

Revivalist belligerence: three controversies

LUCY MC DIARMID

Two-and-a-half years before Francis Sheehy Skeffington was shot by a British officer in the name of the empire, he was nearly killed by an Irish mob in the name of 'faith and fatherland'. Believing that he was turning Catholic children over to Protestant proselytizers involved in the 'Save the Dublin Kiddies' campaign, a mob composed primarily of members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians attacked Sheehy Skeffington as he entered Kingsbridge station on 25 October with two sons of a locked-out worker. He was 'seized from behind, knocked down, and buffeted out of the station. He was bruised on the head and body.' The crowd shouted, '[K]ill him.' When he went back for his bicycle, the crowd 'kicked and struck him'.¹ William Orpen, who saw Sheehy Skeffington return that day to Liberty Hall, wrote, 'He had nothing on except a blanket wrapped around him.'²

Sheehy Skeffington had not gone to the station naively: he put his body on the line deliberately and provocatively to make visible the violence of those allegedly acting in the name of Irishness and Catholicism. Although not all controversies in the years before the Rising involved threats to life and limb, they often involved a similar belligerence expressed in the name of the national cause. If they had simply pitted the colonized Irish against the English colonials, revivalist controversies would lack drama for the scholar: the high moral ground would be obvious, the participants' roles predictable, and the stories unambiguous, reflecting the large-scale antagonisms of the great national narrative. But many cultural contests of this period show the way different subcultures within Ireland fought to control sites whose symbolic power associated them, by synecdoche, with the entire nation. The drama in the railway station did not, as its instigators insisted, pit Catholics against Protestants or Irish against English: fundamentalist Catholics fought labourite leftists over control of the bodies of poor children. The overriding cultural question, even before independence, was not Irish Ireland or English Ireland, but *whose* Irish Ireland?

Yeats referred to the Ireland of the early 1920s, the new Free State, as 'plastic', ready to be formed and molded. But Yeats himself, along with all the cultural leaders of the years before 1916, had been 'inventing' Ireland, in Declan Kiberd's phrase, for several decades already. That invention took place in large

¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 6 Nov. 1913. ² William Orpen, *Stories of old Ireland and myself* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1924), pp 85-6.

part through controversy. The colonial condition of Ireland provided the paradigm for these controversies, but each side – any side – could claim to be the ‘Irish’ side, thereby constructing the other as English. All power struggles replicated the master struggle. Invocation of the idea of ‘Ireland’ functioned as an automatic guarantee of high-mindedness and legitimized the free expression of animosity, however personal, however excessive. It gave license to the kind of public anger that nearly killed Sheehy Skeffington in October 1913 and signaled to all interested an invitation to attack.

Three controversies that began between 1908 and 1913, the period of high cultural nationalism, indicate with particular aptness the way any kind of nationalist discourse was always sufficient to license adversarial speech. This essay will show how the high-minded, belligerent use of Irishness functioned in the O’Hickey controversy of 1908–9, the Lane controversy of 1913, and the ‘Save the Dublin Kiddies’ controversy of 1913.

The O’Hickey controversy offers the clearest example of the license of controversy: a high-minded nationalist discourse gave the Revd Dr Michael O’Hickey freedom to express personal hostility as patriotism through his involvement in the ‘essential Irish’ campaign.³ In August 1908, the parliamentary bill establishing the National University of Ireland was signed, and in the autumn the Gaelic League mounted a campaign to make the Irish language compulsory (or ‘essential’, in the language of 1908) for matriculation in the university. Everyone knew from the start that the issue would be decided by the vote of the thirty-six senators of the university, so the League aimed to rouse the public to pressure the senate.

