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Reading between the Lines: Hyde's Writings, 1916

Máire Nic an Bhaird

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A SET OF OVERLOOKED primary sources related to the 1916 Easter Rising provides the focus for this essay, which will rely on these documents to expand the current understanding of Douglas Hyde's political ideology. These sources produced by Hyde consist of a journal kept at the time of the Rising that includes eyewitness details about the event, a written reflection on the events of Easter Week, and a personal statement that he gathered from Charles MacNeill revealing the turmoil experienced by his brother Eoin MacNeill concerning the conflicting plans for the Rising.<sup>1</sup> These ego-documents are an important piece of the enigmatic puzzle that was Hyde's ideology, particularly where political views are concerned, and they help to reveal his true nature as patriot, future president of Ireland, and pacifist.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, these documents will serve as an explanation for the manner in which Hyde approached the rebellion and nationalism in general.

Journal writing was not a new pastime for Hyde, as he was documenting his inner thoughts and ideas, his linguistic development, and his coming of age in County Roscommon as far back as 1874 in thirteen diaries that are now housed in the National Library of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Hyde was in the throes of adolescence and all of fourteen when he embarked upon the hobby of diary keeping, and he continued the activity throughout his formative years and beyond, completing his final diary in 1912 at the age of fifty-two. Douglas Hyde was an astute, reflective man who understood the importance of data col-

1. Douglas Hyde, *Easter Week Diary* (MS 17,770, National Library of Ireland [hereafter cited as NLI]); Douglas Hyde, *Reflections on Easter Week 1916* (MS 10343/6, Trinity College Dublin [hereafter cited as TCD]); Douglas Hyde, *Typescript Diary* (MS 10343/7, TCD).

2. On the concept of ego-documents, in which "the 'I,' the writer, is continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject," see Rudolf Dekker, *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum, Netherlands: Verloren Publishers, 2002), 1.

3. See *Diaries of Douglas Hyde, 1873-1912* (MSS G 1036-48, NLI).

lection. His awareness of posterity and the importance of keeping memoirs, documenting personal data, and collecting folklore and social-historical documents is evident in his eagerness to keep accurate accounts of his life. In a sense Hyde was an early participant of data collection in the precomputer era who was not unlike modern-day “life-loggers,” who attempt to capture their entire lives, or large portions of their lives, through sensors and wearable electronic devices.<sup>4</sup> He felt compelled to document significant occasions and was a statistician of sorts who recorded weather patterns, logged financial costs, and produced hunting records with a great foresight that yielded social documents for future generations. Even more so than his published works, his ego-documents truly offer an accurate portrayal of the hidden Hyde.

It is therefore no surprise that Hyde also kept a journal during the Easter Rising that now gives us an insight into the events of that week through his own eyes. He not only documented factual events in the diary but also critically analyzed the Easter Rising, revealing in a separate reflection piece his thoughts on the harsh explosive violence he observed. Drawing on these two sources, along with a statement Hyde gathered that details Eoin MacNeill’s movements and responsibility during the Easter Rising, this essay will bring the audience on a narrative journey, providing insights into Hyde’s personal ideological standpoint and the events of the significantly life-altering Easter Week.

The Easter 1916 diary contains seventy-nine pages of writing and three pages of drawings and jottings. Its entries begin on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, and proceed to give an account of the events through Hyde’s own eyes, making it one of those rare but valued accounts of the Rising that was given greater emphasis during the 2016 centenary celebrations. It supplements other recent projects and publications with rich primary-source evidence, including Mick O’Farrell’s *1916: What the People Saw* (2013) and the *Letters of 1916* online resource,<sup>5</sup> as well as older accounts such as the diary of Irish

4. Stefan Selke, *Lifelogging: Digital Self-Tracking and Lifelogging—Between Disruptive Technology and Cultural Transformation* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer, 2016), 2.

