

James Keating:

Denise George, *Mary Lee: The Life and Times of a 'Turbulent Anarchist' and her Battle for Women's Rights*

(Adelaide, SA: Wakefield Press, 2018), 270 pp., PB \$34.95, ISBN 9781743055960

Myra Scott, *How Australia Led the Way: Dora Meeson Coates and British Suffrage*

(North Melbourne, Vic.: Arcadia, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018), 120 pp., HB \$34.95, ISBN 9781925801422

Clare Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom: The Australians Who Won the Vote and Inspired the World*

(Melbourne, Vic.: Text Publishing, 2018), 560 pp., HB \$49.99, ISBN 9781925603934

On 17 June 1911, almost 200 Australasian women congregated on the Victoria Embankment in the afternoon sun, waiting to lead the 'imperial contingent' in the Women's Coronation Procession. Led by Lady Anna Stout, representing the first self-governing country to enfranchise all women, the New Zealanders were followed by a larger group of Australians, including Margaret Fisher, the wife of the prime minister. Despite their pioneer enfranchisement, the antipodeans stood a kilometre behind the 'famous women' pageant that led the procession toward the Albert Hall. Timed to coincide with George V's coronation, the day had a carnival atmosphere. Forty thousand women from 16 nations and Britain's imperial possessions, clad in organisational or national colours, marched united in their demand that Britain enfranchise its women. Among the banners paraded through Westminster was Australia's most iconic contribution to the British campaign, a 4 m² piece of hessian, adorned with two classical figures: imperious Britannia standing beside her daughter, Minerva, the latter draped with the Commonwealth's heraldry. The allegorical tableau, bearing Minerva's unpunctuated plea—'Trust The Women Mother As I Have Done'—lies at the heart of several new histories that revisit the stories of Australia's suffragists. Collectively, they retell them in greater detail than previous

iterations and, in some cases, go further, situating these women as the vanguard of a youthful nation, ‘daughters of freedom’ that built a democratic Commonwealth and exported its values to the world, long before the cataclysmic impact of World War I.¹

Dora Meeson Coates, the subject of Myra Scott’s *How Australia Led the Way*, painted the banner several years earlier in bohemian Chelsea. It was her eighth year in London and, alongside her husband, George, she had carved out a life on the fringe of the art world. Along the way, she co-founded the influential Artists’ Suffrage League (ASL) and joined the Women’s Freedom League (WFL), a pacifist direct-action group established by disaffected members of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). Given Meeson’s peripatetic youth, her midlife embrace of suffragist militancy was not her first encounter with the organised demand for the vote. Born in Hawthorn in 1869, Meeson moved to London as a child, then migrated with her family to New Zealand in 1881. There, she encountered her life’s passions: painting and feminism. While she trained at the Christchurch School of Art, the city became the epicentre of the women’s suffrage campaign. In 1893 Dora added her name to the 24,000 others on the ‘monster’ suffrage petition.² It is unclear if she voted in that year’s election, New Zealand’s first under the universal franchise, but by 1895 the Meesons were again on the move. Back in Melbourne, Dora attended the National Gallery Art School, where she met George Coates. The pair showed promise, Dora more than George, but when Coates won the school’s travelling scholarship in 1896, she accompanied him to Europe. The pair were engaged while studying in Paris, but Meeson’s father forbade their union until 1903, when they began to earn a living as commercial illustrators.

Experience as a graphic artist provided an ideal background for Dora’s entry into the Edwardian suffrage movement. With votes for women no closer to reality after the ‘liberty-loving Liberals’ took power in 1906, suffragists turned to spectacular action.³ Over the next decade, they developed an unmistakable political iconography as they sought to communicate directly with mass audiences. This was the work of groups like the ASL, established in 1907 to coordinate the ‘mud march’.⁴ The sight of 3,000 women trudging through London in the February rain was perhaps not the spectacle its organisers envisaged, but, as Meeson Coates understood, it constituted a turning point in the campaign. Soon after, she won the constitutionalist National

1 See especially Marilyn Lake, ‘1914: Death of a Nation’, *History Australia* 12, no. 1 (2015): 7–24.

2 At least 30,000 women signed 13 suffrage petitions in 1893. Of these only the ‘monster’ roll has survived. *The Women’s Suffrage Petition, Te Petihana Whakamana Pōti Wahine, 1893* (Wellington: Archives New Zealand, Te Rua Mahara o Te Kāwanatanga, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, and Bridget Williams Books, 2017).