Feelings among the clergy on this issue were mixed, because they were more concerned that the university be distinctively Catholic than that it be distinctively Irish; they wanted it marked as their turf, not as nationalists’ turf. At a meeting of the Gaelic Society of University College Dublin on 27 November 1908, the president, William Delany, SJ, mentioned his opposition to ‘essential Irish’ because, among other reasons, he believed that non-Irish-speaking Catholics would end up going to Trinity College.⁴ In order to have a senior cleric speak in opposition to Delany’s view, Fr O’Hickey was invited to address a Gaelic League meeting at the Rotunda on 7 December. He seemed the perfect choice, because he was professor of Irish at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, and he had been vice-president of the Gaelic League between 1899 and 1903. O’Hickey accepted but rather than appearing in person, he sent a letter that was read aloud to great applause. That letter and all of his subsequent writings on the subject

³ For a more detailed analysis of the O’Hickey controversy, see Lucy McDiarmid, ‘The Man who died for the language: the Revd Dr O’Hickey and the “essential Irish” controversy of 1909,’ *Éire-Ireland* 35:1–2 (2000), pp 188–218. ⁴ *Freeman’s Journal*, 28 Nov. 1909. For a description of the entire occasion, see Thomas J. Morrissey, *Towards a new national university: William Delany S.J. (1835–1924)* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1983), pp 322 ff.

echo with a rage directed explicitly at the five clerical senators of the university (among them Delany himself, Archbishop Walsh of Dublin, and President Mannix of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, his employer); it was their vote that particularly excited him. He was already angry with Mannix for weakening the Irish requirements for seminarians at Maynooth, and the controversy gave him the opportunity to attack.⁵ O'Hickey was taking the hostility from an internal academic argument and expressing it in the public sphere.

Naturally, the Church hierarchy were not pleased to be attacked in public, especially by a priest at their own seminary; so they sent O'Hickey a letter through Bishop Sheehan of Waterford and Lismore (O'Hickey's own bishop) to convey the request of the episcopal standing committee that he cease participating in the campaign.⁶ O'Hickey wrote back acquiescing, but throughout the winter and spring of 1909, he continued publishing pamphlets and anonymous letters on the subject. His 'silencing' became a matter of general knowledge and discussion, especially in the pages of nationalist newspapers. In June, he was asked to resign his chair. He refused, and on 29 July, he was dismissed. A testimonial dinner was organized for him and funds collected, and in 1910 he went to Rome to get the papal Rota to overturn his dismissal. O'Hickey remained in Rome six years, but because of a technicality his case was never heard, and in August 1916 he returned to Waterford, dying there only a few months later. Meanwhile, in June 1910, the senators of the university voted 21–12 to support the language requirement, so the cause went on without O'Hickey.

The O'Hickey controversy was itself provoked by his allegedly high-minded nationalist discourse, which was provoked, that is, by his aggressive and hostile use of metaphors and allusions that troped this internal Irish cultural debate as an actual military rebellion against British colonial rule. In fact, his rhetoric seemed almost to go beyond figures of speech in identifying the opponents of the Irish language requirement with the opponents of Ireland. His metaphors were insults, and the people insulted were his employers, the bishops of Ireland. It was not absolutely necessary to attack people while trying to save the language; Hyde, as the archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Logue, pointed out to O'Hickey, had used 'the language of a gentleman' in his Gaelic League speeches.⁷ But O'Hickey's rhetoric was implicitly asking for trouble: he used the pre-existing debate as an opportunity to enact his own rebellion against the author-

⁵ See Micheal Briody, 'From Carrickbeg to Rome – the story of Fr Michael O'Hickey,' *Decies* 57 (2001), pp 154–6. ⁶ Writing on behalf of the Episcopal Standing Committee, O'Hickey's own bishop, Richard Sheehan of Waterford and Lismore, noted that the bishops 'take exception to the language' in his letters as 'wanting in reserve and moderation.' R.A. Sheehan to M. O'Hickey, 29 Jan. 1909; O'Hickey papers 7/4(4), 9; Russell Library, St Patrick's College, Maynooth. ⁷ Michael O'Hickey, *Statement concerning the dismissal of Dr O'Hickey from the Irish chair of St Patrick's College, Maynooth*, printed as appendix in Padraig Mac Fhinn, *An tAthair Micheál Ó hIceadha* (Baile Atha Cliath: Sairseal agus Dill, 1974), p. 181.

itarian structure of the church. For instance, he blamed the resistance to the Irish language on 'the class to which I belong, the Irish clergy,' and added, '[t]o be opposed by the colonists is a thing we are accustomed to; to be opposed by a section of our own, no matter how worthless and degenerate, is not to be endured.'⁸

O'Hickey's most notorious attack came at the end of a talk he gave to a group of Maynooth seminarians in mid-December 1908. The following week, the talk was published in *Sinn Féin*. At the end of the talk he said:

Even in the Clerical Senators as a body I can repose little or no trust; although I cannot possibly imagine how any body of responsible Irish ecclesiastics could embark on a more foolish or reckless course than to take sides in this instance with the enemies of Ireland. The treachery of those who show themselves false to Ireland at this juncture must never be forgotten whilst a solitary fragment of the historic Irish Nation remains. Sir Jonah Barrington has preserved for us a Black-list of those who voted for the infamous Union passed

... by perjury and fraud,
By slaves who sold their land for gold,
As Judas sold his God.

