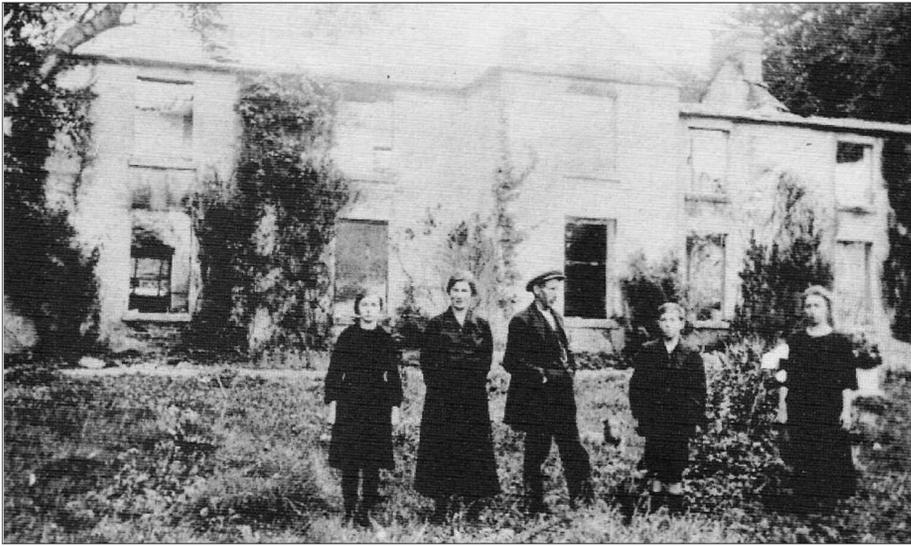


In an exaggerated claim for £1,850 he stated he could graze and fatten 150 cattle on 150 acres of pasture land. This was apparently 'ruined by public trespass.' It was recommended by the value that he be awarded £240 as the maximum number of cattle on that acreage of land was eighty, not the inflated figure of 150 put forward by Pearson.

A glaring untruth by William Pearson to the IGC was the charge that 500 men were involved in the execution. The hyperbole was repeated to a reporter of The Melbourne Argus on their arrival in Australia. Aided by skilled legal advice William Pearson was determined to maximise his perceived victim status. He spun a web of deceit even maintaining one of his daughters was shot by the IRA: 'One of their sisters tried to save them [Richard and Abraham Pearson] and a volley was fired at her and the hair was cut away from her scalp by bullets.'

From August 1921 to July 1923 William Pearson claimed he 'endeavoured' to carry work on his farm where he lived in the outhouses. He alleged he could not work as he was 'prosecuted.' It is questionable if he was physically fit to do farm work. Prior to the execution he did minimal work on his farm owing to ill-health. Indeed his health was so poor he was advised on medical grounds to leave England for a more suitable climate to alleviate his bronchitis. The London-based Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association highlighted his poor physical health and went so far as to question his mental state: '...mentally he is not able to think quickly, and I would ask that due consideration be made by your committee if he is called upon to answer questions.'

During the Civil War he asserted his land was 'used by anyone who cared to drive their cattle upon it.' This may be true as anarchy reined when law and order collapsed. Extreme measures were taken by the Free State in Offaly. On 26 January 1923 three boys Patrick Cunningham, William Conroy and Colum Kelly were officially executed in Birr in a desperate if ultimately futile



The aftermath of the burning of Coolacrease House. L-R: Emily, Matilda, William Pearson, David and Ethel.

the people receiving grants were far wealthier than the British taxpayer contributing to them. The IGC report was not published nor was the recipients and how much they were awarded. Far from struggling financially William Pearson had £6,000 in a bank account which brought in £240 per year before he applied for compensation to the IGC. Fears that the IGC were akin to a gravy train were justified in the case of the Pearsons.

Offaly IRA's War Unsullied by Sectarianism

In an act of further dishonesty David Pearson hinted at a sectarian motive for the execution. As with the allegation of a land grab this was a smoke-screen.

Religious bigotry derived from the Pearsons not Republicans. There is no evidence to suggest the Offaly IRA deliberately stoked religious tension or that Protestants and minority groups were systematically targeted. An examination of RIC County Inspector reports, local and national newspapers have not uncovered evidence of sectarian animosity in Offaly attributable to the IRA.

Infirmary Committee, Tullamore, was against the proposed take over of the infirmary by the County Council and removal of the patients elsewhere.

