The Social Relevance of Jalna by Mazo de la Roche

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Abstract

The thesis explores some of the developments in the Whiteoak personality in the process of becoming Canadian. The study concentrates on Jalna, the first novel Mazo de la Roche wrote in the series, for this was the beginning point of her own conceptualization of the Whiteoak family, and it includes all the seeds that were to develop in the later volumes. The first chapter traces the loss of the family's original idea of gentility, the most profound aspect of the social consciousness of the Whiteoaks. In this respect, the haughty pretentiousness of the family, particularly evident in Gran Adeline, emerges as nothing more than a sham. Chapter 2 examines the artistic sensibilities of Eden and Finch, and how these are interpreted by the two with respect to the rest of the family. Chapter 3 demonstrates the family's growing stature as an agricultural and rural type. The concept of morality of the individual Whiteoaks, and the judgement of this morality as expressed by the author is dealt with in Chapter 4. The conclusion reiterates these themes in delineating the direction of the family in its process of nationalization as Canadians.

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INTRODUCTION

Response to the Jalna series covers an entire spectrum of opinions. Ranging from unabashed praise to downright condemnatory criticism, reactions to the book have been based on little real scholarly work. Two short book-length studies and two obscure Master's theses have been published on Mazo de la Roche; the two books are general texts, however, and the two theses attempt to deal with the entire sixteen volumes of the saga. The remainder of Jalna criticism takes the form of brief articles in periodicals or short entries in surveys of literary history.

Most of Jalna criticism is characterized by the attempt to discuss the work in relation to its amazing popular success. Popularity has never been an absolute measure of value, and as a result admirers of the Jalna books seek to explain and even to apologize for De la Roche's popularity. George Hendrick, for instance, wrote in his examination of Mazo de la Roche that her audience was "one that much admired ornate style. Her readers were obviously entertained by the novel's appeal to snobbery, its romanticism, its erotic scenes and its titillating incidents."[1] Time magazine reported that De la Roche "is to her world-wide audience what bedroom slippers are to tired feet - cozy, roomy, unashamedly woolly, and beyond artistic criticism."[2] John Watson, reviewing De la Roche's work in Saturday Night, wrote that she "never deviates for a moment from the line

[1] George Hendrick, Mazo de la Roche (New York: Twayne, 1970) p. 61.

[2] "The Whelping of Jalna", Time (Canada) Magazine, 30 November, 1953, p. 104.

laid down by the better-class women's magazines."[3]

Such uncomplimentary statements have earned for De la Roche a reputation for being a "second-rate Galsworthy". More serious-minded criticism has done little to improve this image. Most of the early reaction to Jalna is based upon a discussion of the "realism" of the novel. Oddly enough, the Canadian Forum felt that De la Roche "clings rather too closely to the surface of reality".[4] On the other hand, V.B. Rhodenizer, Jalna's most notorious detractor, claims that De la Roche "falls with a crash as far as writing realistic Canadian fiction is concerned."[5] The University of Toronto Quarterly quietly supports De la Roche's reputed lack of relevance to Canadian life by describing the gentleman farmer, as represented by Renny Whiteoak, as "that rather rare being in Ontario."[6] Again, Lovat Dixon summed up the criticism of realism in an attempt to explain British enthusiasm for the saga:

> The Whiteoak books represent the idealized picture of Canada which all English people have. Life is hardly ever painful at Jalna. It's comfortable, it's exciting, there are domestic dramas going on. I think that Englishmen like to believe that anywhere abroad life goes on as it used to go on in England. We always like to think that life for our parents must have been wonderful and life for us is horrid.

[3] John L. Watson, "Latest Jalna Volume Fills up Gap But is Not a Good Introduction", Saturday Night, 1 March 1949, p. 16.

[4] Jocelyn Moore, "Canadian Writers of Today", Canadian Forum, July 1932, p. 380.

[5] V.B. Rhodenizer, Handbook of Canadian Literature (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers Ltd., 1930), p. 106.

[6] J.R. MacGillivray, "Fiction", University of Toronto Quarterly 10 (April 1941), pp. 293-294.

> Englishmen reading about the Whiteoaks think that life is lived that way now, and we know that life is not lived that way in England - nor in Canada.[7]

That segment of the history of Jalna criticism which maintains that the work is unrealistic seems to be missing a vital point. Often critics have been distracted by De la Roche's style, which Desmond Pacey describes as "too precious for our austere modern tastes"[8]; as a result, these critics have lost sight of the representative nature of the Whiteoak family. Ronald Hambleton's excellent study of actual families whose lives paralleled that of the Whiteoaks only seeks to defend Jalna against those critics who have an inadequate knowledge of the history of Southern Ontario. The true consideration of the realism of the Whiteoaks should lie in an examination of the family - the ideal self-image represents the failure of that ideal, and the subsequent birth of a new sensibility. It is not enough for the critic to accept at face value Adeline's assertion that she is aristocratic and claims a proud family heritage; it would be an equally near-sighted view to accept Renny as a gentleman farmer without first defining the concept, then comparing Renny to that parameter.

In the course of Jalna, the Whiteoaks change. At one point in history, the family had been British, but in all fairness, it would be impossible to call it so now.

7 from Ronald Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna (New York: Hawthorn, 1966), p. 219.

8 Desmond Pacey, "Fiction (1920-1940)", in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965, rev. ed. 1966), p. 672.

After almost three-quarters of a century in Canada, life as farmers in Ontario had given the Whiteoaks a character which is relevant to the Canadian environment. The most dramatic manifestation of such change falls in the area of developing morality, a subject which emerges as the central core of Jalna. Certain moralities must collapse before Pheasant can be accepted as a Whiteoak, before Meggie can forgive Maurice, and before Alayne can fulfill herself as a woman. These crises, far from being merely melodramatic "domestic dramas", involve the most fundamental image the Whiteoaks have of themselves. These crises also involve in some instances the complete reversal of existing moral and aesthetic codes. It is through these changes that the family at Jalna evolves a character that is unique, a character that must be examined in the light of the archetypal structure of Canadian society.

It must be remembered that the Whiteoaks are a fictional family. Nowhere in the novel does the author attempt to convince the reader that they are "average" Canadians. Living on a farm which has little connection with any external influences, the Whiteoaks develop slowly and at their own pace, thereby infuriating critics who would wish them to be more attuned to world events. It is the contention of this thesis that the relative isolation of the Whiteoaks, combined with their slow and subtle evolution as Canadians, is a symbolic representation of immigrant British-Canadians, allegorically describing the growth of Canada.

The only real recognition of the Whiteoaks as socially significant in this respect is to be found in Ronald Hambleton's observation that Jalna and the Balfour

Report, which gave equality to members of the British Commonwealth, were written at the same time, and that the two works share a common spirit. At the close of his book, Hambleton briefly touches on a point of view about the Whiteoak family almost identical to that described in the present thesis. "British influence had come to an end," he writes. "I see Gran Whiteoak as typifying the mother country, irascible, touchy, crippled with gout, her brood about her, selfishly clinging to her domain. Most of her brood expresses the different aspects of Canadian society. Renny, the true heir to British sentiment and tradition; Piers, the Canadian farmer; Augusta, Nicholas and Ernest - a pas de trois dancing the old regime out; Finch, the despised artist, who comes of age in the late twenties."[9]

However, Hambleton does not go further than this brief suggestion. The present thesis intends to explore fully the development of the Whiteoaks and to determine their relevance as a symbolic schematization of Canadian social structure. This aim is pursued by tracing the collapse of gentility and aristocratic pretentions, which are still evident in the eldest Whiteoaks; it proceeds through a description of the rising agricultural life which clashes with the view of the older generation; it then sees the victory of a relevant structure of aesthetic values over that tied too strongly to an anachronistic system; and finally ends in a description of the birth of a more durable morality which completes the picture of the Whiteoak character as a representation in symbolic form of Canadian society over a century of time.

[9] Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna, p. 220.

Jalna was conceived as an artistic unity; it is almost certain that at first Mazo de la Roche had no intention of writing a sequel to it. As a result, it set the tone for the rest of the series, and contains within itself everything essential to the Whiteoak character. It is a justifiable procedure, therefore, to discuss Jalna itself, with little recourse to the remainder of the saga.

Chapter 1: The Decline of the Aristocratic Tradition

It is fairly obvious that the family which produced both Philip and Adeline Whiteoak falls into the same class as other famous families of Nineteenth Century fiction - the British ruling class. Like many families in novels from Jane Austen to Thackeray, the Whiteoaks dominated the Society from which they derived, and enjoyed an exaggerated view of their own importance. Social standing was a perpetual interest to them, and it is not without a small dose of sarcasm that Mazo de la Roche attempts to reassure the reader that "to be sure ... they were above title-seeking."[10]

With the money that Philip had obtained from the sale of his commission and with Adeline's distant nobility (an Earl had been a great grand-uncle) the Whiteoaks present an image of respectability. They chose their living place in Canada with care, and finally settled for "an agreeable little settlement of respectable families"[11] in southern Ontario. De la Roche's satirical treatment of the snobbish motives with which they selected their domicile is reinforced by the image of the Whiteoaks importing their massive inlaid mahogony furniture and cumbersome family portraits;[12] with these they expected to establish the prestige they wished to enjoy in the colony.

Historically, there is good evidence of families of this kind emigrating

[10] Mazo de la Roche, Jalna (London: Pan, 1969), p. 26.

[11] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 24.

[12] Ibid., p. 24.

from Britain to Southern Ontario. Ronald Hambleton's Mazo de la Roche of Jalna[13] details the lives of a number of British immigrants who settled around the town of Clarkson in order to prove the historical legitimacy of the Whiteoak image. Such immigrants would arrive in Canada in the belief that they would be accorded at least as much respect as they had been accustomed to in England. Perhaps they could even expect more, since the colony possessed no nobility with which they would have to compete, and they would therefore be all the more distinguished in their new surroundings.

On moving to Canada, the Whiteoak family brought with them high hopes of gentle, civilized living. Their whole background in India suggested a constant emulation of the British genteel life, a style in which they hoped to continue in Canada.

Even the names De la Roche chose for her characters connote suggestions of grandeur. The family name Whiteoak implies a combination of purity and strength, while the name Court brings to mind all the pomp and ceremony of royalty. Adeline's obsession with her own branch of the family is strongly indicative of her high regard for the old British family traditions.

Individually, the Whiteoaks in Canada in the 1920's maintained much of the colour of English mid-Nineteenth Century class consciousness. Ernest and Nicholas, the two aging uncles, still fancy themselves as living a life of affluent Victorian ease, with no responsibilities. In this respect, they are typical gentlemen

[13] Ronald Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna (New York: Hawthorn, 1966).

of their class. Meg remains a delicate embodiment of Victorian moralism in her sanctimonious attitude towards Maurice Vaughan's indiscretion with a tramp. Renny, the "perfect Court"[14], fulfills the image of the gentleman farmer.

In the tradition of gentility, the Whiteoaks consider a suitable profession to be either in the military life or in the career of a gentleman farmer. Renny has a claim to both. He had fought in the Great War, and afterward he had returned home to manage Jalna. He and Piers virtually run the farm between them.

As Finch and Wakefield are too young to be considered among the adults, the only other member of the family to be examined in this light is Eden. Within the context of a family which ostensibly lives up to its aristocratic ideals, Eden's writing of poetry would seem to hold a position of privilege: the family cannot understand it, for it is of no immediate material use to them. Yet they are awed by the obvious importance Eden attaches to the role, and grudgingly allow him his time and energy.