A similar Black-list of the recreant Nationalist Senators must be preserved that, in after times, all men may know who were the false and vile, in a supreme crisis of Ireland's fortunes, and who the leal and true.⁹

Here O'Hickey is just one simile away from saying that the clerical senators betrayed God or might be about to betray God, or at least Ireland, if they vote against essential Irish. Of course all the revivalists used agonistic metaphors, quite often to attack Irish opponents, but O'Hickey is here attacking only five people, the clerical senators.

In two private letters written about his engagement in the Irish campaign, O'Hickey clearly sees himself as an Irish rebel taking on the colonial enemy. Defending his published words to Bishop Sheehan, O'Hickey wrote:

Restraint and moderation of language are relative things. Language which in one case and set of circumstances might be quite unjustifiable, in different circumstances might well be not only warranted, but actually called for. That the language I have used was in no way too strong for the occasion that called it forth, I am convinced ... By the part I have taken in this controversy, it is my profound conviction that I have done the College and the Catholic Faith as well as the cause of Irish nationality a service.¹⁰

⁸ Michael O'Hickey, *An Irish university, or else* – (Dublin and Waterford: M.H. Gill, 1909), p. 132.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158. ¹⁰ M. O'Hickey to R. Sheehan, 31 Jan. 1909. O'Hickey Papers 7/4(4), 11.

Here O'Hickey explains what I have called the license of controversy: his unrestrained and immoderate language was actually 'called forth' and required by the situation. He then invokes the lofty values legitimizing his speech (college, faith, Irish). His phrasing implies that he ought to be seen as a champion of those values. In a letter written to Liam Bulfin after his dismissal, O'Hickey explicitly writes himself as the rebel hero against the West Briton bishops: 'when they tackled the grandson of a United Irishman, who was not unacquainted with the interior of a British dungeon, and the son of a Young Irelander and a Fenian – well, they were, as the Yankees say, "up against a very serious proposition", were they not?'¹¹ To be against O'Hickey was to be against Ireland.

The framing of his controversy as a rebellion, and his own role as a heroic one, led to an inevitable moment: O'Hickey gave a speech from the dock. It had to go that way; if he had turned his employers, the bishops, into the British, then he himself was on the way to martyrdom. When the trustees of St. Patrick's College (Cardinal Logue and various bishops) summoned O'Hickey to the board room and suggested that he apologize before he was 'deprived of his chair,' O'Hickey refused and said, '[t]he writings complained of I published in the discharge of what I felt to be a duty. For any sacrifice the discharge of that duty may entail I am prepared. Whatever may befall me, I cannot play false to my conscience nor to Ireland.'¹² The drama in the board room was driven – like the whole controversy – by O'Hickey's use of the pre-existing campaign as a stage for his own rebellion. The construction of O'Hickey as a martyr was continued by his biographer Pádraig Eric Mac Fhinn, who wrote:

Ag uaigh Sheáin Uí Éigearthaigh, chuir Máirtín Ó Cadhain I gcomórtas leis an Dochtúir O hIceadha é. Chaon duine acu ar a bhealach féin, d'fhéadfá a radh go bhfuair sé bás ar son na Gaedhilge.¹³

[At Sheáin Uí Éigearthaigh's graveside, Máirtín Ó Cadhain compared him with Dr Hickey. 'It might be said that each in his own way died for the cause of the Irish language.']