In Clara, where there was a modest Protestant population, the historian D.B. Quinn argues '...there was no danger to Protestants on the street at night...' F.R. Mountgomery Hitchcock, the Rector of Kinnitty and distinguished historian, categorically denied the presence of any Republican inspired sectarianism where he lived. The south of Ireland, where he lived and worked as a clergyman in the Church of Ireland for twenty five years, was 'absolutely free from sectarian feeling, not to say bitterness. Both Churches are on the friendliest terms.' He had 'never known one case of religious intolerance. We can only live and let live down here.'

At Belfast on 7 June 1920 there was a similar announcement from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: '...nowhere had a hand been raised against one of the isolated buildings nor against a single individual Presbyterian, as such, in the south and west...'

In April 1922 Reverend Neil of Limerick, repeated these sentiments at a Presbyterian meeting in Dublin proclaiming how his coreligionists remained unharmed during the War of Independence: 'We have practically suffered nothing in the South of Ireland...There have been abnormal cases, but the great body of our people have not suffered, and I state here, without fear of contradiction, that no one has suffered as a Presbyterian. There is no religious animus...' The most vigorous denials of sectarianism came from leading Protestants not Republicans.

Offaly Protestants expressed revulsion over sectarianism, emanating from the North not the South. Tullamore Methodists, headed by Reverend William R. Martin issued an appeal published in the Offaly Independent (22 April, 1922) expressing '...their abhorrence of the sectional bitterness manifesting itself in acts of violence in the North of Ireland' while expressing horror at the 'recent horrible reprisals culminating in the killing of children' in Belfast. The Tullamore Methodist appeal concluded: 'We further desire as members of 6 religious minorities in Southern Ireland, to put on record that the South of Ireland has been notably free from sectarian violence...'

Walter Mitchell, a Rahan native and IRA Volunteer of the No. 2 Brigade, was a Protestant and a formidable Republican stalwart. For the remainder of his life he was



Fr Philip Callary, PP Tullamore, condemned the fatal shooting of RIC Sergeant Henry Cronin at Tullamore on 31 October 1920 on 'outside fanatics.'

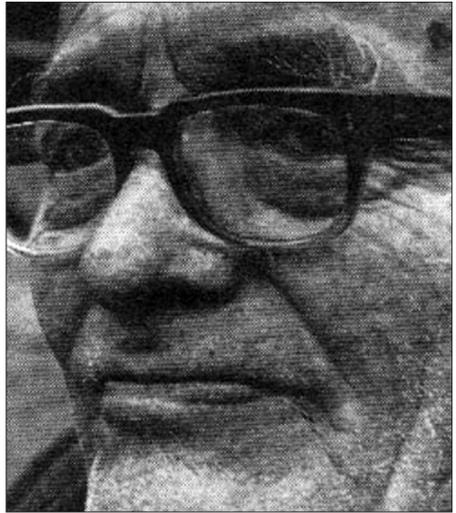
one of the most prominent Republicans in Offaly. Mitchell ran as a Sinn Féin candidate in the 1927 general election in the five seat Laois-Offaly constituency. He polled an impressive 2,939 first preferences coming sixth out of a field of ten candidates.

After the execution, the Pearson family resided at Crinkle Barracks, Birr. The British Army arrived at Coolacrease to protect the livestock. Some unscrupulous locals exploited the Pearsons' troubles to steal property from their farm. An exaggerated report from Dublin Castle alleged that on the night of 12 July 1921 'ten horses, ten cows, one bull, eighty-eight young cattle, fifty-one sheep and lambs, three rams, three fat pigs, one dray and creel, and a set of common harness stolen off Pearson's lands.'

The inaccuracy of this report is indicated in the misspelling of Coolacrease and gave the location in the Tullamore area instead of Birr. The RIC County Inspector's report is

more reliable recording the stolen items as three pigs, a cart and a set of harness. One wonders how diligent the British Army were in protecting the property when this theft occurred on their watch. Two men who stole property were later brought before a Republican Court and ordered to compensate the family.

In October 1921 at the Birr Quarter Sessions William Pearson was awarded £7,800 compensation. Judge Fleming intimated if Pearson agreed to rebuild his house a larger award would have been granted. The family eventually emigrated to Australia. In 1923 their farm was sold to the Irish Land Commission who later divided up the land among local people. Initial preference was granted to British Army ex-soldiers. Copyright ©Philip McConway.



Walter Mitchell, a Protestant, was a formidable Republican stalwart.

attempt to stamp out the level of freelance criminality.

