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## A Humanist Maker of Modern Ireland: Douglas Hyde's Speeches and Interviews (1886-1906)

**D**ouglas Hyde (1863-1947) was a remarkable and talented man. He devoted his entire life to the cause of the Irish language which he passionately endeavoured to promote. He was at once a man of letters—he did research, wrote, translated—and an engaged nationalist, very active in numerous movements: he was a member of the *Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language*, the *Gaelic Union*, and *Young Ireland*. He was elected President of the *National Literary Society* in 1892 before creating with Eoin MacNeill the *Gaelic League*, a cultural nationalist association which became a mass movement and played a major part in Ireland at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Douglas Hyde was interested in the Irish language from an early age. As Seán O'Lúing writes, "the environment of Douglas Hyde's boyhood, embracing central and northern Connacht, played an important part in the development of his consciousness, superlatively rich as it was in bardic culture, legend and folklore" (123). He learned his Irish out-of-doors, and he spent most of his time as a young boy reading and studying foreign languages, and meeting people from the neighbourhood. There, he learned more than languages from the local people. He also took the political views of the Fenian and anti-British people whom he met and composed patriotic rebel poems in Irish and in English. Douglas, the son of Rev. Arthur Hyde, a Church of Ireland rector, was expected by his father to enter the Church, following family tradition, and was therefore made to study Greek and Latin at home. The young boy, who was obviously very gifted in languages, was soon able to learn on his own. He liked writing and

recorded his experiences and feelings in diaries, mostly written in Irish. They have not been published but Janet and Gareth Dunleavy, who acquired them, make frequent reference to these writings in their book *Douglas Hyde, A Maker of Modern Ireland*. Their work enables us to gain a precise idea of Hyde's inner thoughts and feelings when he was young, at a period when he developed a deep love for his country. It should be emphasized that at this early age, he met the poet Seamas Hart, who was to play a key role in his life:

Seamas Hart, with his fluent Irish, his talent for reciting poem and story, his rich store of Irish historical and cultural tradition, his knowledge of the natural world of Frenchpark and environs, his Fenian sympathies, his calm strength, and his capacity for warmth and affection, was not only a central figure in Douglas's daily life but a major influence on his development. (Dunleavy 45)

The man was like a spiritual father to the young boy. Therefore, Douglas Hyde who described himself as "of the stock of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland" on the last page of his *Literary History of Ireland* (qtd. in O'Lúing 123) was torn between two worlds from the start. Without discarding his English persona, he developed an Irish one, which he later referred to as "Dubhglas de h-Ide" (Dunleavy 37), clearly maintaining the distinction between the English and Irish selves he had identified within himself. Yeats also belonged to the Protestant community, but Douglas Hyde must have felt closer to the Irish people than the promoter of the Literary Revival. Human contact mattered most to Hyde, and the purpose of the movement he founded in 1893, the *Gaelic League*, was to promote the Irish language in daily life. This aspect is of paramount importance: the man of letters was not only concerned with literature, he was above all concerned about the fate of a language which was slowly dying and had almost ceased to be a means of communication. According to the 1851 Census, the Irish language was already being used by only 23.3 percent of the population by that time. Indeed, as England had "colonized" the country, the Irish had stopped using their native tongue, Irish, which gradually became associated with poverty, whereas English

became the language of power and wealth. As early as 1534 the English settlement became increasingly efficient with the Tudor and the Stuart suppressions and plantations, which were followed by the Cromwellian settlement (1654), then the Williamite campaign (1689-1691) which preceded the Penal Laws (1695). The Irish-speaking aristocracy and learned classes thus disappeared and were replaced by a new English-speaking land-owning class, and the psychological effect accompanying the gradual disappearance of Irish was then to be exacerbated. Quite naturally, it came to be the badge of a lost identity when Catholic Nationalism emerged in the 19th century. Douglas Hyde was not the first intellectual to point out the importance of the Irish language. The first man to take into account its importance was the poet and journalist Thomas Davis (1818-1845), who was an influential member of the movement *Young Ireland*: to him, a nation was defined by its culture and above all, by its language. For that reason, a nation without its own language is "only half a nation," he said, so Ireland must be "unsaxonized before it can be pure and strong" (qtd. in Boyce 156). A few years later, the *Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language* (1876) came into being. It obviously realized the cultural value of the country and sought to revive Irish as a spoken language. However, it did not enjoy popular appeal, nor did the *Gaelic Union* (1880) which hoped to encourage the language among native Irish speakers. The political context was more urgent, owing to agrarian agitation and the question of Home Rule. With the death of Parnell (1891) and the atmosphere of political disillusion that ensued, the time was ripe for cultural nationalism to bloom with the birth of the *Gaelic League*.

