its earliest period, 120 people providing lacework for home and export. By 1857, when the lace industry began to decline, there were 22 ladies attached to the Adelaide school and Meredith quotes figures of 320,000 altogether in Ireland who worked in lace or crochet or sewed muslin, with a monetary value of one-quarter of the linen trade.³ In her analysis of the industry's decline, Meredith identifies a lack of state training for Irish women workers, and she castigates the emphasis that is placed on a programme that 'seeks solely to induce them to become domestic, and suggests nothing but training them to foreign household habits'.⁴ She recognizes that, for Irish women, domestic 'work has no ascertained value. It gives no promise of social elevation. No labour is worse paid for in Ireland than this'.⁵ In her eyes, the educational system provides no information or help concerning industrial employment.

From such opinions, and from Meredith's own record of providing training and employment, it can be seen that her philanthropy is an empowering one, a programme that sets out to provide the poor with the educational and training tools that will allow them to rise above destitution and have a better life – and she is proud to furnish examples of little girls who worked to earn money that rescued their entire families from the workhouse and set them on the road to relative prosperity. Her philanthropic approach also advocates the employment of female inspectors of industrial schools. When Mrs Meredith moved to London in 1860, her attitude had not changed, merely her spheres of engagement. She edited a magazine (*The Alexandra*) that foregrounded women's rights and campaigned for women's employment; she became involved in prisoner reform and set up refuges both for released prisoners and for their families. If the impetus and the cultural capital for such endeavours derived from her superior educational status, the thrust of her philanthropic efforts was to encourage education and so to allow survival and upward mobility – not to copper-fasten inferior social status or to limit opportunity.

character, with some account of the effort to establish lacemaking in Ireland; & *The redeemed estate* (London, 1865). 3 *Ibid.*, pp 17, 37. 4 *Ibid.*, p. 29. 5 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Mrs Meredith's novella *The redeemed estate*, published in the same volume as her history of the lace industry, serves to confirm the atypical nature of Meredith's philanthropic philosophy and deeds when they are set alongside other examples of nineteenth-century philanthropic activity. Not alone does the story portray the various complexities of societal structures in rural Ireland, its depiction of the Encumbered Estates Court highlights the inadequacy of legal provisions to protect poor and wealth alike at that period, and the venality of court officers. In addition to spotlighting the failings of institutions, the tale promotes – albeit in a rather didactic fashion – the value of thrift, the importance of sensitivity towards others in the matter of displaying wealth, the worth of the 'bastard' child, and it decries snobbery and disparages sectarianism. The ostensibly serious description of 'an Irish gentleman of the old school' demolishes grounds for pretension by neatly summarizing key economic realities of manorial existence: 'The debts of an Irish gentleman of the old school were never encumbrances to himself, whatever they may have been to his creditors. He inherited some, and he created others.' The creation of additional debt, and the path to ultimate collapse of a manorial class, had its roots in the perception that 'he conceived that he owed it to posterity to endow it, as he had been endowed'.⁶ In no case will any conventionally accepted status of lord or lady be allowed to equate with a degree of superiority in this story. The message and the lessons of *The redeemed estate* are quite different in tone from the century's 'improvement literature' and also from the self-righteous certainty of many who dispensed advice and assistance to those they saw as beneath them socially, educationally and economically. Could their purpose of creating a more secure and equitable society be anything other than philanthropic?

In 1916, a half-century after the appearance of Mrs Meredith's book, Susanne Rouviere Day published a mock-humorous account of the experiences of a female poor law guardian in Munster, under the title *The amazing philanthropists. Being extracts from the letters of LESTER MARTIN, P.L.G.*⁷ In Day's epistolary novel, the names may be fictitious but the state of affairs is eminently plausible and realistic. As she notes in the preface, it is a record of her personal experience as one of the first women to hold such office. What is recounted by the new poor law guardian includes, as might be expected, descriptions of social deprivation; it is equally revelatory of considerable self-interest, rank discrimination, bias and bigotry on the part of entrenched office holders. In setting out to remedy each and all of those situations, 'Lester Martin's' areas of philanthropic activity centre on cleaning up jobbery, eliminating gender and sectarian prejudice, as well as working on the issues that women sought to make their own areas of expertise at the time: the care of children, women and families. With a humorous touch but a very sharp eye and pen, Day mercilessly condemns abuse of office, ridicules pretensions, and makes it impossible for the reader to condone any of the instances of neglect and exploitation that are uncov-

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156. ⁷ Susanne R. Day, *The amazing philanthropists: beings extracts from the letters of Lester Martin, P.L.G.* (London, 1916).

ered. In Day's case, philanthropy means working to better conditions in the workhouse, to improve the health of families in their homes, but, importantly, it is also public education for the ultimate benefit of the health and welfare of the community, and especially the poor. This work requires a whistle-blower because it demands that the cat be let out of the bag concerning committee men and so-called pillars of society who might consider themselves to be philanthropists. In laying bare their inactivity, their plots and venality, Day's exposés inform the public and make it more difficult for such abuse to continue unchallenged.