The Hugh Lane controversy also follows a colonial paradigm: the national struggle is at stake here too and is fought once more in a small site. Lane was not an articulate or even an especially verbal man; he did his thinking through things. The high-minded anger in this case was not expressed by Lane but provoked by him. Although for Lane the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, which he founded in 1908, embodied Irish national grandeur and dignity, for others its mate-

11 Michael O'Hickey to Liam Bulfin, 8/7/1909. National Library of Ireland 13, 820. 12 O'Hickey, *Statement concerning the dismissal*, p. 188. 13 Pádraig Eric Mac Fhinn, *An tAthair Micheál Ó hIceadha* (Baile atha Cliath: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1974), p. 11.

rial form and shape replicated the social structure that Irish nationalism was out to destroy. It seemed like a big house. The controversy was not over the paintings; it was the inconvenient and threatening scale of the building required to house them. However generously, however unconsciously, Lane established, for the public good, an institution that Dublin businessmen felt it in the public interest to attack.

Lane was Lady Gregory's nephew, and with no education and no money whatsoever he earned a fortune dealing in old masters' paintings, which he had the gift of discovering in unlikely places. After a visit to her house at Coole Park, Co. Galway, in 1901, where Yeats, Hyde and other Irish revival leaders were staying, Lane allied his aesthetic interests and collector's talents with the cause of Irish cultural nationalism. With the money earned in dealing, he bought modern (contemporary) paintings – but only to give away, not to sell. After some success in organizing exhibitions of pictures by Irish painters, he decided to establish a municipal gallery of contemporary paintings for Dublin. In the gallery's original catalogue, put together for its opening in 1908, Lane wrote patriotically: 'Till today Ireland was the only country in Europe that had no Gallery of Modern Art ... That reproach is now removed.'¹⁴

For Lane as for O'Hickey, the national and the personal were not simply identified; they were indistinguishable. For Lane, it was in objects that the national and the personal met and blended: the paintings were both gifts and private possessions, and the gallery was both municipal and 'home'. Unlike the great continental galleries such as the Uffizi or the Louvre, the Municipal Gallery did not originate as the private domain of a single aristocratic family. It was Lane's own space – to be chosen, approved, decorated by Lane – but given as benefaction to the city of Dublin. Lane preferred to give a painting away rather than sell it because, as he put it, 'if I sell it to some millionaire it is lost, I don't see it again, it may not give any very great pleasure to him and it is lost to everyone else. But if I give a picture to a gallery ... It is as much mine as ever, I still possess it, I can see it when I like and everyone else can see it too.'¹⁵ When, in 1914, Lane was applying for the job of director of the National Gallery of Ireland, he promised to turn over his entire salary for the purchase of more paintings, saying, '[T]ell [them] I will make it my adopted child.'¹⁶ Given Lane's peripatetic childhood, in a sense both the Municipal Gallery (and, later, the National Gallery) functioned as home for him, and through these institutions the bachelor Lane constructed a kinship with Dublin and hence with Ireland. The populace, the putative audience for the paintings, constituted his symbolic heirs.

This emotional relationship with his Irish family began propitiously. At the Municipal Gallery's opening in January 1908, the paintings making up the collection were housed at 17 Harcourt Street. Lane had great public support. Alderman

¹⁴ *Tribute to Sir Hugh Lane* (Cork: Cork UP, 1961), p. 35. ¹⁵ Lady Gregory, *Hugh Lane's life and achievement* (London: John Murray, 1921), p. 195. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Tom Kelly was his champion, as was Lord Mayor Lorcan Sherlock, and *Sinn Féin* praised his generosity. In February he was given the freedom of the city. By 1912, Lane felt the need to nudge the city to provide a permanent gallery: on 5 November he wrote a letter to the Dublin city clerk, turning over to the Corporation one set of paintings, 'on the condition that they are always on view free to the public,' but stating that another group, the thirty-nine 'continental' paintings, would be removed at the end of January 1913, if no decision about the gallery's site were made.¹⁷ In January the Dublin Corporation voted 20–2 to give £22,000 for the new gallery (the building, not the site). After visiting and rejecting many possible sites, Lane was taken with the suggestion of a bridge gallery spanning the Liffey, replacing the metal Ha'penny Bridge; and he commissioned a design from Sir Edwin Lutyens. By the time of the January deadline, no other acceptable location had been discovered; by April, Lane's preference for the bridge gallery had become a stipulation. Without that design by that architect in that place, he would take back the conditional gift of the thirty-nine paintings (leaving, of course, the many other paintings he had already given or had promised unconditionally). Lane was stubborn and impatient; and even in private space Lane's 'taste' was virtually a religion. Walking into a friend's drawing room once, he strode to the window and pulled down the curtains, saying, '[Y]ou really must not have these in your house.'¹⁸ Dublin was simply a larger space to decorate.