As an image of a microcosmic genteel world, the Jalna community is made complete by the presence of the Wragges, the "factotum" and his wife. "Rags", as he is called, is a common Cockney with an accent as thick as the porridge his wife cooks; he underlines the status-image of the Whiteoaks perfectly.

However, the view of the Whiteoaks as simply an amusingly vain, though lovable, family of true upper-class caliber would be quite inadequate.

[14] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 167.

There is a sharp edge of discord in the basic interrelations of the different characters of the family, and in their relations to any real measure of aristocratic bearing.

To begin with,aristocratic Adeline, with her formidable longevity of one hundred years, is grotesque. She has nothing of the serene dignity that one would expect in a family head representing courtly grace. It is a nagging and irritating point that Ernest, at the age of seventy, still yearns for financial independance as if he were a young man trying to break the family ties for the first time. There is some difficulty in totally accepting Renny as a gentleman farmer. He has little of the complete authority over the family that would be implicit in Adeline's definition of a "gentleman farmer", for he is too much eclipsed by that senile centigenarian; on the other hand, Renny never displays an interest in his own rating in terms of social class, and his friendship with the unaristocratic Maurice is testament to his freedom from prejudice, As for Eden, it seems anachronistic that, in the 1920's, he pursues the writing of "adroit, delicate, wistful"[15] verse while "the clock seemed to stand still at Jalna."[16] It is obvious from the start that there are seeds of outdated pretentiousness amid the grotesque and heavy furniture that fills the Jalna dining room.

Certainly the Whiteoaks had begun life in Ontario on an auspicious note. Philip had built a church, thereby establishing himself as an upright member

[15] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 42.

[16] Ibid., p. 26.

of the community. The family had proceeded to "make the semblance of an English park in the forest, and to build a house that would overshadow all others in the country."[17] They had sent their children to be educated in England. And, in spite of a family disagreement, it was fortuitous that Augusta had married well.

Yet despite this genteel approach to farm living, it is obvious that by 1924, seventy years after immigrating, the Whiteoak class superiority had ironically become nothing more than a fond memory and an empty façade. They had become an "affectionate, arrogant, high-tempered"[18] family who "squabbled, ate, drank and indulged in their peculiar occupations".[19] They were at best a caricature of the most flamboyant brand of theatrical aristocracy imaginable.

In view of the sanguine dynamism to which the family had brought itself, it must be noted that the Whiteoaks had developed into something alarmingly different from what had been a cherished idea in the minds of the young Philip and Adeline. De la Roche's trick of carefully describing the original pretentions of the Whiteoaks as they left India clouds any immediate recognition of the change that has taken place during the intervening years. In fact, the reader must provide most of the ironic comment suggested in the picture.

The house itself, described as born "in a burst of romantic feeling"[20]

17 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 24.

18 Ibid., p. 89.

19 Ibid., p. 29.

20 Ibid., p. 25.

had become an unwieldy, grotesque structure. The dining room, a monumental symbol of aristocratic degeneration, is described as

> ... full of heavy furniture that would have depressed a weaker family. The sideboard, the cabinets towered toward the ceiling. Heavy cornices glowered from above. Inside shutters and long curtains of yellow velours, caught back by cable-like cords, with tassels at the ends shaped like the wooden human figures in a Noah's ark, seemed definitely to shut out the rest of the world from the world of the Whiteoaks.[21]

The dreamlike description of the house borders on the nightmarish. And out of the womb of Jalna emerged the Whiteoaks, too visceral to be in any way genteel.

Grandmother Adeline had been what any man of Philip's military station would have wanted in a wife. Together they had presented "the handsomest, most brilliant couple in the station, a couple who had "wit, elegance and more money than any others of their youth and military station in Jalna."[22] But compared to the figure she cuts as a still roaring dowager of ninety-nine years, it is reasonable to suspect that there is a strain of anti-snob sarcasm in De la Roche's remark that they had left India because they were tired of "trying to please stupid and choleric superiors and of entertaining a narrow, gossipping, middle-class set of people."[23]

Adeline had evolved into a female battle-axe. She dominates the family with the ruthless power only the aged can muster and enjoy. "Let me flog

[21] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 21.

[22] Ibid., p. 22.

[23] Ibid., p. 22.

the boy", she bellows in trying to punish Wakefield for a misdemeanor. "I've flogged boys before now. I've flogged Augusta. Haven't I, Augusta? Get me my stick!"[24] Or at Piers, "I hit the young whelp a good crack on the head! ... I drew the blood!"[25]

This orgiastic preoccupation with the thrill of physical violence is rather out of keeping with the ideal of what Renny calls the Whiteoak motto: "Men must work and women must weep."[26] Adeline continually slurps her food at the dinner table with a lack of control not entirely due to age, stinks of peppermint and crêpe, and yells like an ogre: "I want my dinner ... Chicken. I smell chicken. And cauliflower. I must have the pope's nose and plenty of bread sauce."[27] The crudity of her reference to the "pope's nose" is only compounded by the description of the dinner table as a pagan sacrifice: "Meg already stood at one end of[the table], surveying its great damask expanse as some high priestess might survey the sacrificial altar."[28] Adeline approaches, "snuffing the good smell of the roast with the excitement of an old warhorse smelling blood."[29] The sacrifice, of course, is under the aegis of Adeline Court. And not only is the choice part of the dinner

[24] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 42.

[25] Ibid., p. 80.

[26] Ibid., p. 233.

[27] Ibid., p. 122.

[28] Ibid., p. 122.

[29] Ibid., p. 122.

to be served up to her, but in a sense, the rest of the family is sacrificed at the altar of her tyrannical authority.

Literally, Adeline holds court at the dinner table with her family. Each of the Whiteoaks is expected to play a specific role. As young princelings, the younger members scuffle: Wakefield is expected to whine and take a poke at Finch, and Piers to cuff Wake for it. Eden plays the court fop, disdainfully looking down his nose at the activities of his younger brothers. Meg, a lady-in-waiting, eats nothing and is ready to serve everyone. Nicholas and Ernest pander to Adeline's sweet tooth like fawning and obsequious courtiers. Renny, the majordomo, discusses horses and administrative affairs with Piers. In a parody of courtly ritual, each character must conform to Adeline's expectations. She, with great relish, acts like a barbarous queen at a royal orgy.

This boisterous tyranny also governs the weekly procession to church. Like so many stray sheep, the Whiteoaks are herded into the phaeton and into the automobile, only to be presented to the parish as a parade, "moving in a slow procession, rather like courtiers behind an ancient queen."[30]

In a marvelous example of regal and absentminded condescension, Adeline benignly greets the misses Lacey on the church steps:

[30] De La Roche, Jalna, p. 165.

"How's your father, girls?"
The 'girls', who were sixty-four and sixty-five, exclaimed simultaneously: "Still bedridden, dear Mrs. Whiteoak, but so bright!"
"No right to be bedridden. He's only ninety. How's your mother?"
"Ah, dear Mrs. Whiteoak, Mamma has been dead nine years!" cried the sisters in unison.
"God bless me, I forgot! I'm sorry."[31]

What in fact has happened is that the Whiteoaks had developed into a matriarchy. Philip had been dead for some time before the beginning of the novel, and it is now obvious who presides in his place. The constant reassurance that Renny is the "head of the house"[32] is perhaps feudal in its connotations, rather than patriarchal. Nicholas' jibing that Renny has "the instincts of the patriarch"[33] seems to hint that Renny, under Adeline's rule, cannot fully exercise that faculty. Before Adeline, all male Whiteoaks are for the nonce castrated of their power. Renny could run the family fully only after Adeline's death. By capitulating to the whims of their mother, Ernest and Nicholas have lost any masculinity they might have had. Eden and Piers can never be possessive lovers to their wives, because the real source of power does not reside here in the masculine principle. This power haunts the Whiteoaks, and it seems to mock them in the form of the moosehead in the Vaughan household when Piers and Renny retrieve Pheasant after her seduction by Eden: "The two struggled beneath the sinister head of the great moose, under the massive antlers of which their manhood seemed weak and futile."[34]

31 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 165.

32 Ibid., p. 27.

33 Ibid., p. 42.

34 Ibid., p. 250.

The patriarchal and genteel wellsprings of the Courts and Whiteoaks, which heavily carry the features of the ideal Victorian family, are in a shambles. Renny has been reduced in all practical terms to the level of a paternal figure-head, in effect having all the responsibility but no real authority over the family. He is kept from the real source of power, which resides in Adeline and in her fortune, while the inheritor of this fortune remains a closed secret.

The most glaring example of Adeline's crass behaviour is her greed. She lusts after food, vengeance, money and status. That she can keep pace at dinner with the heartiest eater is hardly normal for a ninety-nine-year-old woman. Her orgies for punishment directed against Piers and Wakefield are as grotesque as her cupidity for Alayne's imagined wealth. After listening to her family speculating on Alayne's money, Adeline insisted that they"send her love"[35] to a girl she had never met. "The family at Jalna, always credulous, with imaginations easily stirred, snatched with avidity at the bare suggestion of means."[36] In a descending crescendo of descriptive phrases, characteristic of De la Roche's leitmotif progressions, Alayne's bankroll seems to mark her at first as an "heiress", then as"a rich American girl" and finally as "a help, not a handicap".[37] Piers accuses Eden of the worry that the family might wish to "borrow a few bucks"

[35] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 100.

[36] Ibid., p. 99.

[37] Ibid., p. 99.

from her, and Nicholas finally scrapes the bottom of the adjectival barrel by describing the girl as having "lots of brass".[38] With each approach to the discovery of Alayne's virtual pennilessness, it becomes obvious that the Whiteoak greed for money far outstrips any image they would like to have of themselves.

Adeline's rather circuitous and indirect claim to social status (through the inheritance of money from the maiden daughter of a great-grand-uncle who was an Earl) is a fragile claim to grandeur indeed. She had built up the pretention by lording it over her late husband, and she suffered a mild setback when Augusta's husband fell heir to a baronetcy "through the sudden deaths of an uncle and a cousin".[39] "To be sure," De la Roche relates with humorous but undisguised satire, "the Courts were a far more important family than the Buckleys; they were above title-seeking."[40] The point is ironic, for Adeline's son-in-law Edwin Buckley was considered to be "an insignificant young Englishman" until he "surprised them all by inheriting a baronetcy".[41] The impressiveness of Augusta on her arrival at the Jalna estate forces Adeline into a compromise: "Even old Mrs. Whiteoak held her in some awe, though behind her back she made

[38] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 99.

[39] Ibid., p. 26.

[40] Ibid., p. 26.

[41] Ibid., p. 26.

derisive and ribald remarks about her."[42] However, "to her face she gave a grudging respect."[43]

It seems unlikely that Adeline wishes to pass on the vague idea of the impressiveness of the Courts to any of her own progeny. Renny, the "perfect Court", can never really aspire to that honour so long as Adeline's hand rocks the cradle of the family. Only Augusta poses a real threat to Gran's fragile pretentions.

When Augusta finally arrives, she presents an ineffable picture of aristocratic grandeur. Her unruffled dignity is like "a table set for an elaborate banquet at which the guests would never arrive."[44] The image of the table as a measure of aristocratic pretentions is all the more significant when considered beside the descriptions of Adeline's own barbaric feasts, extending all the way down to the "heathenish"[45] teacosy. Holding her stature like a relic from the Victorian age, Augusta remains marvellously aloof and detached, and is described with the strongest dignity.