Day's literary offering is a significant contribution towards education of the public at several levels, and she can thus be considered as playing as valuable a philanthropic role in writing as she may have done as a poor law guardian. Her novel is more than a functional record, it is remarkably clever, frequently entertaining and persuasive in tone. There are several examples of how a light touch can render prejudice totally ludicrous, and simultaneously convey the speaker's own confidence and her competence to counter the indefensible – the following is typical:

We met Sir Albert Franklin, who raised a frigid eyelid, and would have cut me but his courage failed him. He told Mary Longfield yesterday that no NICE woman would become a poor law guardian. And when Mary asked him why not, answered chastely: 'Things are discussed in a Board room which it is not fit for a woman to hear about'. And what do you think the things were? Sanitation and BABIES! These men!⁸

However, any droll humour is abandoned when Day describes the inmates of the Workhouse:

men saddened with drink, coarse, vicious, brutalized. Women like some awful curse-ridden witch, jibbering and leering, their vacant eyes and slobbering mouths disgusting to see, little children – in the lunatic wards – their hands rolled in bandages to prevent them from tearing and injuring their clothing, scratching, or maiming one another.⁹

She is far from accepting the conditions or their rationale or the impossibility of change and improvement: 'How can anyone imagine that it is good to mass hundreds of human beings together in such conditions of squalor and degradation?' The blame belongs in various places but Day particularly targets the appointments system: 'The chief qualification for a job under the poor law seems to be a capacity for shirking as much work as possible. Busy idleness is the motto. Look busy and earn your salary.'¹⁰ Success in ameliorating many of the worst conditions is later recorded, a clear tribute to the philanthropic combination of interest, analysis, action, and publicity via epistolary novel.

Yet another woman whose name is not well known, but whose work should also be classed as philanthropic, is Ellice Pilkington. Even allowing for the difference between Day's campaigning and entertaining novel on the one hand, and on the other, a pamphlet concerning the organization of rural women, it is abundantly obvious that both authors share a desire to empower people and thereby to allow improvement in their lives, the alleged aim of philanthropy generally. Pilkington was deeply involved in the United Irishwomen, a society that started in 1909–10.¹¹ Her crusading spirit emerges in the account she published in 1911: 'It is essential to Ireland that her rural population should be strong, healthy, active. It must remain on the land, happily occupied, well employed, socially and intellectually developed. Here is permanent work for women to do'.¹² While Pilkington herself would have been considered privileged in terms of education and economic status, her starting point in rural organization is not to prescribe but rather to work with others:

Now it may be as well to consider what our qualifications were for undertaking such work. We had no experience beyond that which is gained in the ordinary every day life of women. We had no special training for doing what we intended to do, and we, none of us aspired to reform society or preach any gospel but that of domestic economy, good comradeship and truth.¹³

This is surely the expression of a philanthropy that understands and embraces a degree of egalitarianism; it is clearly not a top-down dictatorial prescription for lesser beings. As Pilkington writes:

Whatever our lack of skill might be we all knew what we intended to do, and were determined to do it, and therefore we never doubted but that we should find the way, and secure the willing services of those who possessed the training that we lacked.¹⁴

As Pilkington's account makes clear, the United Irishwomen's Association sought to provide the economic and social framework that would enable people to stay happily and profitably in rural Ireland. With eminent practicality, they divided their work under three headings: agriculture and industries, domestic economy, and social and intellectual development. The support framework they designed to facilitate some of their aims included provision of district nurses and instructresses in domestic economy. Under agriculture, two of their specialties were poultry and pig rearing; interestingly and persuasively, they sought to organize both activities 'in the most efficient and least uncomfortable and unattractive way'.¹⁵ In industry, there was a fairly wide range of possible pursuits which included knitting, spinning, and making mats. Perhaps one of their most significant industrial aims was to substitute agencies that