Given the scale and the grandiosity of the Lutyens design, as well as Lane's close alliance with Gregory and Yeats, the gallery became associated with the big house. There seemed to be a seigneurial quality in someone who insisted on tearing down a bridge and inflicting a building on the city; and clearly Lane's notion of a gallery was large, expensive, and grand. It was one thing to give a painting away and 'still possess it,' but Dublin was not Lane's demesne. This understanding of the gallery, emphasizing not the kinship but the class differences between benefactor and beneficiaries, was troublingly evident in all of Yeats's poems on the subject. It was also evident in Beerbohm's drawing of 'Sir Hugh Lane Producing Masterpieces for Dublin, 1909'.¹⁹ Four years before the 1913 controversy, Beerbohm expressed visually the great distance between Lane and his public, to whom he appears as a magician on a stage pulling paintings of his top hat. To those not privy to Lane's acquisition of wealth year by year, deal by deal, painting by painting, his gifts did indeed seem like magic.

The ensuing public argument focussed on the control of urban space. When Lane stipulated that without the bridge site and the Lutyens design, he would take back the conditional thirty-nine, *Sinn Féin* withdrew its support, writing, '[N]o visitor to Dublin could miss seeing that Gallery ... a £40,000 monument

¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 2 Dec. 1912. ¹⁸ Lady Gregory, *Hugh Lane's life and achievements, with some accounts of the Dublin galleries* (London: John Murray, 1921), p. 246. ¹⁹ Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *A catalogue of the caricatures of Max Beerbohm* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 228.

to Sir Hugh Lane far more conspicuous than the memorials ... to Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell.²⁰ The scale of his gift, earlier the index of his munificence, became the measure of his arrogance. In this context, Lutyens's half-Irish ethnicity became an insult. In a letter to the *Irish Times* written in August 1913, William Martin Murphy implied that Lane insisted on the bridge site in order to assert his own dominance over the city:

He is to choose the only site in the city against which he knows there is intense public feeling ... he figuratively wipes his boots in the architectural profession of Ireland, and a committee of Irish gentlemen are so obsessed by Sir Hugh Lane and his handful of pictures that they meekly swallow all his conditions, and are prepared if they can succeed in doing so to place all the citizens under his feet. It is a case of 'no Irish need apply' for any job besides digging the foundations in the Liffey mud.²¹

Two groups emerged to assert the rights of the business interests of Dublin – both their names reflecting the concern with space: the Central Highways Committee and the River Liffey Protection Association (never heard of before or since). To James Walker of the latter group, the Gallery was indeed a 'palace'. He said to the members of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce (of which Murphy was president):

... they had lost sight of the fact that there were 20,000 families living in one room each, and living under conditions which were a disgrace to the City of Dublin. Like any other 'white elephant', the collection in question might be described as being worth £10,000, and they were asked to provide for them a magnificent palace and a great retinue of servants to take care of them. He could not help but regard such a proposition as a scandalous waste of money.²²

In Walker's attack, as in Murphy's, the gallery was not positioned as a threat to Dublin commercial interests but to the poor: the poor, living in one room, digging the foundations in the Liffey mud, offered the high moral ground on which the businessmen stood to attack the gallery. Richard Jones of the RLPA voiced concern that the gallery would injure the health of the poor:

It would be an outrage on art and on common sense to adopt such a plan. It would obstruct a view painted by God Almighty, which no artist could imitate. It would be one of the most unsightly bridges ever erected in a large city, and [would] obstruct the diurnal passage of the sea air,

²⁰ 'Sir Hugh Lane and the Pictures', *Sinn Fein* (9 Aug. 1913), p. 5. ²¹ *Irish Times*, 11 Aug. 1913. ²² *Irish Times*, 12 Aug. 1913. ²³ *Ibid.*

which daily prevented the outbreak of disease in many filthy alleys.²³ Anti-religious, neo-colonial, aesthetically offensive, and a potential cause of epidemics, the bridge-gallery by its very size constituted a threat to all the best interests of the city.