3 Clare Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom: The Australians Who Won the Vote and Inspired the World* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2018), 186.

4 The ASL was affiliated with the constitutionalist National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies. It should be noted that the militant Women’s Social and Political Union, and affiliated organisations like the Suffrage Atelier, contributed equally to this vibrant visual culture.

Union of Women's Suffrage Societies' (NUWSS) poster competition. In short order, she sent her propaganda postcard 'Taxation without Representation' to Margot Asquith, the wife of the reviled anti-suffragist Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, and illustrated the ASL's satirical pamphlet *Beware! A Warning to Suffragists* (1909). The coronation procession, which saw militants and moderates cooperate in the hopes that 1911 would be 'the wonder year' when women won the vote, was by far the biggest stage for her work. Along the 5 km that she carried the heavy banner, it was seen by hundreds of thousands of spectators and, as reactions in the British press revealed, the Dominion's 'impudent' message resonated with metropolitan audiences.⁵

Disappointingly, given her subject's promise, Scott's short book is a missed opportunity. Commissioned in 2003 by the Office of the Status of Women to celebrate the centenary of women's federal enfranchisement, the version published by Arcadia is functionally identical to the original.⁶ The book's promised additions are in short supply: they neither include further research, nor rectify significant omissions, like the failure to mention that Meeson Coates's banner debuted in 1908. Beyond the obvious, the lack of revision is a problem for a book marketed as a biography, of either the artist or her most enduring work, not least because the original only sporadically covered Meeson Coates's career. Instead, much of the manuscript considers the fortunes of her contemporaries who made up Australia's 'talented suffrage diaspora'.⁷ In this telling, no sooner had her banner been folded away in 1912 than Meeson Coates simply faded from view. The irony is that for the past 20 years, contra Scott's introductory claim, historians have extensively documented Australian women's efforts to 'teach feminists in the Imperial "heartland"'.⁸ Perhaps uniquely of these figures, our picture of her subject's life and art remains half-formed.

5 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 13, 452.

6 Myra Scott, *How Australia Led the Way: Dora Meeson Coates and British Suffrage* (Canberra: Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, 2003).

7 Jill Liddington, 'Was the Suffrage Campaign Truly International? Votes for Women in Edwardian England, 1903–1914', in *Politische Netzwerkerinnen: Internationale Zusammenarbeit von Frauen 1830–1960*, ed. Eva Schöck-Quinteros, Anja Schüler, Annika Wilmers and Kerstin Wolff (Berlin: Trafo, 2007), 329–30.

8 June Hannam, 'International Dimensions of Women's Suffrage: "At the Crossroads of Several Interlocking Identities"', *Women's History Review* 14, no. 3–4 (2005): 544. See, for example, Stephen Anderson, 'The Accidental Suffragist from Australia: Muriel Matters and the Political Advance of British Women', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 99, no. 1 (2013): 36–54; Barbara Caine, 'Australian Feminism and the British Militant Suffragettes', *Papers on Parliament* 41 (2004): 11–27; Carly Millar, 'The Making of a Feminist: Bessie Rischbieth Encounters the English Suffragettes', *Lilith*, no. 12 (2003): 78–94; Ann Nugent, 'Nellie Alma Martel and the Women's Social and Political Union, 1905–09', *Hecate* 31, no. 1 (2005): 142–59; Lynne Trethewey and Kay Whitehead, 'Beyond Centre and Periphery: Transnationalism in Two Teacher/Suffragettes' Work', *History of Education* 32, no. 5 (2003): 547–59; Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism and Modernity* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001); Robert Wainwright, *Miss Muriel Matters* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2017).