5. A journal kept during the Easter Rising by Robert Cecil Le Cren, an insurance official who was approximately thirty-eight years old at the time, has recently been published by Mick O’Farrell. In it he, like Hyde, describes the weather: “Friday:

novelist and poet James Stephens (1880–1950), first published in October 1916. Stephens in fact mentions Hyde (referred to as “D. H.”) in his diary, recording on 27 April 1916 an encounter with Hyde in which they discussed the death of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington (1878–1916), the well-known Irish writer and radical activist:

I met D. H. His chief emotion is one of astonishment at the organising powers displayed by the Volunteers. We have exchanged rumours and found that our equipment in this direction is almost identical. He says Sheehy-Skeffington has been killed. That he was arrested in a house wherein arms were found, and was shot out of hand. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Hyde’s entry in his journal for 27 April does not mention James Stephens, but it does offer greater detail on what he had heard about Sheehy-Skeffington’s death:

Murray told that Sheehy-Skeffington had been shot [while] not fighting, apparently. He was posting up notices—quite harmless ones—about a citizens’ committee or something to stop the looting. It was most characteristic of him to be moving about and busying himself in public at such a time. I heard afterwards that the military would hear nothing from him, would not look at his proclamation, but gave him half an hour to get a priest. He refused. They offered him his choice whether he would be shot with his eyes bandaged or open. He tore open his shirt and on his breast were tattooed the words Votes for Women and he bade them shoot him in that spot. I hear the officer who was responsible for this shooting is to be tried for it. It was done inside Portobello Barracks without trial.<sup>7</sup>

Biographer Richard Ellman corroborates the above account when he

This afternoon was comparatively quiet and we sunned ourselves on the Molesworth St. frontage, but now firing is heavy and the conflagration is reaching terrible proportions.” He also writes in a way that suggests that the daily lives of Dubliners were obstructed: “If it were not for this ‘diary of the war,’ I should have no idea of the day of the week. This is the ninth day of ‘holidays’ and sixth of ‘war.’” See Mick O’Farrell, *1916: What the People Saw* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2013), 20, 21. *Letters of 1916* is Ireland’s first public digital-humanities project containing a crowd-sourced collection of letters written around the time of the Easter Rising. See Maynooth University, *Letters of 1916: A Year in the Life*, 2016, <http://letters1916.maynoothuniversity.ie>.

6. James Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin* (Gerrards Cross, UK: Colin Smythe, 2000), 50.

7. MS 17,700 (NLI).

writes that Sheehy-Skeffington “died at the hands of the British . . . when he quixotically tried to dissuade the Dublin poor from looting,” and that he was “arrested while trying to keep the Dublin poor from looting.”<sup>8</sup>

Hyde lived in 1 Earlsfort Place at the time of the Easter Rising. It is not a great surprise that Hyde therefore begins his Easter Week journey only 950 meters from his home, at St. Stephen’s Green. He records that it was a beautiful day and offers insight into a fun-loving, sharp, witty personality through a comment about tires bursting:

It was a beautiful day—very warm; bicycled back along Stephen’s Green and as I turned out of Dawson St. I heard as I thought the tyre of a motor burst loudly in front of the Shelbourne Hotel, and then another burst and then another. Said to myself “there must be great mortality among tyres today.” Bicycled past the Shelbourne and saw large gate of Stephen’s Green closed. Thought it curious to close park on Easter Monday. There was a man inside the gate running with his hat off, discharging shots apparently into the ground, and I saw two or three gardeners walking stolidly away with their tools.<sup>9</sup>

Details about weather, for example, are rarely documented in historical texts on the Easter Rising, and in this regard Hyde’s observations are helpful.<sup>10</sup> Hyde mentions the iconic Shelbourne Hotel, which had been occupied by British soldiers (a contingent under the command of Captain Carl Elliotson took over the Shelbourne Hotel on Tuesday morning), and finds St. Stephen’s Green’s unexpectedly closed.<sup>11</sup>

8. Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 61, 399. Sheehy-Skeffington tried to organize a citizens’ defense force to try to stop looting. See Owen Dudley Edwards and Fergus Pyle, *1916: The Easter Rising* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), 145.