> That air of never having recovered from some deep offense ... was perhaps suggested by the poise of her head, which always seemed to be drawn back as though in recoil. She had strongly arched eyebrows, dark eyes, become somewhat glassy from age, the Court nose in a modified form, and a mouth that nothing could startle from its lines of complacent composure ... Since

[42] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 206.

[43] Ibid., p. 207.

[44] Ibid., p. 206.

[45] Ibid., p. 145.

> it was her fate to have been born in a colony, she was glad it had been India and not Canada. She thought of herself as absolutely English, refuting as an unhappy accident her mother's Irish birth.[46]

Adeline's dog-in-the manger attitude to Augusta's acquired nobility obviously cannot ruffle her daughter. Even though Augusta's title is not without its share of pretentions, it is proved to be of a more durable nature, since she stolidly refuses to share in any one of the family's highly opinionated and petty brawls. She quietly and strongly approves of Finch's music lessons, of Alayne, and of Piers' marriage to Pheasant. She is conspicuous by her absence from any of the less genteel family squabbles, and also has the good grace not to condemn any one too harshly. In effect, Augusta presents the family with a truer version of aristocratic bearing, providing the reader with a touchstone for displaying the Whiteoaks' status as colonial transplants. That her own tangential ascent to the rank of Ladyship is not even the most genuine claim to rank merely strengthens the role she plays to the hilt.

Adeline, the matriarch, has transformed the Whiteoaks into something totally abstracted from the mid-Nineteenth Century Victorian family. To a greater or lesser degree, all Whiteoaks bear the characteristic of a changing sensibility. In spite of their British education, Nicholas and Ernest have turned into what some Russian writers (notably Turgenev and Pushkin) have called

[46] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 206.

"superfluous men". Neither performs any useful function in the family whatsoever. Ernest's research work on Shakespeare seems like nothing more than a family joke gone stale. Aside from slavishly attending to the wants of their mother, Nicholas and Ernest spend most of their time in quietly tormenting each other, an occupation completely ignored by the rest of the family. Their nonexistent impact on the family is the embodiment of half-remembered masculinity and unrealized dreams. At one point Nicholas muses on past affairs with women, "Ashes without a spark. I can't even remember their names. Did I ever kiss anyone in passion? I can't recall the sensation."[47]

As the two wane into the sunset of their dreams, they are closely followed by Meggie, who in her parody of prudery is almost as pointless an individual as each of her uncles. Her failure as a woman is demonstrated in two ways. As a maternal figure, she is completely eclipsed by Adeline's matriarchal authority, and in her own life, she fails to forgive her wayward lover by becoming Mrs. Vaughan. As an illustration, she disappoints the family in her inability to satisfy their bloodthirsty demands by failing to administer adequately severe corporal punishment to Wakefield for his theft of cartridges.

Meg seems never to have resolved the dichotomy between the concepts of gentility and prudery, and as a result she has lost all of her purpose in life by not forgiving Maurice Vaughan's indiscretion with a country wench.

[47] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 205.

In her other-worldly attitude toward Maurice, she sees herself as the saccharine reincarnation of the wronged Romantic heroine. In believing such action was "proper for the heroine in such a tragedy",[48] Meg refuses to marry Maurice; she is perhaps equally influenced by the vulgar fact that the partner of Maurice's peccadillo had been "a chapped country wench"[49], as well as by the fact that he had been unfaithful to her. That Meg had decided not to marry him is comprehensible, but that she chose not to consider any other man thereafter is a definite step into melodrama. As a result, Meg is an anachronism, a Victorian well after her time. Even Augusta, despite her grandeur, calls her a "narrow-minded Victorian".[50]

Renny, on the other hand, happily combines all of the Whiteoak aspirations to gentility with the new and emergent character of the long-settled immigrant. Like his sister, he had never been sent to a British school, but unlike her, his head had never been filled with Romantic idealism. Like his grandfather Philip, he had been a soldier,and afterwards had turned his attentions to the soil.

But Renny is neither a gentleman farmer in the strict sense of the word, nor a soldier of the now-dead glorious British Empire. As a farmer, he is

48 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 61.

49 Ibid., p. 62.

50 Ibid., p. 265.

more interested in horse-trading and in dealing in pigs than in the possible dignity of a gentlemanly existence. If Renny had truly aspired to that role, he would have hired help to work the farm for him.

Renny's ability to satisfy Adeline's dreams of a profession, all the while combining those dreams with a strong dose of "horse sense", or rational pragmatism, marks him as unique among the Whiteoaks. Adeline, of course, attributes to him all the Court virtues, and the rest of the family accords him respect:

> This was his family. His tribe. He was the head of his family. Chieftain of his tribe. He took a very primitive, direct and simple pleasure in lording it over them, caring for them, being badgered, harried and importuned by them. They were all of them dependant on him except Gran, and she was dependant too, for she would have died away from Jalna. And beside the fact that he provided for them, he had the inherent quality of the Chieftain. They expected him to lay down the law; they harried him till he did.[51]

But this description is only partially true. His true power only emerges during the crisis of Piers' marriage to Pheasant, which incidentally brings out the worst in Adeline. As "he turned his lean red face from one to the other of them now, and prepared to lay down the law",[52] the parrot screams for cake, and Renny's only profundity is "For God's sake, somebody give him cake".[53] The family explodes into an uproar.

[51] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 80.

[52] Ibid., p. 80.

[53] Ibid., p. 80.

Renny's mere presence is inadequate to stifle the squall. He must bellow at them to get their attention. Again, in another of De la Roche's wily tricks of revealing the whole truth by escalation, Renny emerges in his real stature:

> In truth, Renny was more often the organ of the family than its head. They knew beforehand what he would say in a crisis, and they excited, harried and goaded him till he said it with great passion. Then with apparent good grace, they succumbed to his will.[54]

The voice of Renny's reason cannot speak until the family has exhausted itself in squabbling with all their Victorian pretentions about Pheasant's "bad, loose blood".[55] In bending to Renny's judgement only as a last resort, the family demonstrates its need to pay initial and token respect to the moral imperative, realizing that in the long run only practical considerations resolve the issue.

In siding with Maurice in a plea to Meg to reconsider her position, and in standing up for the belabored Piers and Pheasant, Renny demonstrates a liberalism and a morality far in advance of the prudish outbursts of the family. It comes as an ironic vindication later when Augusta supports the defense of Pheasant, explicitly labelling herself a "modern"[56] in doing so.

The other characters of Jalna re-enact their respective moments of aristocratic vainglory. Upon his return to Jalna, Piers steps out of character by

[54] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 83.

[55] Ibid., p. 223.

[56] Ibid., p. 265.

expressing a disgust at Wakefield's fishy smell. Finch, trying to impress Alayne, dresses up in his Sunday best and succeeds only in bringing jeers upon himself. Wakefield, even at his young age, shows tendencies toward becoming the classical British school brat.

But by far the most interesting characters are those of Eden and Alayne. In these two, the clash of irreconcilable sensibilities is strongly evident. In Eden's mind, Alayne is an educated, sophisticated city girl who is sensitive to his verse. He makes the immediate inference that she should therefore be sensitive to him. Not realizing that most of his poetry and posing is a sham, Alayne falls in love with the young man, attracted by his poetic personality. After a whirlwind engagement and a quick marriage, Eden brings Alayne home with the highest hopes for their happiness.

But once at home, Eden finds his attention wandering away from his writing desk, toward Pheasant. Like Nicholas and Ernest, Eden finds that, after he has broken his leg, he likes being the pinnacle of uselessness: "he had a feeling of exquisite irresponsibility and irrelevance."[57] He accepts this interval in his life, says De la Roche, as a gift from the gods. It subsequently becomes obvious that whatever it was that had attracted Alayne to Eden had vanished when Eden stopped writing. From that point on, Alayne was destined for a life far more complex than that of a good, genteel and docile housewife. Eden was

[57] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 220.

no longer the Eden who had beguiled her at the publisher's office when he had slipped into his Oxford accent.

The society from which Alayne had sprung could best be described as polite. Although some of the passages describing Alayne's relationship to her parents are heavy with sentimentalism, it is clear that her sensibility is fragile. Her two aunts exist in a "brittle atmosphere"[58] and should have provided the thick-headed Eden with some suspicion that her totally different background would cause her some discomfort among the "high-coloured and flamboyant"[59] Whiteoaks. Almost immediately upon her arrival at Jalna, Alayne is disgusted with the noise and clamour of the family; moreover, there is no recourse in Eden, for he was back under the terrible power of Adeline. Gran's presence, so powerful, "made even Eden seem suddenly remote."[60] On the evening of her arrival at Jalna, Alayne makes the observation to herself that "every conversation in this family seemed to be punctuated by remarks about that dreadful old woman."[61]

Alayne, as objective a measure of external response to the Whiteoaks as one could possibly hope for in the novel, is the first to condemn Gran in such

58 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 101.

59 Ibid., p. 101.

60 Ibid., p. 114.

61 Ibid., p. 121.

harsh words. She is clearly offended and frightened by the bizarre and boisterous family.

Alayne has one more important role to play as an intruder into the family. For the others, she represents a wealthy addition to the family and she manages unwittingly to lead them astray about her supposed fortune until somewhat later. When it comes to light that she really has very little money of her own, the family is upset. Meg sums it up by blurting out, "From the day Eden brought her here I was afraid ... afraid of something in her. Something fatal and dangerous. First she wormed her way - ".[62] This is the first time that Meg gives any indication of feeling so strongly about Alayne, and her bitterness speaks all the more when it is added to her confirmed suspicions about Renny and Alayne.

Although Alayne's financial position is not clear to the family at the outset, it is ironic that the lower-class servant Rags is the one to recognize Alayne's true pecuniary qualifications instantly. All that the menial requires is one look at her and Eden to realize: "Ow, you may fool the family,young man, but you can't fool me. You 'aven't married a heiress. And 'ow we're going to put up with another young woman 'ere, Gawd only knows."[63] The sensitivity of the British lower classes to real class superiority is infallible.

[62] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 208.

[63] Ibid., p. 112.

But the gullibility of the Whiteoaks in believing what they wish to believe bathes them in the light of a distinctly ludicrous kind of vulgarity. It is bad enough for the family to be blinded by greed; it becomes worse when the perspicacity lost in this greed manifests itself in a simple Cockney.

Rags' odd position as a measure of Whiteoak myopia is emphasized later when De la Roche describes the kitchen as more central to the family than we might have imagined:

> The immense, low-ceilinged room, with its beamed ceiling and now unused stone fireplace, was heavy with memories of the past, long-gone Christmas dinners, christening feasts, endless roasts and boilings. The weariness, the bickerings, the laughter, the love-making of generations of servant maids and men. All the gossip that had been carried down with the trays, concerning the carryings-on of those who occupied the regions above, had settled in this basement, soaked into every recess. Here lay the very soul of Jalna.[64]

Through this seemingly exaggerated description of the kitchen, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the author's own personal view of the family. In calling it the "soul of Jalna", De la Roche demonstrates an attitude toward the Whiteoaks that is as astutely critical as it is satirical. The clarity of vision placed in the minds of the lower-class servants by De la Roche confirms the judgement of her as a marked democrat with a bias against the transported Anglo-aristocracy of Canada. De la Roche has often been wrongly called an aristocratic snob; but if this were the case, it would be very difficult to explain the tone of the description and the role of the kitchen and its occupants. It would be equally difficult to explain the satirical points made against aristocratic pretentions and the all-forgiving

[64] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 201.

acceptance of Pheasant; or Meggie's abrupt about-face in morals, and all the general moral turbulence that occurs in Jalna which is a sharp critique of Victorian ruling-class rigidities.

