

## Gatty (Gillett-Gatty), Katherine

by Maurice J. Casey

Gatty (Gillett-Gatty), Katherine (1870–1952), suffragette and socialist, was born on 11 June 1870 in Firozpur, India, to Edward Gatty, a British army captain and Emma Rebecca Gatty (née Collum), a member of a prominent Fermanagh family. Gatty, an only child, was raised on the estate of her mother's family in Enniskillen. The Collums were local power brokers, holding sway through property and prominence in local professions. She recalled in a 1936 interview that her dedication to 'the cause of democracy' had been stirred by observing the plight of the Irish tenants that surrounded her on the Collum estate during her upbringing (*Nenagh Guardian*, 23 May 1936). In the same interview, she suggested that childhood encounters with Jeremiah Jordan (qv), a local Irish Parliamentary Party figure who opposed the unionist politics of the landed Anglican milieu within which Gatty was raised, influenced her to rebel against her family's unionist politics by supporting Irish Home Rule. Sometime in her late teen years, Gatty moved to London. She would later claim to have taken part in the Great Dock Strike of 1889.

Gatty took an active role in the women's suffrage movement in Britain. She was imprisoned nine times for taking part in suffrage militancy, once as a member of the Women's Freedom League and eight times as a Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) member. After taking part in a March 1912 WSPU window-breaking campaign, she was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and took part in a hunger strike. Through these campaigns, she also became familiar with Irish suffrage campaigners, including Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (qv) and her sister Mary Kettle. Alongside participation in suffrage militancy, Gatty also became secretary of the Suffrage Atelier, a collective of artists who worked to promote women's enfranchisement.

Gatty was married twice, first in 1893 to a silversmith named William Reid and later in 1915 to Ernest Gillett. She had a daughter, Janet Gatty, the child of an affair with one John Mason, that led to the dissolution of her first marriage. Although she appears to have been estranged from her second husband and daughter by the early 1930s, she continued to operate under the double-barrelled surname Gillett-Gatty for the rest of her life. Throughout the 1930s, she lived in a number of countries, including Britain, Ireland, Spain, Greece and the United States. She also visited the Soviet Union in 1935.

In 1931, Gillett-Gatty was enlisted into the Women's International Matteotti Committee, an antifascist organisation formed by veteran feminist Sylvia Pankhurst. Gillett-Gatty, who was well-networked within continental feminist circles and spoke French, German and Italian, became an important cog in the Committee's

operations. She travelled on fact-finding missions to Mussolini's Italy and to Berlin shortly after the Nazi's rise to power.

During this period, Gillett-Gatty also periodically lived with the Spanish proponent of sexual revolution Hildegarth Rodríguez Carballeira, who was raised by her mother Aurora as a socialist child-prodigy. When, in 1933, Aurora murdered her daughter Hildegarth, Gillett-Gatty corresponded with the prominent British sex reformer Henry Havelock-Ellis, keeping him informed of developments in the case.

In 1936, Gillett-Gatty returned to Ireland, ostensibly on a mission to receive Irish resolutions condemning women's imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps. Garda Special Branch observed her arrival in the Irish Free State, noting in a profile that she was a polyglot radical 'interested in all movements aiming at the destruction of Fascism' and listing Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Maud Gonne MacBride (qv) and Peadar O'Donnell (qv) as her local contacts (NAI, Department of Justice, report by P. Colleran, 14 Oct. 1936).

She became involved in Irish socialist republican circles and lectured in Dublin on the ongoing conflict in Spain. In January 1937, Gillett-Gatty travelled to Paris for a conference of the International Committee of Coordination and Information for Support of Republican Spain, a body to which she was elected as the Irish delegate. Here, she discussed Irish impressions and connections to the Spanish conflict with prominent pro-Republican figures such as the French pacifist Romain Rolland and the Italian antifascist Carlo Rosselli. By the end of the year she was once more on the move, this time to northern California, where she would remain for several years.

By the end of the 1930s, Gillett-Gatty's activist career and travel appears to have drawn her toward communist conviction. In 1939, she wrote to the African-American novelist Richard Wright that only communism rather than 'mere democracy, mere Socialism' could protect 'my sex and your race' (Richard Wright papers, Yale University). In 1947, she emigrated to Australia where she would spend the last years of her life suffering from arthritis. The last campaign in her long career of activism was her 1947 opposition to the culling of Kangaroos. She died in Sydney in April 1952 at the age of eighty-two.

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Katherine Gillett-Gatty to Sylvia Pankhurst, 10 Feb. 1933, BL Manuscript Collection, Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst papers, MS 88925/7/3; Katherine Gillett-Gatty to Henry Havelock Ellis, 11 Aug. 1933, BL Manuscript Collection, Havelock Ellis papers, MS 70542, ff. 75; Katherine Gillett-Gatty to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, c. February 1936 and 16 Jan. 1937, NLI, Sheehy Skeffington papers, MS 41,177/17; 'Madame Gillett Gatty, Journalist and Authoress – Communist', report signed by P. Colleran, 14 Oct. 1936, NAI, Department of Justice, JUS/2008/117/726; *Nenagh Guardian*, 23

May 1936; *Stanford Daily*, 9 Feb. 1938; Katherine Gillett-Gatty to Richard Wright, 13 Mar. 1939, Richard Wright papers, box 98, folder 1351, Beinecke Library, Yale University; *Border Watch*, 19 July 1947 (trove.nla.gov.au, accessed 30 Oct. 2019); *The Sun* (Sydney), 1 May 1952 (trove.nla.gov.au, accessed 30 Oct. 2019); Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement: a reference guide* (2003), 242; Tara Morton, "'An Arts and Crafts Society, working for the enfranchisement of women': unpicking the political threads of the Suffrage Atelier, 1909–1914', in Miranda Garrett and Zoë Thomas (eds), *Suffrage and the arts: visual culture, politics and enterprise* (2019), 65–89

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