9. MS 17,700 (NLI).

10. Among the exceptions are Captain H. E. de Courcy-Wheeler, who mentions the weather on Easter Monday in his eyewitness account: “It was then one o’clock and the environs of Dublin, bathed in brilliant sunshine and looking their loveliest, were filled to overflowing with excursionists.” See Alex Findlater, *1916 Surrenders: Captain H. E. de Courcy-Wheeler’s Eyewitness Account* (Dún Laoghaire: Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, 2016), 11. See also Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, *The 1916 Irish Rebellion* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 104.

11. Mick O’Farrell, *The 1916 Diaries of an Irish Rebel and a British Soldier* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2014), 15; Mick O’Farrell, *A Walk through Rebel Dublin* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1999), 49; Seosamh Ó Ceallaigh and Donnchadh Mac Niallais, *Éiri Amach 1916* (An Nás: Clódóirí Nás, 2016), 16.

It is likely that Hyde ultimately wished to publish his accounts of what he saw, or at least make them available for the public. Thus one does not get the same sense of unease reading this diary, as it is clearly not intended to be a private one. He repeatedly changes words or crosses phrases out in order to enhance the flow of the diary:

A *young vixen* [struck through] bold-looking girl [above line in red ink] beside him about 16 y[ea]rs old with a bandolier or water bottle or something slung across her shoulder hissed out the same question at me . . . .<sup>12</sup>

Hyde tends to describe events in terms that evoke his other interests, as is evident in his comparisons to hunting when providing a description of the first moment that he heard shots fired during the Rising. After initially believing the shots to be the Irish Volunteers practicing, he describes how he came to understand that this was the beginning of the rebellion. Hyde refers to “pheasants” when describing the shots he heard, a reference that naturally arose from his childhood in Frenchpark where he went hunting frequently with the local people. A comparison between the Easter Rising account and an earlier passage documenting his hunting successes written in 1877 is revealing:

Since the 12th of last month we have shot 2 hares, 1 cock grouse, 47 snipe, 29 green plovers, 8 golden plovers, 4 water hens, 1 wild goose and 4 partridge = total 96 things. During the same time last year we killed only 32 things and during the year before 80 things.<sup>13</sup>

Of the shots fired in 1916, he writes:

All this time I had not the slightest idea that there was anything really serious in the air. Not even when in the garden for half an h[ou]r afterwards. I heard a furious outbreak of firing. It was just like listening to guns firing at pheasants in a hot corner when half a doz[en] shots seem to go off at the same time. This fusillade continued for 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour. I am sure 500 or 600 shots must have been fired, but even still I thought that it was only Volunteers at practice. The shots however began to die away in a manner that suggested a real battle and this it turned out to have been, and only about 300 y[ar]ds away from me.<sup>14</sup>

12. Ibid.

13. Douglas Hyde, Entry for 12 Jan. 1877 (MS G 1037, NLI).

14. MS 17,700 (NLI).

One theme that emerges from the diary is the sense of chaos in the city. Major roads are mentioned in every entry, and this allows the reader to map his movements through the city during the events of Easter Week. The loss of life and danger for civilians is clearly evident from Hyde's account below. The image that he presents of medical students shouting and warning others to go home owing to the dangerousness of the roads is quite powerful:

This we did and turned to the left along the Green to go to Harcourt St., but we had not gone more than 30 yards when 3 medical students hatless and dishevelled with their hands full of lint and bandages shouted to us that it was risking life to go along that side of the Green, that 3 dead bodies had been just brought into their hospital who they gave me to understand had been killed on the street. Needless to say we turned back pretty quick.<sup>15</sup>

His description of events on Wednesday in the same location provides further vivid details:

There was smart firing going on in the Green mostly at the southwest end. The small gate of the Green opposite the Shelburne was open. On the pavement on the other side of the street was lying a dead horse just in front of the branch of the Bank of Ireland. I heard he had been shot on Monday under a cab. The cab was also lying there with the shafts broken. Greatly daring, I ventured a few yards inside the gate of the Green and saw a man lying dead covered with a mantle. A hoarse command given from some place, I could not see where, ordered me back and I returned hastily. We then passed the Shelburne Hotel. Most of the lower windows were broken with bullets. Half a doz[en] bullet holes were to be seen in some. The hall door and vestibule were piled up inside with mattresses and not a soul was in sight. We passed down Kildare St. The Club appeared to be deserted.<sup>16</sup>