As a result, none of the directions in which the family moves is approached with sadness or regret. The basic crudeness of Piers, the harsh realism of a changing morality and the triumph of genuine physical passion, all impossible in the upper-bourgeois ethic, evolve as desirable developments in the course of the novel.

Yet there is no spite toward either the old Victorian Whiteoaks or to the new Whiteoaks, with their drastically changed morality. De la Roche's manner of slowly revealing their out-dated conservatism allows for the development of a deep affection toward their unique and individual personality. As the realization of their foibles becomes more evident, the Whiteoaks keep changing in their Canadian setting into a more acceptable family with an entirely new sensibility. Ultimately, Pheasant is accepted as a Whiteoak, Meg forgives Maurice, and Alayne realizes herself as a woman. These resolutions could not be possible without the breakdown of outmoded Victorian ideals.

The Whiteoaks have therefore developed into a rustic and colonial family which finds the loss of gentility a hard necessity. Their pretentions must not be mistaken for the real aristocratic ideal, but must be interpreted as the last remnants of a dying tradition. The essentially democratic Canadian predisposition

into which they had grown gives the lie to these pretentions of gentility. This theme is always threaded together by De la Roche's gentle satire, as exemplified in the use of Rags as a barometer of class-consciousness.

Naturally, the Whiteoaks could not exist as nobility in any form in Canada; there was no available society, as there had been in England or in India, with which the family could relate in this way. They therefore could not keep their aristocratic sensibilities current. The inevitability of the change to the pragmatic, agriculturist and middle class society of Canada was necessarily marked by a calcification of Victorian ideals, a first step toward their final dissolution.

Chapter 2: The Emergence of a True Artistic Principle

When Mazo de la Roche began Jalna, one of the most imperative demands in fiction was a convincing true-to-life realism. In the early days of Faulkner and Hemingway, critics often built their entire argument around that principle. In the case of Jalna, much damage had been done to De la Roche's reputation by the remarks of some critics that she was not depicting any social reality recognizable in Canada. One of the most prominent detractors was V.B. Rhodenizer, who proclaimed in 1930 that Mazo de la Roche "falls with a crash as far as writing realistic fiction is concerned"; as he saw it, realistic fiction "seeks the typical, the representative, and at its best attains to universality."[65] Rhodenizer's condemnation was echoed in the reply in 1966, when Ronald Hambleton[66] refuted the argument by proving the actual existence of families similar to the Whiteoaks in the region of Clarkson, Ontario, at the turn of the century. It is precisely this valid relation to Canadian history that makes Jalna significant in terms of social relevance.

Perhaps a confusion arose in Rhodenizer's mind over the fact that De la Roche did not write as bluntly as did some of her contemporaries. It is conceivable that realism of vision in her writing was eclipsed by her engaging style, a manner overtly conscious of the British family novel of the Nineteenth Century. But her

[65] V.B. Rhodenizer, Handbook of Canadian Literature, pp. 106-107.

[66] Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna.

stylistically developed gentility, which was used to soften the complex impact of the theme of the novel - the decline of gentility - is used as a contrast to underline her modern views of artistic values.

From the start, it is obvious that De la Roche is conscious of the issue of realism in fiction. She plunges directly into a statement on realism in the first chapter, using the young Wakefield as a fresh point of departure. Wake, discussing a composition assignment with Chalk, the blacksmith, claims that he is at a loss for a subject about which he can write, and Chalk suggests:

> "Why not write about me?"
> Wakefield gave a jeering laugh. "Who'd want to read about you! This comp. stuff has to be read, don't you see? ... You're not the kind of blacksmith to write comp. or even poetry about. You're not beautiful. Mr. Fennel says we should write of beautiful things."
> "Well, I know I ain't beautiful," agreed Chalk reluctantly. "But I ain't as bad as all that."
> "All what?" Wakefield successfully assumed Mr. Fennel's air of schoolmasterish probing.
> "That I can't be writ about."
> "Well, then, Chalk, suppose I was to write down everything I knew about you and hand it to Mr. Fennel for comp. Would you be pleased?"
> "I say I'll be pleased to fire a hammer at you if you don't clear out."[67]

Although the precocious brat seems to have out-talked Chalk, it is obvious that De la Roche considers Wake's view of creative writing as a restrictive hangover of Romantic sentimentalism. It is ironically clear that Chalk's own life would be much more interesting than the idealism demanded of Wakefield's compositions.

[67] De la Roche, Jalna, pp. 12-13.

In this bit of satire of unrealistic fiction, the most interesting comment is Wake's point that composition is writing "about things you're not interested in."[68] It would therefore follow that writing about "beautiful things" is not interesting, while writing about reality is.

This seemingly trivial episode serves two purposes. In the first place, it indicates De la Roche's clear preference for realistic truth in fiction; secondly, it serves as a prelude to the appearance of Eden Whiteoak, one of the prime exponents of sentimental artistic values in Jalna, and to the ultimate development of Finch, the true artist.

Eden's appearance is heralded with good news. He is a poet on the brink of fame: a book of his verse is about to be published in New York. The eldest of the new generation of Whiteoaks, he demonstrates the first signs of an emergent personality in his vocation. The good news of his acceptance is compounded by his decision to write a new series of poems: "I'll go on writing. I may join an expedition into the north this summer. I've an idea for a cycle of poems about the Northland. Not wild, rugged stuff, but delicate, austere."[69]

Although the Whiteoaks would have preferred that Eden had studied law, the boy defiantly stays with his poetry. Laudable as his determination is, these intentions do raise some questions. The family's lack of sympathy for his choice of vocation

[68] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 12.

[69] Ibid., p. 38.

seems to bring out their nascent practicality, as well as the false, effete quality in Eden. When he pompously generalizes - "One should be near one's publisher's"[70] - Piers leaps on this opportunity to parody his rhetoric mercilessly: "Well, it's getting late. One must go back to one's spreading of manure. One's job may be lowly - one regrets that one's job is not writing poetry."[71]

In their pragmatism, the Whiteoaks cannot consider Eden's poetry of any value. In this way, the family represents the practical, anti-art culture of colonial Canada, which has little time for a pursuit which does not render immediate material service. One of the earliest hints of this comes at the beginning of the novel, when De la Roche describes a volume of British Poets as a work "read by no member of the family".[72] Such a disclosure may reflect negatively on Eden; it raises the possibility that he writes in a vacuum, in contrast to the sturdy, pragmatic and more stable development of the Whiteoak family as manifested in Renny and Piers. The Whiteoaks who accept Eden's poetry in varying degrees are questionable in their artistic judgement: Meg, who appreciates Eden's poetry, eventually undergoes a staggering reversal of values at the end of Jalna; Nicholas, supposedly a Shakespearean scholar, never takes an ultimately positive stand in favour of his nephew's work; and Gran is only interested in which cap she would wear should the publisher come for tea.

70 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 30.

71 Ibid., p. 30.

72 Ibid., p. 19.

At first glance, Piers' savage rebuttal to Eden's pompous statement seems to be nothing more than the outburst of a labourer railing against the seemingly easy work of the poet. Certainly, in calling Eden a "good-for-nothing idler - a sponger", [73] Piers considers Eden's lack of desire to do farm work as a sign of laziness, or perhaps weakness of character. However, Piers' take-off on Eden's grammar is also an attack on his brother's artificial artistic pose. As time goes by, more examples of Eden's would-be sophisticated mannerisms become evident.

In New York, with no Whiteoaks to act as foils for his play-acting, Eden speaks to Alayne in an affected accent, deliberately used to impress her. He "caught something of the Oxford intonation of his uncles - saying beautiful and mournful things in a way that would have made Renny wince with shame."[74] It is this phony Eden that wins Alayne, and their relationship as a result begins on the basis of a pretense.

Until Eden goes to New York, he has known only the criticism of his family. He is not prepared for more sophisticated reactions. His first real encounter with worldly critics comes in the form of an affected appreciation from a woman sitting at his side at the banquet celebrating the publication of his book:

[73] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 145.

[74] Ibid., p. 86.

> "Mr. Whiteoak," said the lady in a richly cultivated voice, "I want to tell you how deeply I appreciate your poetry. You show a sensitiveness that is crystal-like in its implications." She fixed him with her clear grey eyes, and added: "And such an acute realization of the poignant transiency of beauty." Having spoken, she conveyed an exquisite silver spoon filled with exquisite clear soup unflinchingly to her lips.[75]

Eden's only reaction is to pray to the Almighty for the presence of his grandmother. Still only really comfortable at home, Eden is incapable of handling such sententious poppycock. This left-handed compliment is later compounded by Rosamund Trent's description of his work as "such a ducky little book".[76] The fact that there is never a passage sincerely praising Eden's poetry leads the reader to believe that his poetry may not merit such a compliment. In any case, these remarks clearly reveal the fin-de-siècle character of his poetry and De la Roche's sense of an exhausted tradition.

But Eden's own romantic flights of fancy reach their dizziest peaks when he embarks on a consideration of what he should look like as a genius. He mugs at himself in a mirror, trying different facial expressions to see which best suits the role of the imagined genius. Eventually, he partially recognizes his own ridiculous pretentions and settles for another cliché: "Perhaps it were better that genius (that word again!) should be encased in a wild-eyed, unkempt person."[77] In another example of

[75] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 89.

[76] Ibid., p. 96.

[77] Ibid., p. 89.

De la Roche's technique of using a descending crescendo of descriptive phrases, Alayne unwittingly cuts Eden down to a puny stature: "He was a young god of the sun, a strong deliverer from her prison of heartbreak; he was a fledgling genius; he was a stammering, sunburned, egotistical young Canadian with not too good an education; he was a blue-eyed, clinging-fingered child; he was a suddenly wooden and undemonstrative young Britisher."[78]

Since no example of Eden's poetry is presented for the reader's examination, the worth of his efforts must be judged by the reactions they evoke. The Whiteoaks categorically reject poetry, perhaps because Eden is straying too far from the gentleman farmer/soldier ideal. The society which accepts Eden's poetry, as personified by the splendid woman at the banquet, gives Eden nothing but hollow encouragement and prosaic banalities. When Eden announces that his intended cycle of poems about the Northland shall be "delicate, austere", it is obvious that Eden's poems are pretentious, for it is inconceivable that such poetry can be written about the Canadian North. After all, Robert Service was already available to De la Roche's readers. It is also interesting to note that four decades later, in 1967, Al Purdy was to publish a successful cycle of poems, which are not delicate in any sense, about the Canadian Northland called North of Summer.[79] Eden's effort, had it been realized with less effete delicacy, would have been a laudable aim indeed forty years earlier.

[78] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 99.

[79] Al Purdy, North of Summer (Toronto: Maclelland & Stewart, 1967).

It is therefore logical that Renny and Piers, the coarse farmers, would be revolted by Eden's mincing attitudes.