¹¹ Pilkington, 'The United Irishwomen, part II: their work'. ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12. ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

would be controlled by women's associations for those run by outside traders. Under the heading of social and intellectual, Pilkington is nothing if not blunt: 'exodus from the country ... is greatly due to the monotony and dullness of country life'.¹⁶ To remedy this, the United Irishwomen planned usage of village halls for classes, concerts, plays, debates and opening libraries, running flower shows. They also aimed to have more women as poor law guardians and to encourage them to participate in local government. Two years after Pilkington's pamphlet, and three years after the association started, it is interesting to read an appeal from its officers for five-year funding, a document that underlines their understanding of philanthropy as a concept that was wider than its common, traditional meaning. The officers describe the society as follows: 'They are, of course, a philanthropic society, but not what is usually understood as a charitable institution. Their watchword is "Self-help" and their working method, to make self-help effective through organization.'¹⁷ One of the early leaders of the association was a Mrs Harold Lett, a substantial farmer in Co. Wexford, and the make-up of her committee is described thus: 'the county families, the farmers' wives and the labourers' wives were represented'. With that scope and appeal, the United Irishwomen must be seen as a wide-ranging philanthropic movement that had obvious gains for its members and similarly clear advances for the communities in which they lived – seeking to improve quality of life for all falls well within any definition of philanthropy. Even to construe their aims thus is to undervalue what they planned and what they achieved because when the existing organs of state had singularly failed to do so, the women set up and ran social operations in industry, agriculture, health, culture and education.

Campaigning journalism is yet another strand of altruistic and humanitarian activity that departs from the more traditional nineteenth-century model but yet justifies recognition as philanthropy. Long before the recent media exposés of wrongdoing and injustice, a reporter identified only as 'B' set out to highlight some odd legal provisions and equally dubious legal decisions. In August 1912, the *Irish Citizen* published B's report concerning a six-month sentence for a repeat offender who had sixty-two previous convictions. This time, the guilty party had broken a window valued at £7 8s. The Judge actually apologized to the man for the heavy sentence he had imposed but said he had no choice because 'the offence was so rife'. In contrast to that case, B cited a similar six-month sentence for two suffrage campaigners who had no previous convictions, about whom the Court Recorder said he was convinced their motive was a perfectly pure one, and whose crime was to break a window valued at £5 17s. 6d.¹⁸ B also reported on a case heard in the previous week: a man who had assaulted his wife with a knife, seriously injuring her and causing her to be hospitalized for several weeks, did not get a prison sentence but was bound to the peace for twelve months, with the warning that any breach would result in a two-month custodial sentence. In delivering these very factual

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17. ¹⁷ E. Fingall, M.E. Greene, Constance Pim & E.A. Stopford, *The United Irishwomen: an appeal* (Dublin, 1913), pp 2–3. ¹⁸ *Irish Citizen*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 93.

reports, it can be argued that B's philanthropy consists in informing the public, in giving the information that allows increased awareness of unjust laws and inconsistent legal decisions, and that this knowledge will assist in fuelling campaigns for justice and equality.

There is similar motivation and philanthropic concern behind the court reports of M.E. Duggan, several of which also appeared in the *Irish Citizen*. In one article, Duggan records a case of bigamy brought against a twenty-four-year-old woman. Duggan's summary of the affair is pithy:

marriage at fifteen; a quarrel with her husband; separation; an agreement to allow her 7s. 6d. weekly, not kept, and then another marriage; her only excuse being that she married the second lover because her 'protector' did not pay what he had promised.

The court decided to release her if she promised not to have anything to say to husband number two. A policeman objected to that decision and so it was then ordered that she should be detained in prison for a month until the next court sitting. As Duggan writes: 'Of course, adultery is wrong; bigamy is wrong; but what of marriage at 15? Do those who allowed it deserve no blame? And the husband?'¹⁹ The newspaper article is very short but its very brevity delivers the case summary most effectively, and leaves the readers the points on which to ponder. The reporter's concern (and that of the newspaper) is to raise awareness and galvanize support for remedying the social conditions that make life all but impossible for some. Instead of moral condemnation of the woman, instead of recommending that she should be put into an institution, either penal or corrective or even charitable housing, the article refuses any unthinking acceptance of what had become custom and practice. In effect, that scrutiny of legal proceedings calls into question both the philosophical basis of laws and the method of their enforcement; in so doing, the article goes right to the root of several prevailing societal ills – family poverty, lack of education and training, gender bias and inequality, and judicial prejudice.