The dead horse near St. Stephen's Green is a poignant image. The British army responded to the Volunteers and brought in thousands of reinforcements as well as artillery and a gunboat. The street fighting was intense especially on the routes into the city center. Hyde's inquisitive nature and desire to document events accurately is seen

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

here when he states that he tried to enter the “Green” but was commanded to go back. He sees a dead man covered with a coat, and the description given shows the disruption and destruction that was caused by the Easter Rising. Hyde helps the reader to try to comprehend the danger on the streets of Dublin at this time. He manages to paint a poignant image of the majestic Shelbourne Hotel’s destruction during the fighting, an image which is hard to conjure up for modern-day Dubliners who pass the impressive building daily.

The movements and responsibilities of Eoin MacNeill during the Rising have always been important to scholars, and documents consisting of statements by his brother Charles that were preserved by Hyde provide further information on that subject. MacNeill had been appointed professor of early Irish history in University College Dublin in 1909; F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne write that “of his colleagues in the Celtic faculty, only Douglas Hyde could be regarded as equaling him in his efforts to stimulate interest in the language.” The two were in fact friends, a relationship that arose naturally out of their shared advocacy of Irish and that “was to survive all the vicissitudes of the next half-century.” To be sure, MacNeill took a different stance from Hyde in regard to the politicizing of the Gaelic League in 1915. MacNeill’s opinion shifted later in his life, however, and “he more than once regretted the part he had played in involving his beloved Gaelic League in the political struggle for Irish independence,” believing that Hyde had ultimately been right.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that Hyde desired to set the record straight in his journal and in his Easter reflection in regard to MacNeill’s role in the Easter Rising.

As chief of staff, MacNeill wanted the Irish Volunteers to maintain a purely defensive stance and would only condone a revolution if the British government tried to suppress them or force conscription upon Irish men. When MacNeill found out on Holy Thursday, 20 April 1916, that Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, and Seán Mac Diarmada were intending to have a rising on Easter Sunday, 23 April 1916, he confronted them and declared that he would do all in his power to stop it. By Good Friday, 21 April 1916, Pearse, MacDonagh, and Mac Diarmada managed to persuade MacNeill that

17. F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, *The Scholar Revolutionary: Eoin MacNeill, 1867–1945, and the Making of the New Ireland* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1973), 3, 80, 86.



a rising should take place. After learning that he had been deceived and that documents showing that the British were to suppress the Irish Volunteers had actually been forged, MacNeill publicly countermanded the mobilization instructions for Easter Sunday.<sup>18</sup>

It was against this backdrop that on Tuesday, 25 April 1916, Hyde wrote in detail in his Easter journal about MacNeill and his position in the lead-up to the Rising. Hyde's language shows his distaste for the events. He refers to the leaders of the Irish Volunteers who were disgruntled at the decision not to take any violent action as "hot-headed leaders." Notably, Hyde also composed the text on Friday, 28 April 1916, that is, prior to the surrender by Pearse on 29 April 1916. He therefore did not leave much time for reflection, although the fact that he did evidently edit and proofread this document indicates a deeper reflection upon the events of the week. Hyde wrote:

Sallied out after luncheon with Nuala and Una and met xxxxxx, who told me for the first time, and authoritatively, that this rising had taken place over the head of John Mac Néill and against his express orders and wishes. He told me that The O'Rahilly had stood out with Mac Néill and (I heard later to my great surprise) Bulmer Hobson also. It appeared that John Mac Néill, having heard that they had intended a rising for Easter Sunday, had countered it by an order cancelling all parades of Volunteers on Easter Day. This proclamation of his I read myself in the *Sunday Independent*. Then, if I understood aright, Connolly, who is in command of the Citizen Army, a force wholly independent of the Volunteers, and some others sent round an order purporting to come from headquarters and ordering out the Volunteers for Easter Monday.