For all of Eden's role-playing in New York, he returns to Jalna not as a success, but as a still-tyrannized Whiteoak offspring. Upon the introduction of his bride to the family, he steps back into the position of the bemused observer of Whiteoak antics. Alayne, finding herself in the limelight with Adeline, looks to Eden for moral support, but he has haughtily abstracted himself into "only an expression of tolerant boredom."[80] Alayne finds it difficult to reconcile this callous Eden with the Eden she knew in New York, who was shy and sensitive. Expecting a defense from Eden for the verbal lashing Adeline heaps on Eden's late mother, Alayne is disappointed. His only reaction is a dismissal: "You must not be so sensitive, Alayne. Words like that are a mere caress compared to what Gran can bring out on occasion."[81]

It is a long time before Eden begins to write again. Alayne, mystified by the prodigious strength of the family, leaves Eden to his own devices, lest her encouragement disrupt the fragile bond between them. She finally sums up the courage to go to him and ask hesitantly:

[80] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 116.

[81] Ibid., p. 119.

> "Have you begun the - you know what ?"
> "I do not know what."
> "The n-o-v-e-l," she spelled.
> He shook his head. "No; but I've written a corking thing. Come in and hear."[82]

Eden's "corking" poem is alien to Alayne, and she fears for the loss of the objectivity in her judgement which she had always felt in New York: "She was convinced that it was splendid, but her conviction did not have the austere clarity that it had carried when she was in New York and he was an unknown poet in Canada."[83]

Much later, she asks Eden one more time:

> "Eden," she said stroking his bright head, "have you been thinking about your novel lately? Have you perhaps made a tiny beginning?"
> He turned on her, upsetting the box of stamps and giving the inkpot such a jar that she was barely able to save it.
> "You're not going to start bothering me about that, are you?" Rich colour flooded his face. "Just when I'm fairly swamped with other things. I hope you're not going to begin nagging at me, darling, because I can't wangle the right sort of job on the instant. I couldn't bear that."[84]

This is the last mention of Eden's creative work in Jalna, before he loses all interest in poetry, and develops a mounting interest in Pheasant.

As Eden's love for Alayne wanes with his love of poetry, Alayne finds herself more often in the company of the rest of the Whiteoaks than in that of her husband's. She, who had cast herself in the role of the woman behind the genius,

82 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 143.

83 Ibid., p. 114.

84 Ibid., p. 177.

had become superfluous and a frustrated wife. Incapable of eliciting the promised novel from him, she turns her encouraging interest toward Finch. She begins to see in him a boy "treated with clumsy stupidity by his family. She saw herself fiercely taking up cudgels for him. She was determined that he should have music lessons if her influence could bring them about."[85]

Finch, who had always had to fight bitterly to keep himself from being at the bottom of his form at school, found it exceedingly difficult to study. But he took to his music lessons with an enthusiasm he had never before paralleled. The rest of the Whiteoaks balked at the idea of another budding artistic talent in the family, and took every opportunity to discourage him from practising his piano. Another sponger was a luxury they could ill afford. And yet Finch persevered, practising on the Vaughans' piano.

Eventually, Finch's involvement with music reaches supreme heights. On the evening of Wake's birthday party, Finch realizes that "this evening he must be free. His soul must stretch its wings in the spaces of the night. Music would set him free."[86] The flight on which he embarks has strong religious overtones, for, when he is about to play, he remembers that "once, in a strange flash of inwardness, he had thought that perhaps God and he were both afraid, each afraid of his own reflection in the other's eyes."[87] It is on the crest of this vision that Finch begins to play:

[85] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 141.

[86] Ibid., p. 237.

[87] Ibid., p. 237.

> In the forsaken house he sat very upright on his piano stool, only his hands moving firmly and with spirit over the keys. The piece he played was no more pretentious than that which any boy of talent might execute after an equal number of lessons. Nevertheless, there was something special in Finch's playing, in the way his sheepish air gave place to confidence when he sat before the piano, in the firm dexterity of his beautiful hands - such a contrast to his unprepossessing face - which kept him in his teacher's mind long after the lesson was over. More than once the teacher had said to a colleague: "I have one pupil, a boy named Whiteoak, who isn't like any of the others. He has a genius of some kind, I am sure, but whether music is its natural expression, or whether it is just a temporary outlet for something else, I can't yet make out. He's a queer, shy boy."[88]

It is interesting to note the detail and the kindness with which De la Roche describes Finch's budding artistic talents. There is no mention of a similar depth of sensitivity in any of the passages describing Eden's poetry. The tight, ecstatic and religious qualities of Finch's approach to self-expression mark him as a special case among the Whiteoaks and as one who is aware of genuine artistic values.

It becomes significant then, that in the course of the book Finch is often cast in the role of the observer. Young as he is, Finch is the only Whiteoak with the perspicacity to see things many others in Jalna miss. He was the viewer of the scene of Renny kissing the strange girl in the orchard.[89] Later, he is the first of the family to be assaulted by the realization that Renny and Alayne are in love, when he sees them together in a dark corner of the porch.[90] And finally, it is Finch

[88] De la Roche, Jalna, pp. 237-238.

[89] Ibid., p. 133.

[90] Ibid., p. 184.

who espies Eden and Pheasant making love in the orchard.[91] All these incidents are extremely powerful experiences for him. In his reactions, he displays a sensitivity unthinkable in Eden's character. Shaken and surprised, Finch has become the recipient of the gift of vision that could shake the family to its foundations. It is in this ability to perceive that Finch is capable of the art which seeks veracity, untainted by pretense and gentility.

Contrasted with Eden's "delicate, austere" view of the Northland, Finch's vision of his surroundings is raw. At the moment, his youth prevents him from fully digesting the impact of his experiences. Although his sensibility is still immature, he is capable of a view of reality that is inconceivable to his older brother.

In proposing Finch as an example of legitimate artistic principles, Mazo de la Roche demonstrates her strong stand in favour of truth and reality in art. Although it may be argued that the style of Jalna is not part of the school of realism, the establishment of Finch's sensibility is beyond a doubt one of the most enlightened stands an author could possibly have taken in 1927.

In that year, the aesthetic and sentimental poets were still favoured and expected by the public. The more genuine revolutionary poets were only beginning as young men: Leo Kennedy, A.J.M. Smith, A.M. Klein and F.R. Scott were just being introduced in the McGill Fortnightly Review at the time Jalna was published.

[91] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 240.

The delicacy of Eden's vision would make him a logical epigone in a tradition which began with the transplanted British delicacy evident in Charles Sangster, Oliver Goldsmith (in The Rising Village) and Charles Heavysege, and which ultimately ended up with the soporific sentimentalism of Bliss Carman. It is possible that Eden represents a result of that element of Canadian culture which, in its severely pragmatic way of life, can only comprehend a poet if he is someone who writes in a familiar and therefore worn-out tradition. The true creative artist is too far advanced of these exhausted modes to be readily identified by a sensibility not in tune with aesthetic creative work. Finch, on the other hand, is destined for the rougher, more realistic kind of endeavour that was to be realized later in the McGill Movement. It is therefore logical that the Whiteoaks found it more difficult to accept Finch as easily as they had Eden. As Augusta had served to contrast Adeline's transparent aristocratic pretentions, Finch serves to display Eden's weak artistic principles. Eden emerges as a Victorian relic, attempting to be delicate and genteel in an atmosphere of pretentious aristocratic decadence.

Chapter 3: The Development of Rural Mentality

In leaving India for Canada, Adeline and Philip had altered the situation of their lives drastically. Not only had they changed their professions, but also their climate and social influence. The rarified atmosphere of the British military station in India gave way to the less pretentious sophistication of Southern Ontario. This change in life-style heavily marked their offspring for two generations.

In embracing the life of farming, the Whiteoaks were no longer influenced by social conditions forbidding the hands of British army officers ever to be sullied by labour. By the late 1920's, however, it had become an accepted and unquestioned fact that several of the Whiteoaks were expected to devote their energies to the work of the estate. In Jalna, we see Piers shovelling manure,[92] grading apples,[93] "being absorbed in his cattle",[94] and so on. Renny, who is the one who carries the burden of leadership, tends to his horses with the same solicitude that he demands of his hired help. The rest are in different ways unoccupied: Wakefield is too young; Nicholas and Ernest are genteel drones; Eden is a "useless" poet. This connection with the soil had developed some of the Whiteoaks into a muscular people, tough, hardy, and often course.

[92] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 30.

[93] Ibid., p. 146.

[94] Ibid., p. 223.

The prodigious Whiteoak power, longevity and muscle has become the norm for the family, and it is from these qualities that deviation is made. It is therefore logical that weakness in any form should be considered a poor characteristic for a Whiteoak. Renny, Meg, Piers, and Adeline are the closest to the heart of the Whiteoak heritage, while Finch's piano playing and Eden's poetic tastes have marked them as lacking in the physical strength that the Whiteoaks demand of their progeny. Renny, whose physical and mental strength is constantly being emphasized in the book, takes a completely practical and materialistic approach to Eden's poetry: "Help Piers. Why not? If he would turn in and help, we could take over the land that is rented to old Hare and make twice as much out of it. It's a good life. He could write poetry in his spare time if he wanted to."[95] But Eden will not help, thereby demonstrating an inaptitude for the work that Renny and Piers rate so highly. As a result, Piers eventually calls Eden an "idler" and a "sponger".[96]

Another aspect of the elder Whiteoaks' complete acceptance of the farming life comes from Adeline. Gran, pretentious as she is about most facets of genteel aristocracy, has managed to translate her longevity into a symbol of strength. Unlike longevity, strength in its purest physical sense is not necessarily a prerequisite for gentility. Within the context of the family at Jalna, strength becomes the

[95] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 43.

[96] Ibid., p. 145.

primary quality desirable in farming. The most poignant example of this centres around Adeline's favourite topic, the inheritance of the Court features and characteristics. In accepting Alayne into her home, Adeline says, "You and Eden make a pretty pair. But he's no Court. Nor a Whiteoak. He looks like his poor flibbertigibbet mother."[97] The insinuation is that Mary Wakefield, the governess who had married Adeline's son Philip, was of a different and weaker strain than the Courts. Margaret Ramsay, who was Philip's first wife and of strong family lineage, had given Philip two strong children in Renny and Maggie. Nicholas, too, supports this view when he sympathetically excuses Eden's failure to work the soil by suggesting to Renny that this was perhaps an hereditary trait: "Poor young whelp. Heavens! How like his mother he is!"[98]

The belief that family traits could be inherited, a theory called "social darwinism",[99] plays a strong part in the Whiteoak view of the family. In a later novel, Whiteoaks, De la Roche describes a process of Renny's thinking that demonstrates how subtly and yet how firmly this concept plays on the minds of the family:

> ... Renny thought about Finch, and not only Finch, but all those younger members of the family who were his half-brothers. What was wrong with them? Certainly there was some weakness, bred in the bone, that made them different from the other Whiteoaks. The face of their mother flashed into his mind ... Renny recalled

97 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 116.

98 Ibid., p. 43.

99 John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic (Toronto, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 61.

> vividly now the fact that when he had come upon her she had nearly always been reading. Poetry, too. What a mother for men! ... Poetry in them - music in them - that was the trouble.[100]

In the light of these terms, it is therefore not an accident of willpower that three of Mary Wakefield's four children are a disappointment in the light of the Court-Whiteoak family ideal. Eden's aversion to manual labour, Finch's discovery of music, and Wakefield's weak heart separate them from Renny and Piers, who symbolize the family ideal of practicality and vigour.