Douglas Hyde had already devoted considerable thought to the Irish language at a young age. He founded the *Gaelic League* together with Eoin MacNeill, a Catholic who was another Irish language enthusiast. From the very beginning, the movement claimed to be non-political as it wanted to bring together both Catholics and Protestants who were eager to work jointly for the cause of Irish. Moreover, it openly wanted to include the Irish people who were intended to be very active within the organization. "Branches" were expected to be created all over



Ireland, to ensure the development and influence of the language that was also to be taught in the branches. The *Gaelic League* was then supposedly a purely cultural movement. Nevertheless, it could not prevent the political nature of some of its actions. The war it waged against the Irish Post Office which refused to recognize the Irish language is particularly instructive in this regard. The League put strong pressure on the Post Office, drawing the Irish population with it. However, Douglas Hyde was not directly responsible for this action which had been carried out by a few militants at its onset in 1901. It was even a quarrel in which he had been reluctant to participate. It remains to be seen whether a cultural organization can be purely cultural and entirely devoid of any political character, particularly in Ireland at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. As David Fitzpatrick underlines, “there has never been a time when politics—always essential to Irish life—took up so large a part of Irish experience and impinged so insistently upon Irish experience” (xi). Besides, the *Gaelic League* is justly considered to be the spiritual father of *Sinn Féin* and it did have a profound influence on the independence movement, which bears witness to the political implication of the association. Would it be right to assert that the Irish language was only a pretence, a substitute for politics? Two arguments contradict this position. First, the question of the language was in the air, and had been so for a fairly long time. Second, Douglas Hyde was a real cultural nationalist, and a true Irish language enthusiast, as his writings tend to prove. The important speeches and interviews he gave between 1886 and 1906 enable us to realize the depth of the man’s involvement in the culture of his country, and also to apprehend the complexity of the theorist which certainly equates with the complexity of the time. They can be regarded as a unique testimony of the strength of Hyde’s emotional commitment to the cause of the Irish language.

The ideas developed in the speech “On the Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland” (1892) are considered to be at the very core of Hyde’s theory. To him, the demise of the Irish language was certainly a matter for question and for sadness, as he wrote in the *Unpublished Songs of Ireland*: “But alas! [...] as our language

wanes and dies, the golden legends of the far-off centuries fade and pass away. No one sees their influence upon culture; no one sees their educational power" (qtd. in Dunleavy 123). Douglas Hyde felt that the Irish language was a national priority because of the language itself, and because of the literature and oral tradition it encompassed. The Irish language perfectly represented the preoccupation of the man of letters and the patriot. As early as 1886, Douglas Hyde wrote an article entitled "A Plea for the Irish Language" for the *Dublin University Review* that appeared in August. His aim was to justify the *raison d'être* of the Irish language and to affirm its value.

Douglas Hyde at the outset takes part in the Irish language debate by quoting J.J. Rousseau's question "*A quoi cela est-il bon?*" ("A Plea" 74), and he proves very anxious to show closeness to the Irish people: "I do not share the wish to see my language dead and decently buried—to 'leave it to the universities,' as they call it" ("A Plea" 74). Speaking of the Irish language as his own, "my language," he obviously wants to include the people of Ireland within his reflection by using the pronoun "we," thus involving every Irishman in the debate, and showing his will to be first and foremost an Irishman as well: "Now if we allow our living language to die out, it is almost a certainty that we condemn our literary records to remain in obscurity," and, a little further:

To be told that the language which I spoke from my cradle, the language my father and grandfather and all my ancestors in an unbroken line leading up into the remote twilight of antiquity have spoken, the language which has entwined itself with every fibre of my being, helped to mould my habit of conduct and forms of thought, to be calmly told by an Irish journal that the sooner I give up this language, the better, that the sooner I "leave it to the universities" the better, that we will improve our English speaking by giving up our Irish, to be told this by a representative Irish journal is naturally and justly painful. ("A Plea" 75)