This action on the part of Connolly, Pearse, Plunkett, and the rest was probably precipitated by the disclosure and publication of the following secret order sanctioned by the Irish Office foreshadowing wholesale arrests and something like martial law in Dublin. This secret order had been sent to me on Wed., 19th April. It so happened that that very evening I was dining with Mr. Stopford, brother of Mrs. Green the historian, and met Sir Mathew Nathan there. I showed Mr. Stopford the document, but he did not believe in its genuineness and to tell the truth neither did I. Neither of us alluded to it when talking to Sir M. Nathan. In view of the subsequent events it is quite obvious that the document was a genuine one and that

18. Róisín Higgins, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory, and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 5.

the military officials were preparing to meet some such coup as that which was carried out on Monday. I was told that some fifteen thousand copies of this document were at once printed and sent round the country. Another account which I heard later was to the effect that the leaders of the Volunteers after a secret session which lasted for thirty-six h[ou]rs decided not to take any violent action, and that all the wiser- and longer-headed leaders determined that the Volunteers should continue to remain a peaceful body as they had been up to this.

The more hot-headed leaders however were so chagrined at this decision that they called out the Volunteers on their own account and by an order which purported [*sic*] to come from headquarters. I imagine that what may have happened was this, that Connolly called out his own Citizen Army, and that the Countess Markievicz threw in her boy scouts, that Pearse, Clarke, Sean Mac Dermott, Thomas MacDonagh, Eamonn Kent, and Plunkett brought in with them their own followers and all whom they c[oul]d persuade to come. . . . Mac Néill spent £1,000 in motors sent about Ireland to stop the rising. . . . He told me some other queer things, the one which struck me most being that they had appointed an official baker whose name I forget to supply the new Irish Republic with bread.

This account, if it is true, about John Mac Néill's dissociating himself from the extremists would seem to be borne out by what my friend Mac Alister told me a day or two later. This was that he had gone to Mac Néill's house at Rathfarnham about 4 o'clock on Sat. afternoon with some proof sheets of the *Gabhaltas* on which they were jointly working, that he had tea there, and that Mac Néill chatted and smoked and talked literature in the freest and most natural manner possible. He told me that it would have been utterly impossible for Mac Néill if he had had any great decision on his mind to have acted and chatted as easily and interestingly. But as Mac was going away at ab[ou]t 6:15 three young men draw [*sic*] up in a motor car perhaps to inform him of the machinations that were going on behind his back. I was told that as soon as he learned these, he resigned his position. With regard to him, at the time of writing this (Friday 28th April) the wildest rumours are afloat, one being that he was living quietly in his own house as late as Wednesday last, another that he had been shot, a third that his own men had taken him prisoner and threatened to shoot him as a traitor, a fourth being that he had given himself up to the government, and yet a fifth that he had escaped into England, which last seemed to me incredible.<sup>19</sup>

19. MS 17,700 (NLI).

Hyde wrote again about Eoin MacNeill in his Easter reflection.<sup>20</sup> The information given is similar to the information in his Easter journal. For example, he refers in both to the amount of money (£1,000) that MacNeill spent on sending out cars in order to spread the news of the calling off of the rising. “He sent out his own brother to the south, O’Rahilly to Limerick, others to Tyrone and the north in motor cars to call off any attempt to rise, and he spent a thousand pounds, it was told, on motor cars,”<sup>21</sup> he writes in the reflection. In the journal he notes, “Mac Neill spent £1000 in motors sent about Ireland to stop the rising.”<sup>22</sup> Hyde shows a certain dislike toward Pearse in some of the language he uses in his reflection, referring for instance to his misleading of MacNeill as a “studied duplicity.”<sup>23</sup> He writes:

He began to see that he was being overreached and went off directly to Pearse’s house in the middle of the night and got him out of bed. Pearse however was firm. MacNeill spent Thursday and Friday gathering the commanders or committee of the Volunteers and reasoning with them, and at a meeting he had a large majority with him, including all the older and wiser men. This being so, he thought that all was right. On Saturday, however, just as Mac Alister, whose visit to him I have already mentioned, was leaving him, a young chap motored up to his house and told him that he had been leaving sealed despatches from headquarters with the Volunteers in a northern county. He had been sent by Pearse. It struck him somehow that all was not right, and he went to Mac Néill to inquire if these despatches had really been sent from headquarters or not. Mac Néill immediately took alarm. . . . Pearse told him that he would call off the people with whom he had influence, this showing that there was an inner circle inside the Volunteers themselves. Pearse appears to have acted with studied duplicity in this, and his adherents, finding that Bulmer Hobson was working against them and fearing that he might spoil the rising, took him prisoner and held him for two days. Mac Néill thought that all was right, but he had been tricked. He was bicycling into Dublin on Monday when he heard the firing and I believe had to turn back.<sup>24</sup>