The real proof of the Whiteoaks' high esteem of visceral power is shown in the introduction of Alayne and in the course of her development in proximity to the family. Alayne had emerged from a delicate, protected background. Her family and milieu were so unlike those of the Whiteoaks that Eden is forced to describe his own family in comparison as "affectionate, arrogant, high-tempered".[101] The devoted daughter of a scholar, she is in her best company at the banquet of the publisher and in the company of her two aunts. Using the setting of the dinner table to make her point, De la Roche describes the banquet as "glittering with exquisite glass and slender, shapely cutlery."[102] It comes as no surprise that Eden, despite

100 Mazo de la Roche, Whiteoaks (London, MacMillan & Co., 1934), p. 94.

101 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 89.

102 Ibid., p. 89.

his delicate posing, thinks of the "huge platters and cumbersome English plate"[103] of his own rough home. In charming Alayne with his assumed air of refinement, Eden serves to ease her introduction into the harsh world of the Whiteoaks.

Alayne's arrival at Jalna proves to be a traumatic event for her. The embarrassed fuss with which the family welcomes her seems unbearable. She is shocked by Adeline whom she describes as "that dreadful old woman".[104] What with everyone talking at once, the parrot cursing in Hindu, and Adeline dribbling spittle on her fingers, Alayne finds her sensibilities offended. Determined to overcome her culture-shock, she vows to adapt herself to life with a family of such gargantuan strength.

With the passing of time, Alayne grows uneasy. She tires of Eden's ivory-tower seclusion and of his lack of desire to work:

> Watching [Eden] , Alayne had a sudden and dispassionate vision of him as an old man, firmly established in Jalna, immovable, contented, without hope or ambition, just like Nicholas and Ernest. She saw him grey-headed, at a desk, searching for a stamp, licking it, fixing it, fancying himself busy. She felt desperately afraid.[105]

This realization is of paramount importance for Alayne, for in it she demonstrates the first real capacity to examine her life with pragmatic eyes. No longer could

103 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 89.

104 Ibid., p. 121.

105 Ibid., p. 177.

she find a life of delicate poetry with Eden satisfying. The idyllic landscape of Jalna had suddenly been envisaged as a narcotic which could suffocate Eden and, eventually, herself. In one last gasp, she realizes that "she must get away from here before the sinister spell of the house caught them and held them forever."[106]

But this decision represents only the remnants of her New England gentility expressing itself in a devotion to her husband. By this time she has begun to lose hold of her sense of propriety by falling in love with the raw, sexual, master of the tribe, Renny; as a result, her desire to get away is simply a manifestation of the last bits of gentility left in her. It is only a very short time before she gives herself up totally to Renny's love: "She, who had lived a life of self-control, was now ready to be swept away in amorous quiescence, caring for nothing but his love."[107]

De la Roche had given the reader ample warning that Alayne would eventually lose her squeamish resistance to the Whiteoaks, since she described Alayne as a late developer: "Sexually she was one of those women who develop slowly; who might, under certain conditions, marry, rear a family, and never have the well-spring of her passions unbound."[108] It is obvious that Eden, in his weakness, was one of these "certain conditions", while Renny, with his raw personality, was to become the one who brought out her womanly passions. For the immature Alayne, Eden's

106 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 186.

107 Ibid., p. 193.

108 Ibid., p. 96.

attraction lay in a confusion of poetic posing and physical passion. As Alayne was subjected to the powerful feelings for Renny, she realized a separation between passion and artistic taste. She could finally give encouragement to Finch's piano playing without confusing her appreciation for his sensitivity with her attraction for Renny.

The unbinding of Alayne's passions demonstrates the theme of the power of life in the country over that of the city. Until she had arrived in Jalna, Alayne had never had any opportunity to realize herself as a woman of mental and sexual vitality. Her delicate and sensitive city background had to crumble before she could express herself with maturity. It was Renny's virile masculinity that had turned all thoughts of Jalna as a place with a "sinister spell" into a place where she could feel "the magical experience of sitting on a cliff with Renny ... [which] filled her with a sense of reckless surrender rather than tragic renunciation."[109] The clear development of Alayne's feelings and her surrender under Renny's power of charm characterize her delicate city influences of intellectual refinement as weaker than the rugged Canadian life at Jalna. In developing her sense of passion, the country proved to be the ideal influence to realize her natural character.

Despite their need of the city as a market for farm produce, the Whiteoaks are forever discovering that if any of their number goes to town, the event

109 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 235.

becomes an omen of change. Alayne, the most disruptive force that family had witnessed in a long time, had come from New York; Piers and Pheasant had eloped to marry in a city; Eden's laziness could be seen as the direct result of an urban university education; and Alayne's affair with Renny had thickened considerably after a trip into town with him.[110] The city, with its more liberal morality, therefore evolves as a symbol of unsettling change and trauma for the Whiteoaks. Conversely, the Whiteoaks' attachment to the soil can be described as a symbol of conservatism, particularly in the question of moral concerns.

With this premise in mind, it is not difficult to see why the novels of the Jalna series basically utilize the technique of disruption: a disturbing influence is injected into a stable and harmonious situation, which forces the family to adapt. The theme of Jalna essentially revolves around the arrival of Alayne and the subsequent threat of disruption of Whiteoak family life. This crisis forces the family to reappraise its thinking in order to survive the change with dignity. The pattern throughout most of the Jalna series is the same: conservatism rises to meet the challenge, but when it becomes obvious that the only solution to the crisis is through liberalization, the family adapts. It is this process of change that forms the core of the novel, thereby developing certain purely Canadian characteristics.

One of the most important characteristics developed by this technique is that of pragmatism; this quality is best demonstrated in the character of Renny. Next

[110] De la Roche, Jalna, pp. 189-190.

to Adeline, the most powerful Whiteoak is Renny, who breeds horses. Although this smacks of ancient British aristocratic traditions, Renny has managed to know and understand horses in a way rather foreign to that tradition. The visceral or physical approach to farming is also manifested in the pragmatism Renny demonstrates by chopping down a dying tree in the orchard despite Alayne's emotional protestations.[111]

This pragmatism, which has been long accepted as a distinct Canadian trait, manifests itself also in the manner in which Renny dominates the family. He is not the pure, domineering, Victorian paterfamilias when he settles a fight between Finch and Piers. "Get up," he says to Finch, " and change out of that suit before it's mussed up."[112] His reason and horse-sense are so powerful that the entire family, even Adeline, bow to his bidding. In the instance of Piers' marriage to Pheasant, Renny's verdict on the affair is a monument to diplomacy and practical problem solving:

> I have been talking the affair over with Maurice this afternoon. He is as upset by it as we are. As for his planning the marriage to avenge himself on you, Meg, that is ridiculous. Give the man credit for a little decency - a little sense ... I told Piers that if he went on meeting her like this there'd be trouble, and there has been, hasn't there? Lots of it. But I'm not going to drive him away from Jalna. I want him here - and I want my tea, terribly. Will you pour it out, Meggie? [113]

[111] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 152.

[112] Ibid., p. 143.

[113] Ibid., p. 82.

But it is not in his ability to act according to reason that Renny is most powerful. As a sexually vibrant individual, he is able to charm and command any woman. Even his grandmother, who still sometimes thinks in frankly sexual terms, admires his appearance; "A perfect Court! Look at that head, will you? My nose - my eyes. I wish Philip could see him."[114] It is therefore predictable that he has the ability to rouse the most raw physical passions in one so cool as Alayne.

Renny, then, emerges as the logical development of the settled British immigrant. From his grandmother he has inherited an aristocracy of bearing, and from his close involvement with farming life he has developed a mixture of earthiness and pragmatism. In his practicality, he could never perfectly emulate the otiose British Empirialism of his grandmother. That remarkable woman had hardened herself as a perfectly stable symbol of the landed gentry, through the willed assumption of authority and an ability to translate longevity into power. Renny, however, is a hybrid individual who combines agrarian characteristics with those of ancient inherited power. Although this combination in Renny makes him incredibly attractive, the process of time and change in a new country will not allow for his type to be perpetuated. In demonstrating the partial loss of the aristocratic ideal so blatantly evident in his grandmother, he sets a pattern of transition toward new and more native Canadian archetypes. These blossom in the characters of Piers and Finch, who as prototypes are much more stable than Renny.

[114] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 167.

Piers is a distillation of Renny's agrarian qualities in the pure state. The most brutish of the family, Piers is also the one most easily identified with the care of the animals on the farm. It is significant that it is he who tends to the cattle and pigs, while Renny is attracted to the more noble horses. True to his rough nature, he reacts to the affair between Eden and Pheasant by confining Pheasant to her room like a wild creature. But unlike Renny, Piers is not merely indifferent to art, he despises it. Where Renny's touch of gentility allows for art without comprehending it, Piers actually detests the meetings of Alayne, Eden and Ernest in Nicholas' room: "They made him sick with their poetry and music."[115] Moreover, he expresses a cruelty toward Finch, the boy who eventually becomes the true symbol of sensitivity to art in this colonial-agricultural colony, unlike that of any member of the family. Piers is forever cuffing Finch at the slightest provocation, and he torments the boy's highly-strung sensibilities by forcing him to say his prayers out loud at bedtime.[116]

This intolerance of the confirmed agrarian mind toward art, which it considers to be effete and useless in a practical environment, is a long-standing story in the history of Canadian literature. Finch, although not fully developed as yet in the context of Jalna, demonstrates the immaturity of Canadian artistic effort, both by his undeveloped talents, and by the fact that he holds a subordinate position

[115] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 145.

[116] Ibid., p. 55.

relative to the pragmatic archetypes. Finch's artistic impotence, as symbolized in this book, is the sort of thing that has considerable relevance both to literature and to the mentality of colonial Canada. As a result, Finch and Piers become logical and stable developments out of the mixture of aristocracy and pragmatism which we find in Renny's character.

The Whiteoak family can therefore be easily described as an archetypal breakdown of this English colonial character in Canada. The narrow development of pragmatism within the family, and the indifference to any signs of artistic traits, are among the strongest themes of Jalna, as of Canadian cultural development generally.

Chapter 4: Vision and Morality in Jalna

In view of the theme of aristocratic decline in Jalna, it is interesting to note that Mazo de la Roche's own public image did little to support the essentially democratic predisposition of her novels. Her name at birth had been Mazo Roche, but she had added the aristocratic prefixes as an affectation.[117] For affectations like this, she has been labelled "a snob"[118] by P. Grosscurth; certainly her superb delineation of aristocracy, as a degenerate principle in Adeline and as a vibrant quality in Augusta, would support this accusation. The strongest indication of De la Roche's "British colonial" sentiments is found in an anecdote in this connection reported by Ronald Hambleton:

> Mazo was horrified at the news that Vincent Massey, Canadian-born, was to become Governor-General of Canada. Being a royalist, she believed that only a member of the British aristocracy at least, and preferably a member of the British Royal house, could adequately represent the monarch in Canada, Later, however, she admitted that Massey had "turned out not too badly".[119]

Despite her nostalgia for a nobler and grander tradition, De la Roche describes the development of the Whiteoaks with a certain degree of inevitablility. Never is the progress of the family from aristocracy to commonalty described with a sense of inexorably tragic loss. What does emerge is a prototypical British-

[117] Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna, pp. 79, 83.

[118] P. Grosscurth, "A Garrulous Account of Mazo of Jalna", Saturday Night 81 (December, 1966), p. 46.

[119] Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna, p. 218.