M.E. tackled some educational issues in a slightly different way. Under the heading 'Education and Sex', she provided the arguments that women would sorely need in their fight to gain entry to further education, making points with which to counter long-entrenched prejudice.²⁰ She mocks the ersatz psychology that avers 'highly educated women become sexless'; dripping sarcasm, she writes: 'Talent in a woman resembles a capacity for strong drink; if indulged it will lead to disaster.' Attacking 'this nonsense', she urges recognition of female talent, of economic pressures for women to earn a living, and she scoffs at the thesis that women are 'not mentally and physically strong enough to understand and endure politics'. She notes a widely voiced scare tactic that women's manners deteriorate when educated, and thus they risk alienating the opposite sex because 'men like amiable women'; she

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3 Apr. 1915, p. 354. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31 May 1913, p. 11.

demolishes the pleas that homes and housework would cease to exist: 'educated women use their brains to run their homes . . . Do the dishes remain dirty? No, a machine is invented.' Impatience and angry disbelief leap from the page and they are both qualities that, in addition to specific arguments concerning Latin and Euclid, can transmit an increased confidence to those attempting to enter universities. In both legal and educational spheres, the conjunction of 'philos' and 'anthropos' underlies the author's concern for the betterment of humanity at several levels in society. The vital and central importance of those areas substantiates the case for emphasis on the true, wider understanding of philanthropy, both in the long nineteenth century and after it.

In today's world, there would seem to be a degree of difficulty in recognizing some philanthropists of the long nineteenth century. The main obstacle may lie in current usage of the term since 'philanthropy' now appears too often in connection with the concept of gain for the dispenser under the cloak of beneficence towards the needy.²¹ At one extreme, one has only to think of the numerous papers written on philanthropy as a customer retention tool, or philanthropy as a benefit to corporate image (sometimes called strategic philanthropy), and the idea of 'for-profit philanthropy'. In addition, there are the innumerable university foundations that baldly state that their philanthropic aims include soliciting contributions from individuals, industry and other funding organizations. Trying to collect money is not philanthropic in itself and while the foundations' ultimate disbursement of the money is, presumably, directed towards a good educational cause, it would be more accurate and honest to exclude philanthropy from the blurb and just label the activity as necessary begging with tax advantages, available to donors who may, or may not, have pure philanthropic motivation. It has always been accepted that the idea underlying the term philanthropy has very often been tinged with some degree of self-interest, both in the nineteenth century and two centuries later. All of that is not to say that philanthropy in a purer sense has ceased to exist, because that would be absolutely untrue. It is important, however, to draw attention to a degree of possible confusion as to the current meaning of the word in some quarters. The website for the Ireland Fund provides ample proof of such misunderstanding: 'Philanthropy in Ireland, although it has grown rapidly in the last decade, is still in its infancy and will be facing severe headwinds in the next few years as the economy contracts and wealth evaporates.'²² Further emphasis on the monetary emerges from the Fund's confident assertion that 'the non-profit sector is large and growing' and the claim that it gives employment to '63,000 people, nearly 9% of the workforce and makes up 8.4% of the Gross Domestic Product.'²³ Such focus and interpretation limit the

21 See, for example, Soma Hewa and Darwin H. Stapleton (eds), *Globalization, philanthropy and civil society: toward a new political culture in the twenty-first century* (New York, 2005); Robert Payton, 'Philanthropy in action' in Robert Payton et al. (eds), *Philanthropy: four views* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1988); Helmut K. Anheier and Diana Leat, *Creative philanthropy: towards a new philanthropy for the twenty-first century* (London & New York, 2006). 22 <http://www.irlfunds.org/news/ffund/index>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2011. 23 *Ibid.*

meaning of philanthropy just as much as does appropriation of the word for less than true philanthropic purposes; the result seems to be that viewing the nineteenth century through the prism of the twenty-first century occludes, to some extent, the variety of philanthropic activities and activists of the earlier time.

In the nineteenth century, as Maria Luddy has pointed out, it was the case that women philanthropists were convinced of their own moral and spiritual superiority.²⁴ (This certainty was surely shared by male philanthropists too.) It was that conviction, often combined with religious evangelism, which led to the establishment of many institutions that benefited the health and education of the populace. The self-same beliefs often resulted in construction of a top-down system where the dispensers of philanthropic assistance identified a problem and then prescribed their own solution, one that was to be applied to the lower orders, and very frequently restricted to the 'deserving' lower orders as they defined them. Although distinction may now be made between benevolent and reformist types of philanthropy, the identification, and the reality of later depictions of nineteenth-century philanthropy focus mainly on the so-called benevolent sector. This may be understandable but only so in terms of numbers engaged in two dominant spheres of activity. Certainly, priority in that century was more often accorded to moral reform rather than social reform, and egalitarianism would have been anathema to many. In much of nineteenth-century philanthropic thinking, the main focus was definitely *not* to galvanize a community and thus empower the people; rather it was to contain, to control, to 'civilize'.