We cannot fail to notice the alternation of the pronouns "I/my" and "we/our" which contributes to creating a sense of

familiarity and intimacy with Douglas Hyde. This implies that he does not appear as a man of letters talking to people, but as a fellow countryman who once was a newborn "in his cradle." Douglas Hyde suggests that his feelings are "natural," thus conferring a legitimacy on the cause he defends which strengthens his argument all the more. Affirming his love for his country, Hyde goes so far as to confess his dislike of the English nation, a dislike he considers typically Irish: "I—and there are hundreds of thousands of Irishmen who felt on this subject as I do—have always liked my Celtic countrymen and disliked the English nation; it is a national trait of character and I cannot help it" ("A Plea" 75). However, there is no hatred in his speech. Douglas Hyde simply regrets that many Irishmen try to imitate the English, thus obliterating their own national personality, whereas the Irish mind should be cherished: "Englishmen have very noble and excellent qualities which I should like to see imitated here, but I should not like to imitate them in everything. I like our own habits and character better, they are more consonant to my nature; I like our own turn of thought, our own characteristics, and above all I like our own language" ("A Plea" 75). At this point in the interview, Douglas Hyde subtly refers to the colonies, implying that Ireland could resemble one:

I cannot conceive a more acute pain in the power of sentiment to inflict than that which I should feel if, after a life passed in England or the colonies or India, I were to come back to my native mountains and find that the indifference or the actual discouragement of our leaders had succeeded in destroying the language of my childhood, and with it the tales, the legends, the imaginations, with which my cradle had been surrounded. ("A Plea" 76)

Interestingly, Douglas Hyde shows, on the one hand, his proximity to the Irish people and, on the other hand, his distance from the Irish "leaders." This desire to distance himself from politicians can be traced in all his speeches and interviews. We can infer that he wanted to affirm his distrust of materialistic preoccupations as he stated at the beginning of the interview:

“What I advocate brings with it no substantial or material advantage at all. It will neither make money nor help to make money” (“A Plea” 75).

On a deeper level, Douglas Hyde proves to be perspicacious when he alludes to the colonies, as anyone who wants to subjugate a nation has to suppress its language in order to secure his domination. Speaking one’s native language thus appears to be an act of resistance and even of rebellion.<sup>1</sup> Douglas Hyde nevertheless remains apparently merely anxious to convince the Irish people of his cultural value. He even does not hesitate to claim that the Irish-speaking nation is superior to the others, and he explains how language and thought are intertwined, insisting that Irish literature and the oral tradition of Ireland are most valuable:

I most unhesitatingly affirm that those who continue to speak their own language are in every way the intellectual and generally the moral superior of those who have allowed it to die out. [...] When they [the people] lose the language they lose also the traditional unwritten literature which, inculcating and eulogising what is courteous, high-minded, and noble, supplied continuously an incentive to the practice of those qualities. (“A Plea” 76)

The bond uniting language and thought is underlined, together with a vision of the Irish mind as a superior one:

When Irish is the vernacular language of the peasantry there live enshrined in it memories and imaginations, deeds of daring and tragic catastrophe, an heroic cycle of legend and poem, a vast and varied store of apothegms, sententious proverbs, and weighty sentences, which contain the very best and truest thoughts, not of the rude forefathers of the hamlet, but of the kings, sages, bards, and shanachies of the bygone ages. Such a stream of collected thought as is everywhere found where the Irish language remains

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<sup>1</sup> As regards colonization, cf. Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*. Concerning the relationship between language and colonization cf. Louis-Jean Calvet’s *Linguistique et colonialisme* (which provides a valuable view on the subject) and *Une Politique de la langue, la Révolution française et les patois*, written by Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel.

spoken, must exercise an influence on those who come into contact with it, as all the peasantry do, and such an influence must be an advantageous one. ("A Plea" 76)

It should be noted that Douglas Hyde at once points out that oral and written literature are equally interesting. Besides, using his own knowledge and experience, he declares: "I have had some experience of my Celtic countrymen [...] I have verified this over and over again and I feel sure that I am asserting the truth" ("A Plea" 76). We can feel that Douglas Hyde is deeply convinced of the veracity of his argument, therefore he appears all the more emotionally involved. Douglas Hyde, who abundantly exemplifies his discourses and always illustrates his assertions with concrete examples, likes quoting Irish heroes and even the Irish landscape, the place where the legends were born: "Every crag and gnarled tree and lonely valley has its own strange and graceful legend attached to it" ("A Plea" 77). Besides, he often makes remarks and draws conclusions after travelling in the country and uses his knowledge as a scholar to reinforce his arguments:

I believe for example that the character of the people has deteriorated in the east of the County Leitrim and in the County Lonford, where Irish died out a generation ago. [...] I have found that a much nearer re-approachment between the natives of Western Leinster where Irish has not been spoken for a great while, and the natives of Mayo, than between the natives of Mayo and their neighbours 80 miles away where Irish has recently died out. ("A Plea" 78-79)

His insistence on the superiority of the Irish mind and "race" is striking and we can also notice that Douglas Hyde clearly states that the Irish-speaking man is the only one in a position to realize that. It is in this context of endeavouring to persuade the Irishman of his value, that references to the course of Irish history are to be considered. The Irish scholar does not hesitate to refer to the "confiscations of 1648, and again after 1691, whose great object it was to stamp out both the language and institutions of the nation" ("A Plea" 79), he then comments as follows:



What with the brutalized sensual unsympathetic gentry of the last century, the racing blasting drunkard squireens who usurped the places of the O'Connors, the O'Briens, the O'Donnells, the O'Cahans, and the MacCarthys [...] what with the pure, the high-handed action of the authorities who with a cool contempt of existing circumstances surely unequalled in a European country, continued to appoint English-speaking magistrates; [...] what with the hostility of the Board of Education who do not recognize the language of those baronies where no English is spoken. ("A Plea" 79)

There the orator fully expresses himself, and this is another aspect of Hyde's speeches which can be perceived in all these writings. Douglas Hyde is often lyrical and uses many devices which aim at hammering home his speech: repetitions, long sentences, sometimes running on to fifteen lines, numerous examples and references to Irish heroes and warriors. He even uses the pronoun "we" when referring to a counter-argument used in the Irish language debate, thus inviting the people to take part in it, and implicitly making them share his own point of view: "We are told that the keeping alive a language spoken by so small a number of the community is a barrier to progress" ("A Plea" 78). Then citing as an example the Irish community in the USA, Douglas Hyde, in the name of the "integrity of Irish nationality" urges every Irishman to adhere most imperatively to his cause: "Reverence for our past history, regard for the memory of our ancestors, our national honour, and the fear of becoming materialized and losing our best and highest characteristics call upon us imperatively to assist the Irish-speaking population" ("A Plea" 80).

Douglas Hyde liked the USA; he was fascinated by the language and culture of the native American tribes he studied and he was well acquainted with Fenians who had to leave Ireland because of their political activities. The *Fenian Brotherhood*, founded in New York in 1858, was the best known of the Irish-American political and paramilitary organizations. Its Irish counterpart was the *Irish Republican Brotherhood* (IRB). To Douglas Hyde, The Irish-American community was exemplary



and the latter greatly contributed to the *Gaelic League* financially. He felt particularly at ease in the USA, and this can be sensed in a speech he gave on the occasion of his visit there, namely “The Irish Language” in 1891. At first addressing the audience in Irish, Douglas Hyde at the outset declared himself honoured to address “such a representative and intelligent audience of [his] countrymen,” one “as competent to form an opinion” as he was (“The Irish Language” 145). Speaking for “himself alone,” Douglas Hyde thus declared he aimed to deliver “brief and uncolored” words about the situation of the Irish language (“The Irish Language” 145). This discourse may appear artificial or at least hypocritical, yet the speech resembles a scientific demonstration and it is distinguished by its concrete development.

The situation of Irish is at first envisaged. Douglas Hyde is not ambiguous as he immediately states how the “little privileged knot of Protestant legislators” is responsible for the situation of Irish (“The Irish Language” 146). In this regard, Douglas Hyde recalls the Invasion of '98 which would have altered that situation, together with the behaviour of the “Irish chiefs” who did not do what was necessary in order to prevent the disappearance of the Irish language (“The Irish Language” 146). “I have found myself,” Douglas Hyde says, “I found an old man” (“The Irish Language” 146). Hyde obviously wants to show that his speech is based on facts. The scholar and man of letters then explains how Irish is, as it were, a “superior” language, “a pure Aryan language” which “stands on an equal footing with Greek, Latin and Sanscrit,” and he again recalls the “literature behind it” (“The Irish Language” 149). But Douglas Hyde also appeals to the sense of patriotism of his fellowmen by quoting Irish soldiers and heroes:

I acknowledge that it gives me a pang of sorrow to see the language of the bards and brehons, of the Saints and Sages, the language of Rory O'More, of Patrick Sarsfield, and Owen Roe O'Neill,<sup>2</sup> the best men that Ireland ever produced, kicked contemptuously aside, crawling away, as it were, with a broken