Canadian immigrant family in the process of change. Viewed at any moment in time, the family contains elements of both the old British traditions and the new Canadian outlook. The standard-bearers of emergent Canadianism - Renny, Piers and Finch - are positively depicted in contrast to their obviously outmoded genteel relations. Nicholas, Ernest, Eden and Meggie all share elements of decadent aristocratic pretentions; they all become incidental to the development of Canadian prototypes in the novel. De la Roche's concentration on Renny, Piers and Finch as logical developments of Canadian character following Adeline's immigration outweighs her petty chagrin at the nomination of a Canadian to the post of Governor-General; actually, it was precisely this Canadianism that allowed her to admit that Massey had turned out well. Eventually, in Ringing the Changes, De la Roche described her intentions of the thematic growth of a Canadian character by identifying with Renny and Finch personally:

> I was one with Finch, for he and I had much in common. I was (at times) one with Renny, for he and I had much in common. At other times I was against him. Never have I been completely at one with any female characters of mine. I might love them, suffer with them, but always they were they and I was I.[120]

This ultimate identification with the more Canadian Whiteoaks supports the view of De la Roche as a writer fully conscious of her sympathy for the evolution of the Canadian character depicted in the novel.

[120] Mazo de la Roche, Ringing the Changes, (Boston: Atlantic, Little, Brown & Co., 1957), p. 229.

As a result of her own consciousness of the inevitability of the loss of aristocratic pretentions, De la Roche is capable of handling the Whiteoak family with a finely balanced combination of affection and satire. For instance, she is capable of maintaining sympathy for Wakefield, the very image of the British school brat. However, when she describes the area around Jalna as "an agreeable little settlement of respectable families"[121] she is being more than mildly satirical in placing "respectable" in italics. Gran Adeline, chops-licking old warhorse that she is, demands love and fascination to a high degree. Yet Alayne's denunciation of her as "that dreadful old woman"[122] comes as something of a shock to the reader. Again, De la Roche's assurance that "to be sure, the Courts were a far more important family than the Buckleys; they were above title-seeking"[123] is a pointed satirical touch, prodding the reader's mind into objectivity. In a later novel, De la Roche sums up the Whiteoak charisma when Eden says: "You know ... I love talking about us. I think we're maddening, but I love us. Don't you think we're lovable? ... Or do you only see the maddening side?"[124]

De la Roche's ability to write of the Whiteoaks with that sense of satire which can only be gleaned from sympathy explains the use of Wakefield as an introductory personnage. This young, impressionable, yet fiendishly clever

[121] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 24.

[122] Ibid., p. 121.

[123] Ibid., p. 26

[124] Mazo de la Roche, Whiteoak Heritage (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1940), p. 81.

rascal epitomizes De la Roche's vision of the family so well that the entire first chapter of Jalna is devoted to him. In this chapter, Wake is playing with an ant, at first gently, then roughly:

> Looking down into the crowding spears of grass, he could see an ant hurrying eagerly, carrying a small white object. He placed his finger before it, wondering what it would think when it found its way blocked by this tall, forbidding tower. Ants were notoriously persevering. It would climb up the finger, perhaps, and run across his hand. No, before it touched his finger, it turned sharply aside and hurried off in a fresh direction. Again he blocked its path, but it would not climb the finger. He persisted. The ant withstood. Harried, anxious, still gripping its little white bundle, it was not to be inveigled or bullied into walking on human flesh. Yet how often ants had scrabbled over him when he least wanted them! One had even run into his ear once and had nearly sent him crazy.[125]

Playing deus ex machina, Wakefield introduces a disturbing obstacle in the ant's path. Like that finger, the introduction of Alayne into the Whiteoak circle acts as a disturbing obstacle, which culminates in the family frantically changing directions in its moral course.

This initial use of Wakefield introduces the young character as a powerful observer for De la Roche's perspective of the family. His coy exterior, covering a monstrously clever capacity for manipulating human foibles, serves as a perfect vantage point for the author. Like the boy's character, De la Roche's images are seemingly unobtrusive but cruelly accurate. Although she toys with her characters as Wake toys with the ant, she maintains sympathy for the family by gaining affection for this introductory character. Wake is sent on a sympathetic visit to the graves of his relatives, and it is believed from the beginning that he is

[125] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 9.

destined for an early death due to a weak heart. It then becomes impossible to accept him without sympathy, and so he becomes De la Roche's touchstone - "idler, liar, thief, wastrel that he was!"[126]

Wakefield's symbolic preoccupation with the ant is more than merely an omen of obstacles to come. It also serves as an introduction to one of De la Roche's most powerful fictional techniques, this symbolic use of animal imagery. The particular attention paid to this insignificant ant paves the way for a view of the Whiteoaks as so many animal creatures. Alayne, with the objective vision of the outsider, puts the concept into words. She begins with Eden: "He's as self-centered as a cat. Like a lithe, golden, tortoise-shell cat; and Renny's like a fox; and their grandmother is an old parrot; and Meggie is another cat, the soft purry kind that is especially wicked and playful with a bird; and Ernest and Nicholas are two old owls; and Finch a clumsy half grown lamb - what a menagerie at Jalna!"[127]

The use of common animals - cats, a fox, owls and a lamb - combined with the kind of morality usually attached to them in symbolic reference, makes De la Roche's images stand as metaphors for the author's view of the Whiteoaks. Although it is not the purpose of this thesis to embark on a detailed study of her use

126 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 19.

127 Ibid., p. 190.

of animals as symbols,[128] it would be worthwhile to note how De la Roche develops a consciousness of the change of morality within the family by the means of animal imagery.

Wakefield, giving a further insight into the author's point of view, mocks a parade of turkeys on the day of Alayne's arrival at Jalna:

> "I suppose you think ... that you're fifteen brides and a groom. Well, you're not. You're turkeys; and you'll be eaten first thing, you know. The real bride and groom will eat you, so there!"
> "Gobble, gobble, gobble."[129]

The image satirizes the earlier vision of the Whiteoak dinner as a pagan cannibalistic ritual; it also proves to be a point of grim irony when it is later realized that the ones who have been "eaten" are in fact the Whiteoaks, through their shocked reactions to the incestuous relationships of Alayne and Renny and Eden and Pheasant. Although Renny and Alayne eventually find themselves in a more mature relationship than was ever experienced by Alayne with Eden, the image of the turkeys comes back to mock Renny in turn for his masculinity. In the episode which describes Piers as he fetches Pheasant from the Vaughan household, the turkeys are parading again:

> The turkeys were crossing the lawn led by the cock, whose blazing wattles swung arrogantly in the first sunrays. His wives, with burnished breasts and beaming eyes, followed close behind, craning their necks, alternately lifting and dragging their slender feet, echoing

[128] Cf. Mary Ann Neely, Sources of Energy in the Jalna Novels of Mazo De la Roche, M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario (1970).

[129] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 104.

> his bold gobble with plaintive pipings. The hens paused to look with curiosity at the boy and the girl who emerged from the ravine, but the cock, absorbed by his own ego, circled before them, swelling himself rigidly, dropping his wings, urging into his wattles a still more burning red.[130]

This final mocking image of Renny as a monstrous egotist with a power over a brood of hens sets off Renny's cold and amoral attitude. The turkeys, however, are impotent in their satirical mocking. At one point, they had emphasized the bestiality of the family; but the victory of a new and healthy awareness of sexual mores as experienced by Renny and Alayne has demonstrated the actual rebirth of a more humanistic and acceptable morality. In this way, the animal images become the death rattles of a conservative and outmoded Victorian code.

Again, De la Roche describes Renny's development in terms of leaving animal images behind. Initially, the use of the image of the fox is used to convey the idea of the kind of morality expressed in Renny before he realizes himself as a man. With his red hair, Renny (Reynard, the Fox) is presented as a cunning and sly individual with a capacity to control people with a skill more mature than any Wakefield could muster. This is an innate talent which he also employs in training the horses he loves. The horses, in turn, are not only symbols of nobility, but become for him vehicles of passion. Through this animalistic aspect of his character, Renny has developed what Meggie calls his "primitive masculine appeal".[131] "Show

130 De la Roche, Jalna, p. 254.

131 Ibid., p. 208.

me the woman who wouldn't enjoy a love affair with a man like Renny," dares Ernest, "especially if she were snatched up from a big city and hidden away in a sequestered hole like Jalna."[132] Alayne, of course, is drawn by his animal magnetism; Renny reciprocates in his fox-like way:

> Her unworldliness, as he knew the world, her reticence, her honesty, her academic ardours, her priggishness, the palpable passions that lay beneath all these, made her an object of calculated sexual interest to him.[133]

But this magnetism of personality is only capable of attracting Alayne; something more mature would be required to keep her. As a result, the image of the horsy cunning Renny gives way to the more human view of him as a horseman. An expert rider, Renny's skill is carried over into his relationship with Alayne:

> He who had all his life ridden desire as a galloping horse, now took for granted that in this deepest love he had known he must keep the whiphand of desire. She, who had lived a life of self-control, was now ready to be swept away in amorous quiescence, caring for nothing but his love.[134]

The image of Renny as the master horseman and Alayne as the mount is unmistakable. It is through Renny that Alayne's passions realize themselves. In developing Alayne as a horsewoman, Renny has brought her through this identification into the more human ideal of the sexually realized individual who is in turn capable of fearlessly controlling passion:

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[132] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 204.

[133] Ibid., p. 173.

[134] Ibid., p. 193.

> But when at last she rode well, dashing along before him, bright wisps of hair blown from under her hat, her body light as a bird's against the wind, he was filled with a voluptuous hilarity of merely living. He could gallop on and on behind her, swift and arrogant, to the end of the world.[135]

The loss of aristocratic pretentions, the plunge into pure animalism and the subsequent rebirth of vibrant awareness of the basic qualities of man build up into a pattern of development through which the Whiteoaks must grow. It is precisely this pointed approach to the sexual side of the Whiteoaks that shows a dimension of subtlety and understanding on the author's part that was quite remarkable in the 1920's. It prompted Walter O'Hearn, the late entertainment editor of the Montreal Star to comment, "I thought her writing was pretty exciting stuff, according to the standards of the Twenties."[136]

The unique use of animal and sexual symbolism also marked for De la Roche an important departure from the nineteenth century family novel, a genre of which she is quite conscious. It is through this candid approach that she describes the visceral strength of the Whiteoak family, projecting their loss of gentility and of suffocating morality into symbolic language. Alayne, in her introduction to the more physical qualities of life as represented by Renny, acknowledges what Desmond Pacey calls the "superiority of the primitive and the instinctive over the civilized

[135] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 203.

[136] Walter O'Hearn, quoted in Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna, p. 129.

conventional."[137] In her episodic rebirth, Alayne draws attention to the more extended process of Canadianization through which the Whiteoaks are going.

As a result, the use of vigorous sexual imagery and plot structure dealing with sex serve to set off the rubble of falling pretensions and decaying moral values. The rubble is plentiful, and it is used primarily as symbolic colouring for the picture of decadence. The most obvious symbol of this is the parrot Boney. This obscene bird, fabled as a symbol of longevity, embodies Adeline's prodigious age; it is also a parody of her completely degenerated physical and sexual being. The two are described as "making love to each other in Hindu",[138] but a great part of the bird's vocabulary consists of a selection of purple Hindu words. Boney (a satirical reference to Bonaparte,[139]) is immediately recognized by Alayne as a symbol of Gran's power over her family. It is no wonder, then, that soon after she has arrived in Jalna, she finds herself at the limits of her endurance with the Whiteoaks, and she is seized with a desire to "snatch the ivory ape from Renny's hands and hurl it into their midst, making the parrot scream and squawk."[140] Piers actually attacks the bird physically when the family gives him and his bride an unwelcome reception. The very acts of seizing the ape or throttling the bird stand as

[137] Desmond Pacey, "Fiction (1920-1940)" in Literary History of Canada, ed. C.F. Klinck, p. 669.