The mind-set of some of the privileged who, armed with the security of their own moral and spiritual superiority, then sought to control those lower on the social scale, can often be discerned in the language used, in the limited expectations laid out, and in the generally conservative and conformist tone of their own lives. While ambitions may have been worthy, the values were less than democratic. There are records in which some of the careful and stilted language employed is reflective of class-based prejudice and suggestive of associated hide-bound societal structures. One such account is a posthumous tribute to Sarah Atkinson, written by Lady Gilbert in 1894.²⁵ Given the year of its composition, the idiom exudes a surprisingly dated stiltedness, all the more unexpected but revelatory since it was penned by a novelist. Gilbert's opening sentence lauds Sarah Atkinson as 'lovely as a rose between the leaves of a book'; the accepted gender roles are apparent in descriptions of Atkinson's parents with her mother 'a strong and noble character, hidden under a sweet and gentle exterior'. In contrast, her father's features included 'strength of mind, the largeness of his views'.²⁶ Atkinson was hurried 'into a bustle of helpfulness' for girls born in the workhouse, who were 'found in an almost savage state, looked on as untamable' (*sic*). However, in Gilbert's words, 'the wise tact and sweet solicitude

24 Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 214. 25 Rosa M. Gilbert, 'Memoir' in Sarah Atkinson, *Essays* (Dublin, 1895). 26 *Ibid.*, vii; viii.

expended on them individually' prevailed and she reports the successes with many who left for England, Australia and America and who 'went forth, after long training, having given proof of their trustworthiness'.²⁷ The few who remained in Ireland went in search of places in 'factories or households, where their antecedents were unknown to, or kept a secret by, their employers'.²⁸ There is absolute acceptance by Gilbert (and possibly by Atkinson) of the shame attached to being born in a work-house – and no evidence of any attempt to change discriminatory practices and outlooks. Neither does Gilbert consider any greater opportunity for the girls than domestic service or menial factory work: 'Under Sarah Atkinson's influence they slowly and gradually accepted the bondage and admitted the blessedness of labour'.²⁹

To pay further tribute to Sarah Atkinson, Gilbert imports into her text a short paean by Katharine Tynan Hinkson. While she is most impressed by Atkinson's spirituality, Hinkson also finds it important to praise her house: 'I have never known anything like the purity of that house. It was so clean that the most vigilant sunbeam found no mote to float in it'.³⁰ The urge to eulogize by reference to a dust-free environment communicates an unparalleled approval of conformity to gender stereotype, and an equal understanding of its perceived desirability in the eyes of readers. The pattern of Atkinson's philanthropy included afternoons 'on her way to pay visits of charity and kindness, the pockets which lined her skirt and cloak well filled with a variety of articles for the comfort and use of the needy and sick'. To show her excellence as a 'lady', Gilbert portrays Atkinson as 'fond of society', interested in 'high-class music' and 'her taste in pictorial art was of the same fastidious order'; 'conversation was brilliant'. Her personal appearance is impeccable: 'luminous dark eyes ... Her delicate mouth had a sweet curve of pure red, which gave value to the tender paleness of the oval face'.³¹ Thus is set out the portrait of the gracious philanthropist. If the reality of Atkinson's work had less of the dilettante about it than appears in Gilbert's portrayal, if Atkinson's interest and involvement in Temple Street Hospital, in the Hospice for the Dying ('her favourite charity'), and in the Children of Mary Sodality in Gardiner Street were in any way reformist rather than palliative, there is not a hint of that motivation in Gilbert's 'Memoir'. On the contrary, there is an unspoken approval of charitable work that draws inspiration and strength from the spiritual and cultural capital of an attractive lady, 'the dignity, the sweetness, the winning attractiveness of her character'.³²

Against that general backdrop, the practical interventions of Mrs Meredith in launching the lace school, her acknowledgment of the shared needs of all classes and creeds in the immediate post-Famine years, her multiple suggestions for societal improvements – all these things mark her out as an unusual and campaigning philanthropist but perhaps also as almost dangerously reformist where class and sectarian divisions were concerned. That judgment is reinforced by the values that were promoted in her novella *The redeemed estate*. While her factual account of the lace

27 Ibid., x. 28 Ibid., xi. 29 Ibid., xxi. 30 Ibid., xii. 31 Ibid., xiii; xiv; viii. 32 Ibid., xxii.

industry documented success and promoted paths out of poverty, the novella emphasized the qualities that underpinned such journeys. If her target audience was not disposed to retain the more prosaic detail about the lace industry, it would have no difficulty in receiving the subtler messages delivered in the novella. In that double-pronged approach to life enhancement, Mrs Meredith displayed her ingenuity as well as her experience.