Clare Wright's much more ambitious and accomplished book can be read as *How Australia Led the Way's* spiritual successor. *You Daughters of Freedom*, the second book in Wright's 'democracy trilogy', is similarly concerned with Australia's place in the world. Like Scott, she uses a cast of emblematic expatriates and political tourists to demonstrate 'how the world's newest nation became a global exemplar' of democratic practice. Wright also opens with Meeson Coates, narrating her encounter with the banner—purchased by the Commonwealth in 1988—during a tour of Parliament House, and ends with the aftermath of the 1911 march.⁹ Here, the similarities end. Wright is a talented storyteller who uses a much larger canvas to both narrate the history of Australia's women's suffrage campaigns and to ensure that Australians' part in Britain's 'epic [suffrage] drama' is restored to its rightful place in national and world history.¹⁰

You Daughters of Freedom is segmented into three parts. The first, 'Purity', begins where *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* left off, spanning the history of the demand for the female franchise from 1854 until the first federal election under universal white suffrage in 1903.¹¹ By unfolding vivid vignettes, Wright effectively conveys white women's lot before the vote. Through the devastating tale of Maggie Heffernan, a lone mother sentenced to death for drowning her infant son, Wright demystifies what today seems 'strange' about the suffragists' ideology. In unravelling Maggie's desperate circumstances alongside the successful campaign for her release, she lays bare their quietly radical belief that women's enfranchisement would cleanse the polity of intoxicants and toxic masculinity. In what is an unabashedly national, and occasionally nationalist, history—in the introduction we twice learn that Australia offered a more distinctive global object lesson than New Zealand, because it was a 'nation-state' not a mere 'colony or Dominion' (neither claim is correct)—the rash of colonial and state enfranchisements between 1894 and 1908 play second fiddle to the story of Federation and the 1902 Commonwealth Franchise Act.¹² Following in the footsteps of Vida Goldstein, who spent 1901 lecturing in the United States, Wright explores the rising 'international reputation ... of the new nation'. Over the following decade, Australia provided progressive observers abundant 'data for cold hard research'. The concatenation of women's enfranchisement with the provision of old-age pensions, the eradication of sweated labour, the subsequent rise in women's wages and improvements to married women's property rights became staples of Anglophone suffrage propaganda.¹³ Yet, as they sold these successes overseas, Goldstein and the other women who fell short of winning federal office until 1943 were painfully aware of how distant equality remained.

9 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 13.

10 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 9.

11 Clare Wright, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2013).

12 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, Author's Note, 11–12.

13 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 127, 130.

The following sections, 'Courage' and 'Hope', transpire between Britain and Australia, taking the reader from 1905 to 1911. Here, Wright traces the antipodean influence on the British suffrage movement through the lives of five women who cut their teeth in the Australasian suffrage campaigns, then used these experiences to assist the bitter metropolitan struggle. Their efforts were altruistic and self-interested, as they sought to safeguard their hard-won rights 'outside the sanctuary of the antipodes' before extending them to their British sisters.¹⁴ Alongside Goldstein and Meeson Coates, we follow puckish Nellie Martel, the Sydney suffragist and elocutionist turned WSPU organiser; the South Australian actor and WFL provocateur Muriel Matters; and the Anglo-Australian suffragist, socialist and sybarite Dora Montefiore. All five played 'the Australian card' in Britain where, Wright argues, the democratic lacquer on their once shabby colonial origins opened doors in the suffrage campaign. In 1906 Montefiore, who had lived in London since 1893, found her Hammersmith residence the temporary headquarters of the fledgling WSPU, as her tax resistance campaign reached its dénouement during a six-week siege by bailiffs. The union also welcomed Martel, who became one of its 'deadliest weapons' after her arrest during a 1906 raid on the Commons.¹⁵ Despite the precedent set by her compatriots, Matters found a more congenial home in the WFL. Drawing on her theatrical training, she specialised in political stunts, chaining herself to the grille hiding the Ladies' Gallery from the floor of the Commons in 1908, and flying over the opening of parliament in a WFL blimp the following year.