[138] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 173.

[139] Ibid., p. 35.

[140] Ibid., p. 173.

symbols of the desire to go beyond the animal tyranny represented by Adeline's power.

In time, the more Canadian Whiteoaks demonstrate a capacity for controlling these passions. Piers responds to Pheasant's affair with Eden by treating her like a caged beast, demonstrating the first signs of mastery; Finch loses his lamb-like clumsiness before the piano; and even Meggie capitulates to Maurice's simple view of morals. Eden, however, never develops this control in the novel, leaving himself in the cold with his romantic attitudes. Ernest and Nicholas will remain a useless parliament of owls. Adeline will die an old parrot.

All of these are representative of a changing morality which finally finds victorious expression in the experience of horseback riding in which Alayne takes part. This rediscovery of the instincts becomes an excellent starting point for the development of a definition of a Canadian mentality.

Due to the pattern of changing morality, the resolution of several crises in Jalna turns upon shifts in morality structures. Alayne's rescue from her Victorian love affair with Eden is achieved through a shattering of the outmoded moralism that would have abandoned her life in boredom. Meg's forgiveness of Maurice Vaughan comes only after what she called that "pretty little game of progressive marriage"[141] has worked itself out and after she has left the family for the hut in the woods. Meg's ironic use of the word "progressive" proves the kind of attitude necessary for any desirable change, and describes perfectly the progression from

[141] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 259.

gentility to modern democracy in the morality of love. It is through this progressiveness, through this rebirth of awareness of the instinctual, that Alayne finally has the "well-springs of her passions unbound",[142] Pheasant finds acceptance as a Whiteoak, and Meg realizes herself after nineteen years of self-denial.

Mazo de la Roche, looking at her characters with the same aloofness that Wakefield displayed in toying with the ant, shows a full awareness of changing moral standards. Through the incisive use of images and symbols of explicit sexuality, the definitive collapse of Victorian ideals is described, leading to a naturalistic rebirth of primal life values. The evolving character of the family, with its new morality coloured by a memory of old English colonial values, is perfectly typical of many British-Canadian immigrants. Untainted by any violent historical rupture with the Empire, such as the Americans and the Revolution of 1776, this Whiteoak family becomes truly representative and archetypal.

[142] De la Roche, Jalna, p. 96.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to see why Jalna is so often dismissed on the grounds that it is irrelevant to Canadian life. One possible explanation stems from Mazo de la Roche's candid acknowledgement of her literary antecendents of the British novel. Her stylistic debt to that tradition is often used as proof for those who wish to deny any kind of development of national character in the novel. This approach obscures De la Roche's basic democratic predisposition, and leads to a severe criticism of Jalna's superficial appeal to the reader's sentimental and snobbish tendencies.

A more probable explanation is that Canadian critics, in their eagerness to find a single definitive literary work which would encompass all Canadian types, are disappointed when all these types are not to be found in such a lengthy work as the Whiteoak saga. The essential diversity of Canadians immediately precludes any hope of such an idea, for the task would be immense. Jalna does not pretend to such a unifying intention. It deals forthrightly with the immigrant Briton who establishes himself as a farmer in Canada, subsequently developing a national character. In this view, the Whiteoaks become representative of one of the two so-called "founding nations" of Canada. Yet by extension, this can be attributed to all immigrants to Canada. This is a fundamental perspective on which all Jalna criticism must be based.

An examination of the direction in which the Whiteoaks develop will prove the Canadian nature of the character which the Whiteoaks evolve. This

character is no longer British, for the Whiteoaks were not capable of maintaining the dignity and poise of their parent class as minor British aristocracy. Having near them no model of their own society to emulate, the family was forced into a position of interaction with other immigrants; as a result, they developed tangentially to the mainstream of British social consciousness. Neither is this character entirely American, for it was slower in evolution. American national identity is largely identified with the Revolution of 1776, which proved to be the sudden founding of a new society. For Canadians and the Whiteoaks, the lack of a violent break with England caused the development of an identity to be less abrupt, and to be characterized more by the gradual crumbling of the values of a dying genteel society than by the sudden rise of a new one.

The slow and inevitable pace toward a Canadian character set by the Whiteoaks was begun by Adeline and Philip, who, upon emigrating to Ontario, attempted to impress the quality of their British background on the Canadian forest. Almost three quarters of a century later, that quality is still present, but found to be altogether inadequate for the second generation of Whiteoaks. They are different, in varying degrees, from what they would have become in England, and the tenacity with which Adeline clings to her aristocratic memories belies her unconscious fears that the Courts and all they represented may soon vanish. In that woman's longevity, the process of a re-definition of a social and class change becomes neatly evident, present in three generations at once. This pattern is expertly emphasized by the introduction of Augusta, who sets off the aristocratic stagnation of the family; by

Alayne, who in abbreviated form shows the formation of a sturdy character out of the shreds of inadequate gentility; by Pheasant, who illustrates the collapse of prudish ideals in winning the acceptance of the Whiteoaks; and finally by Meggie, whose final acceptance of Maurice suggests the victory of a new morality.

The Whiteoaks have become a matriarchy in Jalna, and as a result they are no longer British in family structure; and although some sociologists have argued that Americans are in truth a matriarchical society, the Whiteoaks will not fall into that role easily, for there is no really strong female figure to keep up the tradition after Adeline dies. Renny can never bring the family back to British form, for he is characterized by a pragmatic bearing which isolates him from the ideal paterfamilias of English society. However, his debt to that society and to the memory of his aristocratic grandmother also exclude him from identification with the traditional American pioneer archetype, which is in essence a masculine dominant role. It is a victorious point for the view of the Whiteoaks as a pragmatic family that it is Finch who will inherit Adeline's fortune in Whiteoaks. None of the usual qualities of the leader are to be found in him, and this point demonstrates the essential individualism of the Whiteoak sensibility.

This slowly developing feature of pragmatic and fundamental thinking, combined with the gradual collapse of Old World value systems, must be recognized as a distinct Canadian phenomenon. The basic freedom of the Whiteoaks to develop into what they will is extremely attractive; their isolation from world involvement gives the family a flavour of political immunity. The only idealistic aspect of the

Whiteoaks' character is their unstated desire to develop unrestrictedly; their only restriction is a crumbling set of social values.

The Whiteoak family as a whole is therefore prototypical of British immigrant families of the Nineteenth century, and representative of a large part of Canadian immigrants in general. Within the family, an examination of the individual characters of each of the Whiteoaks gives rise to five sub-types which help round out the picture of the Whiteoaks as Canadians.

The first of these is comprised of Renny and Piers, who together embody the hard-working class of farmers. In this respect they are close to their basic American analogues; however, the element of aristocracy seen in Renny and in his occupation of breeding horses for show purposes separates him from his more basic and utilitarian counterpart. It is unfortunate that Ronald Hambleton, in an otherwise excellent study of the Jalna saga, was searching too diligently for the pure gentleman farmer in Renny when he called him the "true heir to British sentiment and tradition".[143] Piers, on the other hand, as a logical extrapolation of the more earthy side of Renny's character, is a classic farmer going back to Piers Ploughman, after whom he was significantly named.

The second sub-type concerns the breakwater between the sentimentalist school of literature and the rougher breed of artist which is contained in the differences between Eden and Finch. Eden's acceptance by the non-artistically oriented

143 Hambleton, Mazo de la Roche of Jalna, p. 220.

Whiteoaks and by the as yet undeveloped Alayne suggests the kind of poetry that he was probably writing. A non-artistic and pragmatic society sees the artist as effete; Eden, with all his pretentions, fills the role admirably. An unrealized and genteel girl such as Alayne would find that kind of poetry appealing to her girlish sensibilities. It is therefore no wonder that, as Alayne matures, she sees more value in the encouragement of Finch, who is not effete like his older brother. The inward drive with which Finch approaches the piano is a more natural and more powerful expression of artistry. Through his manifest gift of viewing life in the raw at Jalna, Finch has a motivation which is more realistic than Eden's delicate view of an indelicate Canadian North. Coupled with the emergence of literary realism in the McGill movement several years after Jalna was published, the genuine nature of Finch's talent shows itself as a historical Canadian fact.

The remaining three prototypes are all connected with the evolution of a national character. Alayne represents the urgent need of the new Canadian to mature quickly through a rediscovery of primal instincts in order to adapt to the rough life of farming. Adeline, Nicholas and Ernest are characters who typify the collapse of outmoded and transplanted ideals which must die in the face of an emergent society. The last of these groups is comprised of Wakefield, the stock British school-boy, and Meggie, who sees herself as the wronged Romantic heroine; both of these must be classified as throwbacks to the family's Victorian heritage.

The farmer, the artist, the new Canadian, the staunch British Empire loyalists and the throwbacks cover a good deal of Canadian historical development.

The Whiteoak family parallels this development in a very conscious way, leaving them with a definite and unique character.

The most important aspect of this evolution of character is that it revolves around crises in morality, which form the dramatic core of Jalna. In the course of the novel, incestuous adultery, which is one of the most frightening social sins, presents the Whiteoaks with an almost insurmountable obstacle. Shocking as the topic was in 1928 when De la Roche published the novel, adulterous relationships happen twice, once with Renny and Eden's wife, and then with Eden and Piers' wife. The family can cope with the situation only through strength of character and a complete rejection of stuffy Victorian morality. The only alternative would be a disintegration of the family unit.

At this point, the Whiteoaks present the strongest display of their new Canadian character. Their reborn elemental instinct for survival allows the family to shoulder the crises and move to a new plane of morality which is much more acceptable than the suffocating Nineteenth century variety. None of the four principals in this is expelled from Jalna, but they are actually forgiven in a tremendous display of family solidarity celebrating Adeline's hundredth birthday. Meggie's self-righteous view of Maurice crumbles entirely when she realizes that Victorian ideals would imply a complete breakdown of the Whiteoak family life. Even Gran finds room in her tough old heart to forget family squabbles. As a result, pragmatism and primal values of life emerge victorious over the moral systems that would have constricted and ultimately destroyed the Whiteoak family.

In perspective, Mazo de la Roche's Jalna must be viewed as a historically important novel. Its overt debts to the British and American traditions and its departure from these traditions clearly show the trend of Canadian literature. Sterling North had described Jalna as "a blend of two great traditions, the English tradition of the smooth, well-rounded narrative with good characterization and the lusty American tradition with its humour of exaggeration and its moments of irrepressible animal spirits."[144] Through her acknowledgement to these roots, De la Roche emerges as a Canadian novelist who finds it not in the least embarrassing to show one's sources of inspiration. Like the slowness of change experienced by the Whiteoaks, Jalna's casual acceptance of influences reflects the general origin and progression of Canadian literature. In this respect, Jalna cannot be criticized by those who find De la Roche too genteel.

It is obvious that Jalna is a much more searching and significant novel than it has usually been taken to be. What is now called for is an examination of the entire saga with an eye to an exploration of the complete symbolic meaning of the changes undergone by the British immigrant family in Canada from the mid-Nineteenth century to the present.

144 Edward Weeks, In Friendly Candor, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1959), p. 95.

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