Of the twenty-six different claims of William Pearson to the IGC only twelve were upheld as 'fair'. John Wheatley, a Labour MP, expressed concern about the overly generous payments of the IGC to Irish people who sought to get 'their hands into the pockets of the British Exchequer.' He contended that

In January 1921 a potential ominous development occurred when the Reverend R.S. Craig, Rector, Tullamore, found the words 'IRA Beware Craige [sic] you are doomed by the High St. boys...' Any suggestion that this was motivated by sectarianism was quickly dispelled by the RIC who stressed the incident was political in its origins. Craig, as a member of the County



In a major blunder the IRA failed to capture any arms after the ambush at Kinnitty.

An Colún

What's So Great About Reality Anyway?

By Derek Fanning

I had not heard of the novel 'Bridge to Terabithia' (by Katherine Paterson) until I saw the 2007 film of the same name. 'Terabithia' is a really important film as it deals with the themes of alienation and imagination in children, but these themes are crucial for adults too. Adults can be just as unthinking, conformist and unimaginative. 'Terabithia' reveals to us that which we already knew but which we have to constantly remind ourselves of as it is absolutely vital, which is that we must free our minds, release our imaginations and thereby come into communion with beauty and freedom with God. Freeing our minds in this manner is actually an incredibly practical thing to do but sadly many human beings are not as practical as they like to think they are.

One of my favourite poets is Lord Byron, a man whose name is synonymous with flamboyance and romanticism, and Byron often wrote of the cruciality of devoting ourselves to beautiful things, of devoting ourselves to the realm of imagination. He contrasted this imaginary and aesthetic realm with the realm of reality; he saw reality in a negative light. In one poem he wrote of,

'The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.'

Another writer that I admire and who had many valuable things to say on this theme was Howard Lovecraft who lived from August 1890 to March 1937. Lovecraft was a child prodigy, reciting poetry at the age of two and writing complete poems by six. His grandfather encouraged his reading, providing him with classics such as The Arabian Nights, Bulfinch's Age of Fable and children's versions of The Iliad and The Odyssey. When he became an adult and started writing fiction, he was frequently critical of people, pointing out that they lacked aesthetic and imaginative sensibility. For example, he once commented powerfully that, 'Whilst they strove to strip from life its embroidered robes of myth and to show in naked ugliness the foul thing that is reality ... I sought for beauty alone.'

The plot of 'Bridge to Terabithia' centres on 12-year-old Jess Aarons and 12-year-old Leslie Burke. Jess is a shy, withdrawn elementary school boy living in a financially-struggling, rural family in Virginia, USA. Leslie is the new girl at Jess' school, and she arrives on the school's athletics day. She enters a running event which she wins with ease, despite her classmates calling it a "boys only" race. Jess is, at first, quite sour about this and wants nothing to do with Leslie, but Leslie's persistence in meeting him soon pays off, and soon the two become good friends. Their friendship starts when Leslie offers Jess a piece of gum on the bus, and he accepts.

Jess shares his secret love of drawing with Leslie and together they venture into the woods located beside their homes in the countryside, where they swing across a stream (or 'creek' in American parlance) on a rope and find an abandoned tree house on the other side. Here, Leslie invites Jess to open his mind and release the imaginary and frequently beautiful worlds within him. He agrees to this and the two friends invent a new world they call

Terabithia, which comes to life through their imaginations as they explore together. Jess and Leslie base the menacing creatures of Terabithia on the people (i.e. the bullies) that give them a hard time at school.

The last portion of the film is emotionally overpowering and one movie critic said it would move even the most cynical of people to tears. In its last portion the film brings us through profound suffering before we emerge into a brighter and happier place. What it seems to be saying is that suffering is inevitable and unavoidable in this life, but we do have a choice as to how we respond to that suffering. We can respond to it in an optimistic and stoic frame of mind, or else in a negative, pessimistic way. Jess goes through terrible suffering and he grieves awfully for a long time but eventually he transcends that and the way he transcends it is by embracing even more fervently the beauties within his imaginary worlds. The English 19th Century Poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning will provide more illumination on what I am talking about. In her poem 'Greek Slave' Browning shows that she is on the same side as the Jesses of this world for she urges people to,

'Pierce to the centre
Arts' fiery finger, and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world.
Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure height of beauty against man's wrong!'