20. MS 10343/6 (TCD).

21. Ibid.

22. MS 17,700 (NLI).

23. “He was obliged to countermand orders, having decided that it had been forged by his subordinates.” See Lisa Godson and Joanna Brück, *Making 1916: Material and Visual Culture of the Easter Rising* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 68.

24. MS 10343/6 (TCD).

Hyde also asked Eoin MacNeill's brother Charles for a statement regarding Eoin's movements and responsibility during the Rising. A statement was sent to Hyde, and Hyde stated that he believed "it to be true in every particular."<sup>25</sup> Charles MacNeill's statement reads that "neither John Mac Néill nor the majority of the council or of the executive committee of the Irish Volunteers knew that a rebellion was being planned, or that assistance of any kind was looked for from Germany."<sup>26</sup> Eoin MacNeill's views and the policy that he adopted for the Irish Volunteers is described as follows:

The policy agreed on was that the Volunteers should continue arming and drilling as before, and that an attempt to disarm and suppress them, if made, should be resisted all over the county by the small bodies of Volunteers in their own districts. The council's decision was that the action of the Volunteers should be purely defensive. No project for offensive measures against [the] government was then or at any time approved, nor was any alliance or any form of cooperation with any authorised or even discussed. The policy of the Volunteers was as stated by John Mac Néill in the "Irish Volunteer" newspaper, and no other. There was no secret policy. So far as is known, no member of the committee or of the council, other than the five members who promoted the rebellion, approved either of offensive action or of combination with Germany or any foreign power.<sup>27</sup>

Hyde's own Easter journal and reflection state that Eoin MacNeill knew nothing of the Rising until late on Holy Thursday, 20 April 1916: "Until about midnight between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, John Mac Néill knew nothing of any plan of rebellion. Late on Thursday night the secretary of the Irish Volunteers, Bulmer Hobson, heard from a member of a country Volunteer corps that orders had reached it directing offensive action to be taken on Easter Sunday."<sup>28</sup> In this statement by Charles there is also a statement by a barrister who was counsel for Eoin and was allowed to be present at his subsequent, post-Rising trial.<sup>29</sup> This piece once again highlights that

25. MS 10343/7 (TCD).

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. MS 10343/6 (TCD).

29. This statement was typewritten by Neilí Ní Bhriain for Douglas Hyde. Ní Bhriain was an Irish-language activist and a painter. She was a close friend of Hyde's.

Eoin MacNeill was unaware of the plans for a Rising until 20 April 1916. The language used by the barrister highlights the effort that was made to contrast MacNeill with Pearse and his followers, who are referred to as “conspirators”:

About midnight on Holy Thursday Mac Néill for the first time heard of the campaign. He spent the next two days arguing with the conspirators. Failing to prevail on them, he publicly countermanded their orders in the Sunday press and on Saturday night sent messengers to every part of Ireland, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Kerry, Tyrone, etc. This effectually stopped the rising which had been planned for Sunday afternoon, and on Sunday evening Pearse and MacDonagh informed Mac Néill that they had desisted from the project—Mac Néill believed that they subsequently heard of the vice-regal decision to arrest them next Monday, however that may be, without any intimation to Mac Néill[.] Pearse or Mac Donagh brought out their personal command in Dublin which was under their own orders. On Monday morning the rest of the country, with one or two trifling exceptions, remained obedient to Mac Néill’s countermand. Mac Néill never had any sympathy with a rising, he was in fact anti-German, he was prepared to resist conscription or disarmament. No connection with Germany was proved or indeed attempted to be proved on his part. It was admitted that he had no part in the Rising. He was tried principally for being head of the Volunteers and also for speeches and writing which were much less strong than those of Carson and other Irish politicians.<sup>30</sup>