When, after the Corporation's 19 September vote against the bridge site, Lane revised his will to leave the thirty-nine paintings of the 'conditional gift' to the National Gallery in London, his decision seemed to show that he deserved everything that had been said about him. But three developments conspired to stigmatize him. Firstly, he died suddenly and relatively young in tragic circumstances, drowning when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed by the Germans on 7 May 1915. Secondly, his will contained a recent codicil leaving the thirty-nine paintings to Dublin if a permanent gallery for them was built within five years of his death. Finally, in 1926 the British government, at the recommendation of a parliamentary committee of inquiry, officially refused to return the collection because the signature on the codicil was unwitnessed. What the Germans began with their torpedoes, the British completed with their committee: they made Lane and his paintings Irish. The Dublin Corporation commissioned a bust of Lane from the Irish sculptor Albert Power: in 1933, when the gallery was resituated in Charlemont House, the bust was stationed in solitary splendour in the final room, making Lane into a tutelary deity of this small bit of Dublin space. In 1959, the first of several agreements for sharing the paintings between Dublin and London was negotiated. But until then, the thoroughly hibernicized Lane stood on guard in his empty room, a patriotic reminder of unfinished national business.

Only six weeks after the final negative vote on the bridge site, the 'Save the Dublin Kiddies' controversy erupted on 22 October 1913. This controversy did not simmer and brew like the O'Hickey and Lane controversies: it erupted violently in the streets of Dublin. It was short and intense, its most dramatic conflict over in less than a week. Yet here, too, offended, outraged Irishness licensed public adversarial behaviours. In this case, the idea that any kind of aggression was licensed operated not only in the rhetorical but in the somatic realm: punitive physical violence was exercised in purportedly high-minded ways to defend Irishness.

In late August, the great strike of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union began; it did not end until February 1914, when the last of the 25,000 striking and locked-out workers returned to their jobs. In September and October, British unions began sending food and provisions to the workers' families, whose situation was desperate. The 'kiddies' controversy originated in a humanitarian plan suggested by the British socialist/suffragist Dora Montefiore to board the striking Dublin workers' children with socialist families in England and Scotland for the duration of the strike; the name 'Save the Dublin Kiddies' was her creation.²⁴ With labour leader Jim Larkin's blessing, she publicized her

²⁴ Dora Montefiore, *Our fight to save the kiddies: smouldering fires of the Inquisition* (London: Utopia, n.d.), p. 2.

campaign through the socialist paper the *Daily herald*. By the time she arrived in Dublin she had offers of room for 300 children.²⁵ When the plan was put into effect on the 22 October, the ensuing hysteria took Montefiore and her helpers completely by surprise. Over a period of several days, outraged priests and angry mobs recruited by the Ancient Order of Hibernians grabbed many of the children from the hands of the social workers washing them at the Tara Street baths; pulled others off boats at the North Wall of the Liffey or off trains at Kingsbridge station; attacked anyone attempting to leave Dublin with a child; and marched triumphantly along the quays singing 'Faith of Our Fathers' after each day's successful 'rescues'. Although eighteen children made it to Liverpool and remained there until February, plans for getting more out of Dublin were given up. Montefiore and her principal helper, the American Lucilla Rand, were arrested and charged with kidnapping; they were released on bail and the charges were dropped when it was clear they had stopped saving Dublin kiddies.

A letter written by Archbishop Walsh and published in several newspapers on 21 October provoked the controversy that encouraged aggression by its high-minded outrage. Walsh's discourse evoked the sectarian rescue battles between rival Catholic and Protestant charities common in nineteenth-century Dublin, London, New York, and other cities:

A movement is on foot ... to induce the wives of the working men who are now unemployed by reason of the present deplorable industrial deadlock in Dublin, to hand over their children to be cared for in England by persons of whom they ... can have no knowledge whatsoever. The Dublin women now subjected to this cruel temptation to part with their helpless offspring are, in the majority of cases, Catholics. Have they abandoned their faith? Surely not. Well, if they have not, they should need no words of mine to remind them of the plain duty of every Catholic mother in such a case. I can only put it to them that they can be no longer held worthy of the name of Catholic mothers if they so far forget that duty as to send away their little children to be cared for in a strange land, without security of any kind that those to whom the poor children are to be handed over are Catholics, or indeed are persons of any faith at all.²⁶