Despite their successes, the 1900s were frustrating years for the suffrage diaspora. Their 'democratic charms' notwithstanding, the Australians could not persuade Britons to abandon the 'half-loaf' of partial enfranchisement and embrace universal suffrage.¹⁶ As Wright relates, like so many others, colonials who entered the Pankhursts' orbit usually left bruised and burned-out. Months after Nellie Martel and Emmeline Pankhurst were attacked by a mob at the 1908 Newton Abbott by-election, the Australian was ousted as a paid organiser, around which time Matters, Montefiore and Meeson Coates abandoned militancy. Only Vida Goldstein, enmired in the Victorian suffrage campaign, maintained ties with the union. From Melbourne, she convinced federal politicians to pass resolutions attesting to the unbridled success of women's enfranchisement. Their endorsements, which were conveyed to Herbert Asquith, circulated across the world, ensuring that Goldstein received a rapturous response when she finally arrived in Britain, addressing huge crowds as the WPSU's guest in 1911. Yet for all her celebrity, Goldstein was unable to shift the barometer in Britain. When the Liberals withdrew their support from a partial franchise bill soon after the coronation procession, the WSPU ended its

14 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 406.

15 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 248.

16 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 427.

ceasefire and began the sustained campaign of property damage that ended the 'Edwardian suffrage era' and continues to characterise popular understanding of the movement. Australians, as Wright notes, followed these events with 'horror and awe', convinced by the escalating violence that British suffrage was a purely domestic concern.¹⁷ Only the upheaval of World War I could shake the entrenched conservatism that bound British society enough for a partial suffrage bill to pass in 1918, long after the 'daughters of freedom' had retreated from the front lines or returned home.

Wright begins her history with three caveats, foremost the reminder that the qualifications that barred most people of colour, including Indigenous Australians, from voting take 'a good deal of the gloss off patriotic gloating' about the Commonwealth's democratic experiment.¹⁸ As Penny Russell explains, in a book that celebrates one of Australia's foundation stories, the disclaimer is salutary.¹⁹ However, the introductory warning is one of the few occasions where Wright engages seriously with the suffragists' prejudices. While she delineates the 'breath-takingly candid' bigotry that led federal legislators to make race, rather than gender, the defining feature of Australian citizenship, the book sidesteps the suffragists' complicity in the Commonwealth Franchise Act's colour line: 'if any of the women present in parliament to witness their historic victory were uncomfortable with the racial sting in the tail of this exceptional democracy, they were keeping mum'.²⁰

Some in the gallery might have found the inscription of white supremacy in the Commonwealth's DNA uncomfortable, or worse. What's clearer is that the suffragists were not silent witnesses to the racialisation of Australian citizenship. Rather, they aided its construction. Mary Lee and Vida Goldstein presumably understood the consequences of the compact they forged between 'the united forces of Labour and Women' and, in Goldstein's case, spruiked as a political strategy to North American suffragists.²¹ Although she returned from that trip a critic of the Jim Crow South, like many of her new friends, Goldstein was not above race-baiting when it suited her. In October 1900, for example, the cover of her newspaper, *Australian Woman's Sphere*, featured a cartoon contrasting disenfranchised womanhood, represented by a blonde student, with caricatures of male voters: the drunk, the wifebeater and the fop. Among these undesirable electors stood racial 'others': a Chinese man smoking opium and an Indigenous man toting a boomerang and a bottle of grog, each intoning 'I have a vote'.²² Such rhetoric resonated in New South Wales, where the Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) routinely decried the exclusion of white

17 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 461–63.

18 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, x.

19 Penny Russell, 'You Daughters of Freedom Review: Clare Wright on our Suffragettes in Britain', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 2018, 24.