MacNeill is not the only leader given attention in Hyde’s Easter reflection. Hyde also offers thoughts on MacDonagh, whom he regards as foolish in entering into a doomed revolution.<sup>31</sup> MacDonagh (1878–1916) had been an assistant headmaster at St. Enda’s School (Scoil Éanna) and was appointed assistant lecturer in English at University College Dublin in 1911.<sup>32</sup> Commandant of the 2nd Battalion

I am currently completing research with Liam Mac Mathúna on her relationship with Douglas Hyde.

30. MS 10343/7 (TCD).

31. Brian Hughes, ed., *Eoin Mac Néill: Memoir of a Revolutionary Scholar* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2016), 71.

32. Elaine Sisson, *Pearse’s Patriots: St. Enda’s and the Cult of Boyhood* (Cork: Cork University press, 2004), 1; Conor Mulvagh, *Irish Days, Indian Memories: V.V. Giri and Indian Law Students at University College Dublin, 1913–16* (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2016), 51.

of the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers, which fought in Jacob's biscuit factory, MacDonagh was executed along with Thomas Clarke and Patrick Pearse for his part in the Rising. Hyde shows a respect for MacDonagh and a clear admiration for his literary skills:

I knew MacDonagh pretty well and wondered very much what it was that made him act as he did. He had a fine sense for literature, was a poet of considerable skill, was married to a sister of that man Gifford who wedded Plunkett on the morning of his execution, and was obviously anxious to get on in life. As assistant lecturer in English in University College Dublin, he had about £180 a year and made more by his writings. He was apparently a man of the world, and one of the last I should have thought to have misjudged the chances of a revolution, or have gone into one where there was only a chance in a million of succeeding.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, Hyde finds it difficult, however, to comprehend why a man of such academic and creative ability would favor a rising when the probability of a successful outcome was so low.

Hyde spends some time on Pearse, offering him alternating praise and questions about his motivations. He discusses Pearse's Irish-language skills and states that "he wrote best about children. His *Iosagán* [was] written in good Irish which he learned in Connemara. . . ."<sup>34</sup> Hyde had written down "excellent Irish" but edited this by putting a line through it. Hyde also discusses St. Enda's School, the secondary school for boys that Pearse established in 1908 in Ranelagh. He explains in his reflection that he did not want to be identified with the school as he did not think it would be successful in the end:

He several times asked me to associate myself with the school by joining a committee of management, or something, but I felt convinced that it would come to an untimely end, and though I subscribed money to it, I always avoided identifying myself with it.<sup>35</sup>

Hyde focuses on Pearse's wish for "making history." He subtly informs the reader that Pearse was a man of action, irrespective of the consequences. He indicates that Pearse may not have reflected deeply

33. MS 10343/6 (TCD).

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

enough, so strong was his desire for action and for ensuring that history was made. Pearse longed for physical action. “As the new disciple of Tone and Emmet, he felt his longing for physical action—a joyous, exhilarating action—become a necessity.”<sup>36</sup> Hyde was a reflective, analytical, pragmatic thinker, so it is easy to understand why Hyde would have criticized Pearse’s supposedly rash behavior:

Pearse was always for strong measures in politics. He admired Larkin, and at a Gaelic League meeting after our great march to Smithfield, where to my horror Larkin spoke as a Gaelic Leaguer, he belauded the labour organiser to the skies because he said that “he at least had done something.” Let us do something was Pearse’s ambition. He never apparently stopped to think whether what Larkin had done was good or bad. He was doing something, he was making history. This was enough for Pearse. . . .<sup>37</sup>

The two clashed in regard to the politicization of the Gaelic League, and this is explicitly stated by Hyde, who wishes to inform the reader that a speech given by Pearse was incorrect, and that he (Hyde) did support the Gaelic League’s apolitical approach to the question of Irish nationalism.<sup>38</sup> He reinforces the necessity of this apolitical approach and states that the Gaelic League would never have survived or indeed existed if it had been politicized from the start:

He (Pearse) made a speech afterwards in which he said, “Dr. Hyde never talks (as I was always doing) of the Gaelic League being the white dove of peace, that I do not follow him whenever I can and say that the Gaelic League has come not to bring peace but a sword!”—a poor policy through which to gain adherents. If I had preached it, there would never have been a Gaelic League.