Although Walsh received private assurances from Montefiore herself as well as from Catholics in Liverpool that the children sent there were going to Mass regularly, and although the private letter he sent to her suggested he knew that the children were not being proselytized, his public comments nevertheless referred to a sectarian plot.²⁷ His speech several days later to the St Vincent de Paul Society spoke of the plan to 'deport our Catholic children to England' and rein-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5. ²⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Oct. 1913. ²⁷ Archbishop Walsh to Mrs Montefiore, 22 Oct. 1913. Corrected typescript, carbon copy. Dublin Diocesan Archives 377 / 3. ²⁸ *The*

forced the license for the violent gestures on behalf of 'faith and fatherland'.²⁸

To a large extent, Archbishop Walsh and Dora Montefiore were in the same business, supplying welfare before the existence of a welfare state. The Catholic Church in Ireland dominated a huge network of social service institutions – orphanages, hospitals, asylums, schools, as well as the parish churches and convents that fed and cared for the local poor. The provision of housing, nourishment, medical care and education – all 'maternalist' enterprises – was the area of greatest concern to English women reformers, and it was of course the aim of socialists to make these services permanent state functions.²⁹ The Dublin workers' children represented an overlapping of two symbolic domains, that of the Irish Catholic Church and that of socialist women. The symbolic conflict over the children – a physical custody that signified an ideological power – was expressed gesturally, in the direct force applied by the priests against the women who were carrying off the children. The logic was geopolitical: to let a child leave the city was to lose control of the family and to let Protestant win over Catholic and English over Irish. Philip O'Leary has written about the metaphor of the 'wall around Ireland' that recurs in the writings of Irish language revivalists, that is, a linguistic wall 'against the onslaught of the enemies of our nationality and our civilisation,' as Pearse put it.³⁰ Although in the 'Kiddies' controversy anxiety was focused on the leaking out or loss of the national culture, Tom Garvin's analysis of 'fear of cultural change coming from outside and destabilizing the rather fragile social entity of Catholic Ireland' is also relevant.³¹ The mobs opposing 'Save the Dublin Kiddies' used their own bodies to create that wall so the national culture could not leak out, child by child.

As the first 'kiddies' were being washed at the Tara Street baths on 22 October, Montefiore arrived on the scene to witness an adversarial encounter on a large scale:

I went down to the baths and found an indescribable scene going on in the street, a surging crowd, some with us, some against us, beat up against the steps of the baths and was again and again pushed back by two red-faced, brutal-looking constables. Right inside the girls' side of the baths, where he had no business to be, stood a priest, who asked me what I was doing there. I told him I had come to help Mrs Rand with the children. He replied we should not have the children, and that he was there to prevent their going.

Dublin Children's Distress Fund, the Society of St Vincent de Paul: the archbishop's statements, pamphlet ([no publisher given], 27 October 1913, p. 1, in Walsh Papers, DDA. ²⁹ For a discussion and analysis of maternalism in this period, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michelle, 'Introduction: mother worlds,' *Mothers of a new world: maternalist politics and the origin of welfare states* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp 1–142. ³⁰ Philip O'Leary, *The prose literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881–1921: ideology and innovation* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994), p. 26. ³¹ Tom Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890–1914,' *Irish Historical Studies* 25:97 (1886), p. 76.

When I met Mrs Rand I found he had already threatened and hustled her, and she had to warn him not to touch her again. The priests were shouting and ordering the children about in the passage-way ... some of the women were 'answering back' to the priests and reminding them [that] they had been refused bread by the Church and that now they had a chance of getting their children properly cared for; other women, worked on by the violent speeches of the priests, were wailing and calling on the saints to forgive them ... When we found we could do nothing more for the children we drove back to Liberty Hall through a crowd that threw mud at us and raised cries of 'Throw them into the Liffey.'³²

The affronted sense of territoriality on both sides is evident even in Montefiore's openly partial narrative: the women feel the priest should not be anywhere near the room where the *girls* are being bathed; and the priest feels that the women should not be touching the *Catholic* children. The parties involved operate under conflicting taxonomies. The women respond to the priests as *men*: they feel 'threatened' and 'hustled' and resent being touched. The priests treat the women not as women but as *English Protestant* kidnapers who are endangering the children. In fact, Montefiore was the non-religious widow of an Australian Jew and Rand was an American Catholic.

