



The Young Rebels

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Morgan Llywelyn answers the most common questions about her novel

Q: What inspired you to write *The Young Rebels*?

A: In 1993 a publisher in New York asked me to write a historical novel about the Easter Rising. Titled *1916*, this book became a bestseller. While doing the research for it, I had discovered the St Enda's boys who followed their beloved headmaster to the GPO on Easter Monday. The incident haunted me long after my novel was finished. When The O'Brien Press asked me for a 1916 book for young adults, I had a chance to tell their story in detail.

Q: Was John Joe a real boy?

A: No, John Joe and Roger are fictional. Most of their classmates, including the Larkin boys, were real. As were most of the adults in the book.

Q: How do you create fictional characters?

A: Before beginning to write, I live with them in my head, sometimes for many weeks. I have to decide what they look like, how they talk, how they think, their likes and dislikes, who their families are and the backgrounds that shaped them. This is a major part of the creative process. Much of this will not go into the story but is important to develop the character. By the time I actually put the person on paper, he or she is totally real to me. I would recognise them in the street.

Q: How do you know so much about Patrick Pearse?

A: I got to know him by reading every book or article he ever wrote. The man is revealed in his words. Because he was on 'the losing side' after the Rising, his enemies were free to tell lies about him, some of which are still repeated. However, many of his students adored him. They knew he had done everything he could to bring out the best in them. If he had lived to become our first minister of education, we would live in a very different Ireland today.

Q: Was St Enda's a real school?

A: It was. The school eventually closed in 1935 and was bequeathed to the nation. Today it is open as a museum. You may visit this beautiful building in Rathfarnham, Dublin, and walk through the magnificent parklands Pearse maintained for the children of Ireland. The atmosphere is extraordinary.

Q: If John Joe is fictional, who is the boy in the photograph on the cover of *The Young Rebels*?

A: That is Frank Burke, a student of St Enda's who became its last headmaster in 1923. The talented cover

designer at The O'Brien Press, Emma Byrne, deserves the credit for finding this powerful picture of one of Pearse's students with his dreams in his eyes.

Q: Did it take long to write *The Young Rebels*?

A: Because I had done most of the necessary research while writing *1916*, the actual writing process for *Rebels* took around a year. Most of this was spent getting to know John Joe and his friends.

Q. Do you write by hand, or do you use a computer?

A. I wrote my first three books on a portable manual typewriter, but now I use a laptop. It makes editing so much easier. I do not use the spellchecker, though. Thanks to a good education, I know how to spell.

Q. How do you do research? Do you get your facts from the internet?

A. I never use the internet for serious research. A lot of material on the internet is simply wrong. Either those responsible have not bothered to check their 'facts', or they do not care – or they are just trying to make mischief.

For every book I write, I begin my research with the latest published edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Then I consult my personal library of almost 2,000 books on Ireland and Irish history, both ancient and modern. The books I work from are those accepted by the most respected scholars in the field. I also go to our National Library and the appropriate regional libraries. When possible I use the direct testimony of prime sources; men and women who actually witnessed the events I'm writing about. Research is always at the heart of my work.

Q. Where do you find your inspiration?

A. All around me, in many things, large and small. A living person, a historical incident, a building, a landscape, a piece of music, a painting in a museum, the way the light falls on a certain day, even a casual remark by a stranger can fuel the itch to write.

Q. How do you know when you've finished a book?

A. I write the ending first. That way, I always know where I'm going.