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<sup>2</sup> Owen Roe O'Neill, a professional soldier, became a hero in 1642.

leg to die, like a hunted dog in a ditch, a vile and lingering death. ("The Irish Language" 149)

After laying down facts, Douglas Hyde tackles the persons and the system responsible for the situation, namely Daniel O'Connell, a politician who advocated the English language; Maynooth College, founded in 1795 at the prompting of the Tory politician and Prime Minister William Pitt; and the educational system, the "English schools" which "condemn the Irish language" ("The Irish Language" 149). The Irish scholar is very clear in his speech: "I want to see the language kept alive as a great national heritage [and] as one of the best bonds to knit together the Irish race [and lastly] because a bilingual race is infinitely superior to a race that speaks only one language" ("The Irish Language" 150). In short, Douglas Hyde wants to unite the Irish nation through its old language. Again, to fully appreciate this point of view, it is important to note the psychological impact of the gradual disappearance of Irish, which is emphasized by Hyde: "It is a most disgraceful shame the way in which Irishmen are brought up. They are ashamed of their language, institutions, and of everything Irish" ("The Irish Language" 151). Douglas Hyde vigorously and pragmatically states what must be done in order to achieve his aim:

Now there are only two possible ways, as far as I can see, to keep up the Irish spirit of the people, and a due regard for the language of the past; one of these is to gain Home Rule, and by a vigorous movement, on this side of the Atlantic and at home, to put pressure on the unIrish Irishmen, to teach Irish in the schools, to put the Irish language in all institutions and examinations upon the same footing or a little more favorable footing than French, Latin and Greek, and to insist on having Irish-speaking functionaries and schoolmasters in Irish-speaking parts of the country. ("The Irish Language" 151)

Douglas Hyde obviously equates his purpose with a war, a concrete war to be waged against England so as "not to give the English people this last shameful victory over us" ("The Irish Language" 151); but in his eyes, this battle contains something more: "This sort of thing would do more to elevate the people in

their own eyes and in those of the world, than a great many thousand speeches by professed politicians" ("The Irish Language" 152). Paradoxically, Hyde calls for the political autonomy of his country, while refusing to be considered a politician. Through his speeches, however, his involvement in the politics of Irish history is revealed. That kind of speech explains the supposed political implication of Douglas Hyde in the course of Irish history. "The Necessity for De-anglicizing Ireland" enables us to shed light on this ambiguous theory of the man in all its complexity and richness. Delivered one year before the birth of the *Gaelic League*, it encompasses Douglas Hyde's deep ideology. We can find the same preoccupation with "the folly of neglecting what is Irish" ("The Necessity" 153) denounced in Hyde's blunt opening of the speech. The situation of the contradictory, "illogical" situation ("The Necessity" 153) of Irish is presented, but the responsibility of the Irish population is here clearly emphasized, as Hyde affirms that Irishmen have deliberately "thrown away with both hands" their language, whereas "the great bulk of Irishmen and Irishwomen over the whole world are known to be filled with a dull, ever-abiding animosity against [England]" ("The Necessity" 154). Douglas Hyde quotes all the movements which have proved popular in Ireland: "Such movements as *Young Irelandism*, *Fenianism*, *Land Leagueism*, and Parliamentary obstruction seem always to gain their sympathy and support" ("The Necessity" 154); he does so in order to state that such movements permit the country's deep resistance against what can be called "the occupation of Ireland." Thus, not only does Hyde appeal to the people's good sense when he brings to light the "contradictory" situation of Ireland, "imitating England and yet apparently hating it" ("The Necessity" 154), but he also asserts that the country has not gained the least material benefit from England: "To say that Ireland has not prospered under English rule is simply a truism; all the world admits it, England does not deny it" ("The Necessity" 154). Moreover, the so-called "materialistic" characteristic of England is criticized, and is considered totally alien to Ireland which is supposed to have superior values of which the people are unconsciously proud:

How many Irishmen are there who would purchase material prosperity at such a price? It is exactly such a question as this and the answer to it that shows the difference between the English and Irish race. Nine Englishmen out of ten would jump to make the exchange, and I firmly believe that nine Irishmen out of ten would indignantly refuse it. ("The Necessity" 155)

What is more, Douglas Hyde suggests that the Irish people would have reacted, if they had realized what was happening:

Its inroads have been silent, because, had the Gaelic race perceived what was being done, or had they been once warned of what was taking place in their own midst, they would, I think, never have allowed it. When the picture of complete Anglicization is drawn for them in all its nakedness Irish sentimentality becomes suddenly a power and refuses to surrender its birthright. [...] The race of today cannot wholly divest itself from the mantle of its own past. ("The Necessity" 155)

The patriot unambiguously appeals to his countrymen's national pride and his denunciations of England's domination leave no room for doubt either. Hyde clearly and remarkably demonstrates in this speech that Ireland can be considered an English colony since it assimilated the Northmen and Normans who invaded Ireland, but did not assimilate the English who did not desire to be assimilated: "None of those [The Northmen and Normans] broke the continuity of the social life of the island" ("The Necessity" 156). In spite of the country's foreign arrivals, Ireland truly resisted: "What the battleaxe of the Dane, the sword of the Norman, the wile of the Saxon were unable to perform, we have accomplished ourselves" ("The Necessity" 157). And the country managed to resist even during dark periods and to remain vivacious from the literary point of view: "Not only so, but during the dark Penal times they produced amongst themselves a most vigorous literary development" ("The Necessity" 157). "The literary activity of even the eighteenth century among the Gaels was very great," not to mention the ordinary Irishman, who was lettered: "Every well-to-do farmer could read and write Irish, and many of them could understand even archaic Irish" ("The



Necessity" 158). Douglas Hyde attributes the decline of the Irish language to the arrival of Daniel O'Connell and Maynooth, as previously mentioned. The repression of the native language can in effect be regarded as a political domination, in other words, as a real desire to colonize a country. Douglas Hyde recalls how the Irish gave up their old language: "within the last ninety years we have, with an unparalleled frivolity, deliberately thrown away and anglicized ourselves [... and] the losing of it [our national tongue] is our greatest stroke, and the sorest stroke that the rapid Anglicization of Ireland has inflicted upon us" ("The Necessity" 159-160).

Douglas Hyde thus suggests the following solution: "In order to de-Anglicize ourselves we must at once arrest the decay of the language" ("The Necessity" 160). The disappearance of the native language which was given up by the Irish population results from the feeling of being inferior to the conqueror, the colonizer, hence the desire to speak the latter's language so as to feel the colonizer's equal: "We must teach ourselves not to be ashamed of ourselves," he says ("The Necessity" 169). The demonstration is convincing and Douglas Hyde expatiates on the subject, showing his mastery of the question of Anglicization. His long developments on Irish surnames, as well as on the Irish topographical nomenclature, are all the more convincing as they are detailed: "De Bourgos of Connacht became MacWilliams, of which clan again some minor branches became MacPhilpins, MacGibbons, and MacRaymonds [...] The Henneystys are Harringtons, the O'Kinsellaghs, Kinsleys and Tinslys" ("The Necessity" 162-63). The passage runs on to fifteen lines, and Hyde resorts to the same process of a long listing when considering Irish first names: "Surely Una is prettier than Winny, which it becomes when West-Britonised" ("The Necessity" 165). Then Hyde proceeds to Irish place-names, to him "corrupted to suit English ears" ("The Necessity" 166), then to music which "has become anglicized to an alarming extent" ("The Necessity" 167), with the disappearance of the harp and pipers. Lastly he tackles Irish games. As far as they are concerned, Douglas Hyde refers to the *Gaelic Athletic Association* (G.A.A.), another cultural nationalist association which aims at de-anglicizing Irish games:

I consider the work of the association in reviving our ancient national game of caman, or hurling, and Gaelic football, has done more for Ireland than all the speeches of politicians for the last five years. And it is not alone that that splendid association revived for a time with vigour our national sport, but it revived also our national recollections, and the names of the various clubs through the country have perpetuated the memory of the great and good men and martyrs of Ireland. ("The Necessity" 168)

This key passage enables us to grasp Hyde's deep ideology: he wants to prove that he is above all eager to show that concrete actions are by far preferable to "speeches of politicians." These actions are part and parcel of a general national process, implying the realization that the Irish language has a symbolic role to play, which is not obvious to all: "We must put pressure upon our politicians not to snuff out by their tacit discouragement merely because they do not happen to understand it" ("The Necessity" 160). However, the question of the native language which is described as being ignored by the politicians is considered to have a part to play within the political frame of the Home Rule: "We can and we shall insist if Home Rule be carried, that the Irish language, which so many foreign scholars find so worthy of study, shall be placed on a par with—or even above—Greek, Latin, and modern languages, in all examinations held under the Irish government" ("The Necessity" 161).