The priests' violent intervention was legitimized by the religious and national values invoked in the archbishop's letter. When Fr William Landers and Fr Thomas McNevin, curates from nearby St Andrew's parish on Westland Row, interviewed the boys, 'almost without exception the little fellows sturdily asserted that they didn't want to go to England. Many of the lads shouted, "We won't be English children," and a few of the eldest said that they didn't want to renounce their Faith ... [when Fr Landers announced he was 'strenuously opposed' to the plan, he was] accorded an ovation by the gathering.'³³ The *Freeman's Journal* noted a crowd of '200 or 250' outside the baths who gave Fr Landers 'a very hearty cheer.'³⁴ To this crowd Landers read Archbishop Walsh's letter and gave a rousing speech, reminding his listeners 'that the Irish people knew what poverty was for a long time, but they were never reduced to the extremity of denying their Faith ... the Irish people would rather their children perish by the ditches than that they should be exposed to the risk of being perverted in their religion.'³⁵

Over the next few days, 23–25 October, 'Catholic Vigilance' was at work along the quays and in the train station, ensuring that no child left Dublin. 'FATHERS & MOTHERS OF CATHOLIC DUBLIN,' read a handbill, 'Are you content to abandon your children to strangers, who give no guarantee to have them placed in Catholic or Irish homes? You may never see them again.' In the name of these same principles, adults were attacked also. Later that day

³² Montefiore, *Our fight*, p. 6. ³³ *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Oct. 1913. ³⁴ *Ibid.* ³⁵ *Ibid.*

Montefiore was assaulted by one of the priests as she attempted to board the train for the Kingstown steamer: 'a priest thrust me rudely aside and held me by the shoulder'. Once she was aboard, another priest closed the door against her, 'hurting me considerably, and making me feel faint'. On the train, the priests 'started a systematic bullying' of the boys. As Montefiore 'sat passive and contemptuous in the corner', the priests told her they 'did not want any of our English charity'.³⁶

And so it was in the midst of this fray that Frank Sheehy Skeffington went to Kingsbridge railway station 'as a journalist' to see, as he said later, if the previous days' scenes 'would be repeated' and to help get the children out of Dublin. There he saw a crowd of A.O.H. members and priests who shouted '[H]ere they are!' when he appeared with the children. Sheehy Skeffington's 'persistence roused the anger of the crowd,' said the *Freeman's Journal*, and it 'forcibly ejected him from the station premises. There were marks on his forehead, and his hat got lost in the rush.' Sheehy Skeffington's own description in police court the following week was more detailed, describing the kicks and beatings inflicted on him by the mob, and the shouts of '[K]ill him'. Sheehy Skeffington had no wish to press charges against the men who assaulted him most directly because, as he said in court, '[T]hey are merely the dupes of more astute persons in the background.' But his bruised body offered evidence of the hatred licensed by the archbishop in the name of the Irish Church.³⁷

With the Rising, the War of Independence, and the Civil War, antagonisms were expressed in a different form of battle with different enemies, and cultural controversies temporarily receded from importance. Unlike wars, controversies do not usually cause change; they make it visible as it is in the process of occurring. In them large forces explode in small sites. Their conflicts are decided, if they are decided at all, by bluff and bravado, by improvisational flair and rhetoric rather than by any clear and consistent scoring system. Precisely because it is often irresolvable, a controversy registers with great clarity the tensions of a society at a particular moment. The controversies of the Irish Revival show the struggle to claim the discourse of Irishness, to insist on a role in the ideological apparatus of a state that did not yet exist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: For the use of archival materials, the author is grateful to the: National Library of Ireland; Russell Library, St Patrick's College, Maynooth; and the Dublin Diocesan Archives. Special thanks to the librarians at the National Library, to Penny Woods of Russell Library, and to David Sheehy of the Dublin Diocesan Archives.

³⁶ Dora Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a modern* (London: Archer, 1927), pp 162–3. ³⁷ F. Sheehy Skeffington, 'Wants priests in dock, Kingston Police Station', *Freeman's Journal*, November 1913.