Browning claimed that atheists are dullards because they 'cannot guess God's presence out of sight.' Like Jess, she was an enemy of excessive worldliness and materialism as she knew the wrong that it could lead to. The 19th Century was a period of developing industrialisation, of the confident and pragmatic bourgeois; its atmosphere was often antipathetic to dreamers, artists and aesthetes. Jess finds himself in a world which is capitalistic and materialistic. Such atmospheres inevitably lead to the production of outsider-artists, men and women who are dissatisfied with life and yearn for something spiritual, for something beyond. In one striking statement, Jess says 'What's so great about reality anyway?'

Precisely. As I said already, people frequently pride themselves on their great pragmatism but it is often impractical to be too practical (if you follow!) because excessive pragmatism can lead to all sorts of bad things, including what we call nowadays 'dysfunctional' families; it can lead to suffering and anguish.

Browning knew what was the opposite of this suffering and she knew what was really important: 'They say Ideal Beauty cannot enter'

The house of anguish.' I am also presently reading another great book which ties in neatly with all of the preceding. This is 'Against Nature' which was written by a Frenchman called Huysmans in 1884. It was considered a scandalous book and one can see why as it spoke about homosexuality, and as there are still many sexually prudish people in society today its content would still scandalise. However to become all scandalised and moralistic would miss the point of the book which is daydreaming. 'Against Nature' is driven by the phenomenon we call daydreaming and as this experience is common to every human being upon the

planet then we can all relate to this book.

'Against Nature' centres on just one character called Des Esseintes, who is an ailing, languid, and sometimes not-very-nice aristocrat. Des Esseintes pushes his daydreaming to such an extreme that he becomes eccentric which briefly entertains his bourgeois visitors. There is a famous description of a funeral feast to mark a minor personal misfortune: 'The dining-room, draped in black, opened out on to a garden metamorphosed for the occasion, the paths being strewn with charcoal, the ornamental pond filled with black basalt and edged with ink, and the shrubberies replanted with cypresses and pines. The dinner itself was served on a black cloth adorned with baskets of violets and scabious; candelabra shed an eerie green light over the table and tapers flickered in the chandeliers. While a hidden orchestra played funeral marches, the guests were waited on by naked nesses wearing only slippers and stockings in cloth of silver embroidered with tears.'

This is 'Decadence' which was a literary movement in the late 19th Century. One of its famous advocates was our own Oscar Wilde who refers to 'Against Nature' in 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. In the awful and hypocritical trial against Wilde, Huysmans' book was produced as evidence against the defendant. Homophobia, sexual prudery and hypocrisy are still common in 2007 and we have a long way to go before we arrive at an openminded and compassionate attitude to sexuality instead of a judgemental, harsh and moralistic one.

Des Esseintes has a room which is illuminated by a soft, warm pink hue created by lamps shining through Indian Satin. Here he brings his lovers (all women in this instance) and as he makes love to these women in this pink room he appreciates 'the beneficial effect which this tinted atmosphere had in bringing a ruddy flush' to their complexions. The women themselves like this room: 'They loved steeping their nakedness in this warm bath of rosy light and breathing in the aromatic odours given off by the camphor-wood.'

Des Esseintes turns away in distaste from the ugliness, superficiality and stupidity of society and confines himself to an isolated Parisian villa where he expresses his desire for luxury and excess. He feeds his aesthetic appetites with classical literature and art, exotic jewels, rich perfumes and a kaleidoscope of sensual experiences. Des Esseintes, like Baudelaire before him, was a dandy and there is a marvellous and eccentric scene in the first chapter, 'His final caprice had been to fit up a lofty hall in which to receive his tradesmen. They used to troop in and take their place side by side in a row of church stalls; then he would ascend an imposing pulpit and preach them a sermon on dandyism, adjuring his bootmakers and tailors to conform strictly to his encyclicals on matters of cut, and threatening them with pecuniary excommunication if they did not follow to the letter the instructions contained in his monitories and bulls.'

Eventually, like Oscar Wilde in real life, Des Esseintes turns to Roman Catholicism, because a dissatisfaction with life is essentially a spiritual problem and its solution lies in mysticism.



Chathaoirleach of Offaly County Council Cllr Eamon Dooley, Citizen's Information Board Representatives and Mr. Jim Stone Chairperson of Co. Offaly Citizen's Information Service pictured at last weeks Launch of the Disability Advocacy Service in the Tullamore Court Hotel were standing at back L R Tom Kelly Area Manager CIB, John Long Regional Manager CIB and Jim Stone Chairperson Offaly Citizen's Information Service with seated in front L-R Helen Lahert Citizen's Information Board Advocacy and Accessibility Manager, Cllr Eamon Dooley, Chairman Offaly Co. Council and Eileen Fitzgerald Senior Manager Regional Services CIB.