20 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 121–26.

21 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 111.

22 'Voters and Voteless', *Australian Woman's Sphere*, October 1900.

women from an electorate that included ‘blackfellows and naturalised aliens’.²³ Such sentiments make it hard to believe that when Goldstein declared her support for the Immigration Restriction Act from the hustings in 1903, ‘her beef was chiefly with capital, not colour’.²⁴

As Angela Woollacott has made clear, there is little value in ‘morally indict[ing]’ Goldstein’s attitudes. Despite her prejudices, she was not just a woman of her time. Rather, Goldstein took more enlightened positions than most of her contemporaries. Even her 1911 admission that she ‘believ[ed] more firmly than ever in the wisdom of a White Australia’ was inflected with profound unease at the extent of her racial privilege during a stopover in Ceylon.²⁵ Nevertheless, if the suffragists are enshrined as nation-builders, offering Australians a founding story bound to the principles of democracy, justice and progress, we must reckon carefully with the extent of their complicity in the Commonwealth’s foundational injustices. At the very least, the suffragists’ fraught relationship with the racialised foundations of Federation trouble the book’s epigraph, uttered by a man many would have disenfranchised, the escaped slave turned abolitionist and universal suffragist Frederick Douglass.

Whereas Scott and Wright consider Australian exports, Denise George takes the opposite path, tracing the life of the Irish migrant social reformer Mary Lee. For many Australians, Lee’s story is so entwined with her role in South Australian women’s achievement of full democratic rights that it is easy to forget she arrived in 1879 as a middle-aged widow, abandoning five adult children and a 30-year teaching career. George’s account, the first extended study of Lee’s life, takes the reader beyond her fateful landing on the Semaphore Jetty.²⁶ Instead, it opens in County Monaghan, where Mary Walsh was born to a working-class family most notable for its allegiance to the Orange Order. Beyond these sectarian origins, her childhood remains opaque, but, as George explains, she was an early beneficiary of Ireland’s national education system. Introduced in 1831, the policy changed 10-year-old Mary’s life. Equipped with an elementary education, she became a teacher, which, alongside her marriage to George Lee, a church musician, elevated her into the middle classes. Within a year of their wedding, the tentacles of imperial governance again changed Lee’s path. As the Great Famine struck in 1885, George and Mary joined the diaspora.

23 See, for example, ‘Womanhood Suffrage’, *Evening News*, 16 July 1895, 6; ‘No Vote, No Tax: A Woman’s Protest’, *Evening News*, 5 March 1898, 5; ‘Womanhood Suffrage’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 September 1901, 5.

24 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 143.

25 Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 44–45; Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 400–1.

26 Lee’s *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, for example, contains a single sentence on her life before 1879. Helen Jones, ‘Lee, Mary (1821–1909)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lee-mary-7150, published first in hardcopy 1986, accessed 25 April 2019.

After several nomadic years, the family settled in Cambridgeshire. Life was tough; alongside raising the couple's eight children in deprived Barnwell, Mary taught 187 girls at the local school, circumstances that formed the wellsprings of her hard-bitten feminism. In 1860, the Lees moved south, and Mary opened a school in Hammersmith. George died soon after, leaving Mary reliant on her business income. After spending the next 20 years educating the daughters of London's aspirational classes, she made an unlikely emigrant. Upon learning that her youngest son, Benjamin, had contracted tuberculosis in Adelaide, she and her daughter Eva booked their passage south. Their reunion was short-lived. Soon after Mary's arrival, Benjamin died. Little did she know it, but her search for consolation through charity set her on course to become one of the most famous women in South Australia.