Hyde also observes that Pearse was not averse to the “killing of people” if the desired result was achieved for Irish nationalism; he

36. Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (Swords, Co. Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1990), 176.

37. MS 10343/6 (TCD).

38. “On another occasion I bought Mme Sante Marie Perrin, the charming daughter of René Bazin, with her husband to a fête at Pearse’s school. Pearse had a supper for about 70 or 80 people. He made a speech afterwards. . . .” See *ibid.*

knew that Pearse was where he most wanted to be when leading the rebellion.<sup>39</sup>

One last insight into Hyde comes in his responses to the executions of the 1916 leaders. In some ways his writing showcases the deeply felt emotions that were evoked among the Irish people but were not immediately expressed because of the destruction, violence, and disruption of people's daily lives. These emotions began to manifest themselves when a heroic portrayal of the men who had been shot was publicized in the media.<sup>40</sup> Hyde's account highlights some of the details about the executions that resonated with him and presumably the larger Irish public:

The men who were executed by court martial bore themselves very bravely. All agree in saying this. One English officer on seeing how they went to their deaths said he would sooner have been born an Irishman than a native of any other country. Joseph Plunkett, who had most romantically been married to Miss Gifford early that very morning, went to his place to be shot whistling "A Nation Once Again." When Colbert—I never knew him—was having a white cloth pinned on his coat to show where the heart was for the soldiers to fire at, he remarked: "It's no use marking my heart, it's far away from here at this moment." Some of the soldiers who shot Connolly asked him to say a prayer for them. "I'll say a prayer," said Connolly, "for all brave men who do their duty." When Major MacBride was being shot, he refused to let his eyes be bandaged. "I've been looking into rifle barrels half my life," said he, "and I'm not afraid of them." Pearse wrote a most pathetic letter to his mother and a poem on the eve of his death. Mr. Massingham, the editor of the *Nation*, must have heard some of these stories, for he wrote of "the faultless bearing of the Sinn Féiners in their deaths."<sup>41</sup>

Hyde concludes, "They bore themselves stoically as men who had hazarded and lost and were prepared to pay the penalty. That, I think, was the saddest sight of all that I had seen during these terrible

39. Ibid. Hyde states, "I often heard him say that he did not shrink from blood-letting and that the killing of people in this effete age would have been the most excellent tonic effect on the body politic, or words to that effect. . . . Hence, when I learned that Pearse was at the head of the rebellion, I felt he was in his rightful place."

40. See Risteárd Ó Glaisne, *De Bhunadh Protastúnach nó Rian Chonradh na Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath: Carbad, 2000), 232.

41. MS 10343/6 (TCD).



days.”<sup>42</sup> Hyde’s 1916 Easter journal, his reflection writings, and the statement he gathered from Charles MacNeill show Hyde’s desire for the truth and his understanding of the need to leave firsthand accounts that would be a vital source to future generations about one of Ireland’s most significant historical events. It is important that more research be conducted on Douglas Hyde so that a clearer, more vivid picture of the workings of Ireland’s first president is available for the centenary commemoration of his 1938 inauguration. The ego-documents available to scholars today help us to understand the man who was, in the words of his biographers, “the maker of modern Ireland.” These journals provide a unique insight into Hyde, including his holistic thinking regarding Irish nationalism, the importance of culture in defining a society, and in particular his advocacy of a non-combatant form of nationalism. His close association with the leaders of the Rising provides a unique insight into the mentality and *modus operandi* of this group. While a staunch supporter of Irish culture and nationalism, he remained steadfast in his opposition to violent action. He was an academic of high intellectual caliber who could rise above innate feelings or egotism and who presented a vision of Ireland that married well with his subsequent position as president of Ireland.

42. Findlater, *1916 Surrenders*, 19.