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**Book review of The 1916 Irish Rebellion by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada
with foreword by Mary McAleese
Breen, P.**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in National Identities, NO JOURNAL CITATION. The final definitive version is available online:
UNKNOWN DOI

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The 1916 Irish Rebellion by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada with foreword by Mary McAleese – Dr Paul Breen, University of Westminster.

This timely work, published by Cork University Press, offers a powerful illustration of how the 1916 Easter Rising served as the focal point for a reconstruction of Irish identity that then became crystallized on all sides and defined the decades and possibly century which followed. Even the title itself, *'The 1916 Irish Rebellion'* lends strength to the argument that the dramatic events of that year in Irish history are not limited to a single weekend in Dublin. Another rising took place in the months and years before the violence that engulfed the city's General Post Office and the streets around it. This was the rising of nationalist consciousness in Ireland and Britain at a time when such sentiments had similarly ignited the root causes of war in wider Europe.

Author Bríona Nic Dhiarmada has divided her narrative account into three parts and manages to weave a series of personal stories into the broader fabric of history, as she moves from contextualisation of the Rising to its aftermath. This gives the reader a sense of making a journey not just through the events of the time, but of the great sweep of history before and after the Rising. Similarly too, the author manages to situate this in the broader European and global context from which the Irish and British situation can never be isolated or detached.

Documents and images from the time period further add to the authenticity of the journey that is not always purely chronological or presented in binary fashion. This is a book that does not portray Irish history in stark black and white terms. Rather it gives mention to the various players within the broader historical context, ranging from the Unionists in the North East of the island to those who were influential on the far side of the Atlantic. In the United States, *The New York Times* carried front page coverage of events in Dublin for fourteen consecutive days between April 25th and May 8th 1916. Such details about the international dimension are often overlooked in accounts of the significance of the Rising, and it is this positioning of the events in an international, rather than purely domestic, context that is the unique feature of this extensive work. Some areas could have been explored further such as the manner in which nationalism, in the aftermath of the Rising, usurped the more socialist ideals of James Connolly and those in the Irish Citizen Army.

Yet that would be a divergence from the main focus because this book is very much about what actually happened, how that was reported, and how it was received. As such this narrative could have been quite a depressing work, particularly in the aftermath of the Rising and the execution of the leaders. However Bríona Nic Dhiarmada manages to translate this tragedy into the laying of foundations for the establishment of the modern Irish state, and also paradoxically the momentum for eventual peace between Britain and southern Ireland. Added to that she ties this pivotal Irish event into the gradual unravelling of Empire throughout other parts of the world.

Thus on the whole this book makes a positive contribution to the literature of the 1916 Rising and of Irish history in general. It will have an appeal for not just an

academic audience but also the general public because of the manner in which it has been narrated. Teachers of history may also find it to be a very useful means of educating students about the events and the context of the 1916 Rising, particularly with the bonus of a link to a three part TV documentary. At around two hundred pages in length, it is also no mean feat on the author's part to keep the reader engaged even when the story seems to turn dark towards the end.

Thankfully, as highlighted at the outset, the shared history of Britain and Ireland has taken on a brighter form in recent times, as exemplified by the visit of Queen Elizabeth the Second to Ireland in June 2011. That, as this book shows, was a whole hundred years since George V came to Dublin. A great deal happened in the time between these two momentous events and Bríona Nic Dhiarmada has done well to give us a powerful sense of how the 1916 Rising played such a pivotal role not just in the context of a few short weeks but in a whole century of what came after the fires on the streets of Dublin had smouldered out.

Perhaps it is only now that those crystallized identities that emerged in the years surrounding 1916 are starting to soften and take on new forms that are less binary and nationalistic at a time when once again the shadow of wider Europe lies on the horizon of affairs between Britain and Ireland.

The 1916 Irish Rebellion by Bríona Nic Dhiarmada with foreword by Mary McAleese is published by Cork University Press.