One of George's strengths is her articulation of the intersections in Lee's politics. As she emphasises, witnessing the precarious lives of women in the Cambridge slums and Adelaide's deprived West End politicised Lee. She entered public life in 1883 as secretary of the Social Purity Society's Ladies Committee, campaigning for legislative measures to protect working-class girls from the twin evils of 'violence and seduction'.²⁷ Seven years later, alongside Augusta Zadow, she established the Working Women's Trade Union (WWTU), to combat their exploitation by predatory capitalists. By the time the demand for women's enfranchisement had blossomed into an organised movement, Lee had a reputation as a scabrous letterist. Her knack for courting controversy, and selling newspapers, served her well as secretary of the Women's Suffrage League (1888–95). Over the next six years, Lee's barbed exchanges with anti-suffragists and broadsides against fickle politicians proved vital in keeping the subject in the public eye.

From the outset, Lee conceived of the WWTU as both a vehicle to mobilise working-class women and a means of ensuring the United Trades and Labour Council would parlay its support for women's enfranchisement into political action. As WWTU vice-president, she persuaded union bosses to assist the League's petitioning efforts and ensured that universal suffrage featured on the United Labor Party's inaugural manifesto.²⁸ Lee resigned from the Council in 1893, devoting the next two years to gruelling regional lecture tours as she strove to keep pressure on the colony's legislators. She returned to the circuit victorious, after the passage of the 1894 Adult Suffrage Bill, to encourage women to vote. Yet, despite her devotion to public service, Lee did not enjoy the privilege—afforded to her contemporary, Catherine Helen Spence—of living out her years as 'the grand old woman of South Australia'.²⁹ Instead, she was relegated to the margins of colonial life.

27 'Social Purity Society', *Adelaide Observer*, 8 December 1883, 35.

28 'Letter to Women', *Adelaide Observer*, 22 March 1890, 8; Women's Suffrage in South Australia Scrapbook: United Trades and Labour Council of SA Minutes, Letters, Newspaper Articles, 324.623 W872d, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide.

29 'Miss Spence and the Woman's Suffrage Victory', *Weekly Herald*, 21 December 1894, 3.

Despite George's careful research, her subject remains enigmatic. She was, at once, a hard-up Irish widow—hardly social dynamite—and a charismatic rabble-rouser. As Wright notes, Lee cultivated 'friends in high places', counting the wife of the South Australian premier, Julia Holder, as her 'best mate'.³⁰ Nevertheless, Lee's disdain for convention ensured that she was never well liked. Given her uncompromising advocacy on behalf of working women, the public animus she engendered was unsurprising. However, it was compounded by her willingness to turn the weapons she used to destabilise the patriarchy against her allies. While George emphasises Lee's gentler qualities, demonstrated in her mediation of the WSL of New South Wales's 1894 leadership dispute, she omits the story's coda. When her friend Lady Mary Windeyer resigned as president, Lee ceased writing to her successor as an act of solidarity, depriving the league of a valued advisor.³¹ She bristled at sharing the limelight and let it be known that, despite their common ends, she found the Woman's Christian Temperance Union odious: 'we know the plane on wh. they live, move & have their being & I am not in sympathy with them'.³² The mistrust was mutual. Asked about Lee's legacy, the union's president, Elizabeth Nicholls, rubbished 'the notion that she was the only earnest worker ... on the League or outside its ranks'.³³ Such misgivings, George contends, manifested in the lacklustre contributions to her testimonial funds, acts of public indifference that not only stung Lee, but condemned her to live her final years in poverty.

Harping on these discordant moments may seem uncharitable, but they offer rare insights into Lee's character. Beyond their common subject, what unites all three texts is that they are, emphatically, accounts of public lives. Readers seeking something akin to Mineke Bosch's incisive studies of the emotional culture of transatlantic suffrage internationalism or June Purvis's new biography of Christabel Pankhurst, in which her subject is considered in light of her extensive friendship networks, will be disappointed.³⁴ In Scott's and Wright's cases, such silences stem from their archives. Both rely primarily on published sources. As indispensable as digitised newspapers have become over the past decade—Wright's livelier portrait of Meeson Coates tells this story in microcosm—a dearth of personal or organisational papers circumscribes these histories. When they were not suppressing news about the suffragists, newspapers necessarily documented spectacular moments—stunts

30 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 69.