Hyde's concrete propositions stand in contrast to the "speeches of the politicians," hence their differences. Moreover, Hyde contemplates a popular action involving everyone: "Nothing less than a house-to-house visitation and exhortation of the people themselves will do" ("The Necessity" 161), a method "analogous to the procedure that James Stephens [the Fenian] adopted throughout Ireland" ("The Necessity" 161). He thus envisages the question of the Irish language as a national one, involving every Irishman "whether [they] be Unionists or Nationalists" ("The Necessity" 161). The question of the Irish language is objectively enough envisaged within a general framework; namely the political one, but it is sensed as being intellectually superior and profoundly different, although it may entail non-cultural



consequences: "Even at the risk of encouraging national aspirations," Hyde finally adds ("The Necessity" 161). This theory, ambiguous though it may appear, can also be regarded as a most interesting one, as it has the merit to consider the political situation of the country, instead of pretending to ignore it. The theorist also reflects on the role that his cultural purpose can play in a pragmatic way, and he recognizes the political implications of apparently non-political questions, that is to say, linguistic ones.

"The Gaelic Revival," a speech Douglas Hyde delivered in the USA, bears witness to this interpretation and even justifies it: his love of Ireland and his desire for harmony are striking. Hyde regarded himself as a champion of the Irish people he was eager to raise spiritually:

We are above and beyond all politics, all parties and all factions; offending nobody—except the anti-Irishman [laughter and applause]. We stand immovable upon the bedrock of the doctrine of true Irish nationhood—an Ireland self-centred, self-sufficing, self-supporting, self-reliant; an Ireland speaking its own language, thinking its own thoughts, writing its own books, singing its own songs, playing its own games, weaving its own coats. [...] The Gaelic League is founded not upon hatred of England, but upon love of Ireland. Hatred is a negative passion; it is powerful—a very powerful destroyer; but it is useless for building up. Love, on the other hand, is like faith; it can move mountains, and faith, we have mountains to move [laughter and applause]. ("The Gaelic Revival" 179)

We can feel that Douglas Hyde must be thrilled to be back in the USA and to deliver a speech to an enthusiastic audience. His address is full of humour, puns and even mimicry. It is a remarkable text. In 1905, the *Gaelic League* was a popular movement, certainly enabling Hyde to put his creed into practice.

The "reconstructive policy" of the *Gaelic League* is vividly described and the general tone of the speech shows a real desire to convince and communicate. His address is full of anecdotes. The succession of numerous questions inviting the audience to react—which it did—contributes to the familiar and lively tone of

the whole: "How many Irishmen are there who would accept material prosperity at such a price as that? [shouts of None and great applause]" ("The Gaelic Revival" 183). Douglas Hyde himself had already spent whole years travelling throughout Ireland in order to promote his movement and create branches all over the country. He liked being with the people and he was very much appreciated, which contributed to the popularity of the League. Describing Anglicization as though it were a "disease," Hyde delights at the harmony created by his movement which was open to anyone who wanted to do something for the Irish language:

For the first time in Ireland within my recollection, Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Nationalist, landlord and tenant, priest and parson, all work hand in hand in the interest of Ireland's life and intellectuality, and we are realizing for the first time, the glorious dream of Thomas Davis, "how every race and every trade should be by love combined." We are working together in a common cause, in a spirit of good fellowship. ("The Gaelic Revival" 191)

His description of England, sometimes verging on contempt, merely aims at convincing the Irish people of their own value.

Douglas Hyde can also be considered, as a poet rather than a politician. Ireland is described as "a young hearty girl with whom thousands and thousands are falling in love" ("The Gaelic Revival" 175) facing "the awful chasm [...], the devouring demon of Anglicization whose foul and gluttonous jaws have swallowed everything that was hereditary, natural, instinctive, ancient, intellectual and noble in our Irish people" ("The Gaelic Revival" 178). Even though he recognized the importance of the English language for economic reasons (Hyde wanted Ireland to be bilingual), the theorist could not but be radical in some ways, in order to be more credible. This accounts for the passages where Hyde could appear as a revolutionary, in the political sense of the word. But the theorist was also a man of letters, an orator (he won medals for oratory), a poet and even an actor. We can feel in this text his love of words and even of theatre: "I know and say that

