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# The Guns of Easter; A Winter of Spies

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Given the complications of Irish history, it is, perhaps, surprising that so many of the country's children's writers are drawn to its past as a source of inspiration. Part of the attraction may be to explain that past, part to challenge conventional responses to it and, certainly, part to move beneath the abstractions of textbook history to focus on 'ordinary' Irish lives. An ambitious writer such as Whelan responds to all of these challenges, though his primary concern is with the last of them.

Thus, while **The Guns of Easter** is endowed with a strong sense of the conflicting political passions of the seminal year of 1916, it is equally remarkable for its portrayal of a credible and likeable hero, twelve-year-old Jimmy Conway, growing up at a time when his country is experiencing its own uncertain moves towards independence: his dilemma is to resolve a situation where a father has enlisted in the British Army and an uncle is prominent in the Rising. The emphasis in **A Winter of Spies** shifts to Jimmy's sister, Sarah, and her initial enthusiasm for the life of the 'rebel' in the War of Independence of the early 1920s: her dilemma is to maintain her ideals in an adult world of duplicity and double-dealing. These are extremely accomplished novels, neither of which shirks the bloodshed and misery which war inevitably entails.

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