31 Mary Lee to Lady Mary Windeyer, 4 January 1894, MLMSS186/14/275, SLNSW. She only resumed regular correspondence with Rose Scott and the WSL on the eve of the enfranchisement in 1902.

32 Denise George, *Mary Lee: The Life and Times of a 'Turbulent Anarchist' and her Battle for Women's Rights* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2018), 180; Mary Lee to Scott, 25 March 1897, A2271/261, SLNSW.

33 Elizabeth Nicholls, 'Mrs Mary Lee and the W.C.T.U.', *South Australian Register*, 23 December 1895, 2.

34 Mineke Bosch, 'Gossipy Letters in the Context of International Feminism', in *Current Issues in Women's History*, ed. Arina Angerman, Geerte Binnema, Annemieke Keunen, Vefie Poels and Jacqueline Zirkzee (London: Routledge, 1989), 131–52; Mineke Bosch with Annemarie Kloosterman ed., *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902–1942* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

like Matters's dirigible flight—rather than the endless meetings, fundraisers, public engagements and correspondence to which these activists devoted their lives. In addition to losing the essence of their work, we learn little about how jarringly self-possessed colonials 'fit' in metropolitan life a decade after Kate Sheppard and Catherine Spence singularly failed in their efforts at suffrage evangelism. Despite antipodean and Scandinavian women's pioneer achievements, many in the 'introverted' British movement regarded their struggle as the 'storm-centre' of international suffragism.³⁵ To give but two examples: reading more about why WSPU members expelled Martel, or balancing the claim that Montefiore invented the census resistance movement against the WFL's records, would offer a clearer picture of Australians' importance to the British campaign.³⁶ George is conscious of these absences, and turns to what Kiera Lindsey calls 'speculative biography' to breathe life into her subject. Whereas Mary Ann Gill soars off the page in *The Convict's Daughter*, elevated by Lindsey's overtures to the reader, the effect is not as mesmerising in *The Life and Times of a 'Turbulent Anarchist'*.³⁷ Instead, George's imagined Lee, tending to a stew or murmuring confidences in her 'strong Irish accent', seems uncanny, emphasising the chasm between her vibrant public persona and her veiled interior life.³⁸

You Daughters of Freedom begins with Clare Wright's realisation, following a public discussion of *Suffragette* (2015), that: 'I had mistakenly assumed Australian women already knew their own history'.³⁹ Her book together with the biographies of Mary Lee and Dora Meeson Coates do much more than simply fill this gap. They remind us of women's integral role in the struggle to create an idealistic, democratic and ethnically homogenous Commonwealth; a nation that, for good and ill, held intrigue for progressives across the world.⁴⁰ Bracing and briskly told, these activists' stories deserve a wide readership. However, the integration of their biographies with the story of a nation searching for its identity and place in the world is far from seamless. Wright concludes that Meeson Coates created not a banner in her Chelsea studio, but 'a founding document'. An artefact that reveals as much about the outsized 'aspirations and identity of the young nation as the still-wet constitution'.⁴¹

35 The phrase was coined by the American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt in 1908 and quickly adopted by her British counterparts. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 200–1; Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 30.

36 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 247, 389–91.

37 Kiera Lindsey, *The Convict's Daughter: The Scandal That Shocked a Colony* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2016); Kiera Lindsey, "Deliberate Freedom": Using Speculation and Imagination in Historical Biography', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Programs* 50 (2018): 1–16.

38 George, *Mary Lee*, 29–30.

39 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 7.

40 For more on the centrality of white racial kinship to progressive networks across the English-speaking world, see Marilyn Lake, *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

41 Wright, *You Daughters of Freedom*, 473.

As with all founding documents, careful attention reveals that its provenance is a little more prosaic and its meaning more ambiguous than at first glance. Perhaps Meeson Coates, an experienced political cartoonist, left a subtler message in her depiction of Britannia, gazing into the horizon, scarcely aware of Minerva's fingers on her shoulder.

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