you plant your feet and you will say, 'Not one step more, demon! Back demon! You shall never swallow one single mouthful more of the possessions of Irish Nationhood' [applause]" ("The Gaelic Revival" 178). We can easily picture him addressing the crowd and mimicking a gallant knight defending his kingdom to the death... The warlike accent of the passage may appear as propaganda. It could also be interpreted quite differently, and namely as illustrating his will to resemble any Nationalist, eager to fight for the freedom of his country. Once again, Douglas Hyde speaks in the first person singular which sets up a feeling of intimacy, so much so that the speech itself gains more credibility. This continuous repetition of the pronoun "I" reveals his personal implication which is particularly strong in this speech: "I want to show you," Douglas Hyde says several times, "suppose with me tonight," "to tell you the honest truth," "and now you will ask me" ("The Gaelic Revival" 181, 182, 183, 185); he wants to prove that notwithstanding his position, he is like any other man, subject to fits of anger sometimes, particularly when his nation is at stake: "I lost my temper! I hit him one kick!" ("The Gaelic Revival" 186), the theorist confesses. The sense of intimacy is particularly strong in this address which is suffused with anecdotes, confidences and humour. Here again, Douglas Hyde more often than not just stands outside and describes what he sees as if he were an objective witness; he obviously wants to show that he speaks neutrally. The numerous brief passages convey a sense of intensity which also contributes to creating an impression of reality and spontaneity. That being said, the poetic quality of this speech should not obliterate the fact that the scholar, the theorist, was also eager to prove that he was rooted in the reality of history:

So long as England refuses Irishmen the right to govern themselves, so long they will continue to dislike her, and movements like Young Irelandism and Fenianism and Land Leagueism and Parliamentary obstruction—all those things will crop up time and again. And this is why I say since they won't become proper Englishmen, then let them become proper Irishmen; and then since they won't become the one thing, Englishmen in sentiment, then, in God's name, let them become

the other thing—let them come in with us and build up an Irish-Ireland! (“The Gaelic Revival” 182)

Douglas Hyde subtly intermingles humour and seriousness. After making the reader laugh and smile, he is more incisive and calls every Irishman to help his movement financially: “and with that money, we are reviving the soul of Ireland. The Gaelic League is in earnest” (“The Gaelic Revival” 185).

Logically enough, Hyde was so radical as to reject literature in English. This was part of a process of national withdrawal into oneself which can be considered necessary. The rejection of the English language as a medium of literary expression certainly was unavoidable, it even bore witness to the rigour of the thinker who felt he had to exclude one language so as to reinforce the other. Moreover, the Irish language was perceived as a means to unite all Irishmen within an educational movement: “What we want in Ireland is a National University which will bring students together and educate them upon national lines; [...] to insure that every class in the country and every creed shall have the same advantages in Ireland as every other. [...] we desire a National University, to which both Protestant and Catholic shall be equally free to go” (“The Great Work of the Gaelic League” 199). It is not at all surprising that, in the theorist’s eyes, the movement was not a political one: “This is an educational movement, pure and simple. [...] There is nothing political in it” (“The Great Work” 198). The humanist was above all a reconciler, passionate but reasonable.

Douglas Hyde, the humanist, was a maker of modern Ireland. His movement, the *Gaelic League* included numerous men of genius, many of whom took part in the rising of 1916, like Patrick Pearse; and it directly led to the independence movement. Nevertheless, when the League became openly politicized in 1915, it lost its President, as Douglas Hyde resigned. From then on, the cultural association started to decline. The movement which led to the independence of Ireland is pregnant with the values of the League which verged on conservatism and even sectarianism as

years passed by. Douglas Hyde did give birth to this movement that sought harmony; he did not wish to take on its political direction, although he was well aware of its evolution. The humanist could not applaud the bloodshed that ensued in the 1916 rising. Describing the Easter Rising as a “criminal business,” he wrote to Lady Gregory in the same year: “Ireland is in a hopeless muddle, the Gaelic League included” (Dunleavy 348). His concern for pure cultural nationalism was so deep as to refuse any other action implying violence and arms. This shows Hyde’s ability to understand. His respect for those who did not share his own points of view was remarkable. It characterizes the theorist. Douglas Hyde had many politicized friends and the League included many groups with divergent opinions. The way the League functioned enabled groups to express themselves freely. In spite of his strong refusal to compromise on the objectives of his movement, Douglas Hyde did allow the Irish nation to open up thoroughly and to bloom intellectually.

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