Originality and inventiveness are also the qualities that distinguish Susanne Day's strategy in her efforts to expose mismanagement and cruelty in the workhouse system, and the lack of concern and inertia on the part of self-interested poor law guardians. Her epistolary novel delivers the message that common sense can overturn bad practice and, while not understating the difficulties encountered by a sole woman poor law guardian, it suggests that determination can expect to effect change. Rather than thundering with statistics or lamenting any personal hardship, Day's use of the novel form, her cheery tone, her almost naïve-sounding reproduction of council proceedings, and her evident empathy with sufferers are disarming, and their net result is to effectively promote her philanthropic concerns. The literary novel as humanitarian tool is novel in more senses than one.

The straightforward language used by Ellice Pilkington in her report mirrored her direct approach to helping others to make life better for themselves and the rural communities. Is it possible that the broad scope of ambition of the United Irishwomen has somehow militated against Pilkington being viewed as a philanthropist? Is it equally likely that the association's emphasis on assisting women in the home to make a living could somehow skew judgement on what philanthropy is? Has Pilkington's joint focus on ills and remedies touched raw nerves, especially when the ills of rural Ireland are listed? Could her interesting remarks on patriotism – 'Patriotism for women is a thing of deeds, not words'³³ – have conveyed a preoccupation with politics, whether nationalist or unionist, which was somehow deemed to separate the association's work from charitable benevolence? Is a philanthropic label never to be applicable to an agenda with some degree of democratic purpose? Those are questions that must be asked when the nature of philanthropy is being re-assessed and when the title of philanthropist is to be bestowed. The classical interpretation of philanthropy unquestionably admits Pilkington and her like into the fold; the political concerns of past and present may well be the barriers that tend to refuse admittance.

In the case of M.E. Duggan, her special interest in suffrage affairs was firmly intertwined with her anxiety to highlight, in her articles, the multiple problems faced by women in the early years of the twentieth century. The underlying values are apparent in her question: 'Do we want to see workingwomen free and independent, or humbly receiving the legislative bounty of the better-off sisters?'³⁴ Marion Duggan may have been feared for her public crystallization of issues that many would have swept under the carpet, prostitution and its clients being a case in point; she has

33 Pilkington, *United Irishwomen*, p. 18. 34 *Irish Citizen*, 8 Aug. 1914.

been described as a journalist, as a suffragist, as a woman barrister, as a woman denied professional work on account of her sex. It must be asked why she, too, has never been lauded as a philanthropist. Perhaps the rationale is similar for the exclusion of Maud Gonne in connection with her work for school meals for the poor? And for Constance Markievicz's help with soup kitchens during the 1913 Lockout? And for Kathleen Lynn's efforts at St Ultan's Hospital? Rocking the boat, defying stereotype, confronting sectarian and class prejudice, identifying with particular political colour – all facilitate the labelling of individuals primarily as characters, as malcontents, as unusual, as politicians, as medical pioneers, or as self-serving publicists, rather than as philanthropists.

The examples of Mrs Meredith, Susanne Rouviere Day, Ellice Pilkington, 'B', M.E. Duggan and others, strongly suggest that they shared certain qualities. Obviously, each was concerned for the welfare of others, a commitment that should always be at the heart of philanthropy. Equally clearly, and this is where their modes of engagement differed from the traditional concepts of charitable benevolence, each of those mentioned sought to bring people with them rather than impose or dictate. They set out to generate thought and argument, they endeavoured to empower by providing example and by lending the authority of their own medium and of their own personal status. They were far from naïve when it came to assessing potential opposition and they countered antagonism, often by pre-emptive, strategic argument and action. Their campaigning tactics were shrewd and informed and varied. The scope of their application was wide in the cases of the United Irishwomen, and sharply focused when it came to law and legal process. In every case, it was progressive and aimed at filling the lacunae and remedying the defects of the state and social systems. The distinctive nature of their generous humanity is all the more unmistakable when it is compared with much philanthropic activity in both the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, but most remarkable of all for the egalitarian spirit that was far from common in the long nineteenth century.