

# THE UNITED STATES AT JALNA<sup>1</sup>

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THE JALNA NOVELS are best known for their evocation of the British ideal in a Canadian setting. The Whiteoaks are the epitome of the British heritage in Canada — haughty, aristocratic, conservative, bound strongly together as a family in a rural homestead of considerable tradition. And yet with English Canadians, loyalty and support for the Empire and for things British have always been paralleled by a rejection of the United States. Recent studies of Canadian imperialist thought have examined in depth the relationships between anti-Americanism and Canadian imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Certainly for Mazo de la Roche the image of the United States played an important role in supporting the pro-British sentiment and life-style so predominant at Jalna.

The period in which the Jalna novels were written (1927-1960) was one of considerable anxiety in Canada regarding the American cultural "take-over" of the Dominion, Royal commissions expressed their concern for the potential loss of Canadian identity and the growing intrusion of American popular culture; movements and journals led by Canadian intellectuals showed similar fears. Even the federal government was moved to action, however moderate: the Aird Commission, the Massey Commission, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, the Canada Council. In the late twenties and early thirties, when the outlines of Jalna were being created and determined, Canadian attention to such problems was very strong, with a good deal of thrust and vigour to their proposals and actions.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, there was an appreciation of American success, prosperity, and well-being that fostered among Canadians some desires for emulation.

ONE PERSON at Jalna, Alayne Archer, symbolizes Americans. Born and raised in New England, she appears in the first novel written in the series as the wife of Eden Whiteoak. Before long she has been seduced by

Renny Whiteoak, and this is followed by her divorce from Eden and marriage to Renny, the family patriarch and the standard of Canadian and Whiteoak against which all other family members must measure themselves. At the same time Alayne is never shorn of her American background. "Though she had spent almost half her life in a British country she was still very conscious of her American roots. She subscribed to the more intellectual of American periodicals. She kept in touch with what was going on in the political scene."<sup>4</sup> The marriage of the representative figures of Canadianism and Americanism is never a real or a rewarding union. They have separate bedrooms; quarrels are frequent; communication is difficult and sometimes impossible; at one point a lengthy separation occurs. In truth Alayne never fits in. She is often at Jalna, but is never a part of it. In *Variable Winds at Jalna*, we read:

It seemed to Alayne that the long yellow velour curtains at the windows of dining-room and library with which Renny refused to part laughed at her. As they heavily undulated in the warm summer breeze they seemed to say, "We shall hang here when you are gone." In truth she sometimes felt that the very essence of the house was antagonistic to her. . . .

And later:

"If you [Alayne] are not one of the [Whiteoak] clan after all these years," he [Fitzturgis] said, "can I ever hope to be?"

Alayne never joins with the Whiteoaks fully and never really comes to understand them. Of her two children, one (Adeline) takes after Renny and the other (Archer) resembles Alayne in character and outlook. It is noteworthy that Archer too never seems to feel at home at Jalna.

In not admitting Alayne into the family while retaining her presence throughout the story since the mid-twenties, Mazo de la Roche was clearly manipulating this character in order to demonstrate that there are differences between Canadians and Americans. Language and geography might throw the two peoples together, but beliefs, attitudes, heritage and sentiment would continue to impose barriers between the two countries. While Canada and the United States might live beside one another, they would never truly join together. For although Alayne and Renny do join together in the sense of being married and having children, there is no fundamental union in the realm of spiritual harmony. Whatever attractions exist (and continue to exist) between the two, fundamental and deep-set differences make for very uneasy bed-partners.

Time and again throughout the Jalna series the United States is employed as a symbol of wealth, prosperity and economic success. Alayne personifies this image, particularly in the first novel, *Jalna*. When she first arrives at Jalna, Alayne is accepted (in part, at least) because of her supposed wealth:

... as a matter of fact Meg did not greatly desire the love of Alayne. She rather liked her, though she found her hard to talk to, — ‘terribly different,’ — and she told her grandmother that Alayne was a ‘typical American girl.’ “I won’t have it,” Grandmother had growled, getting red, and Meg had hastened to add, “But she’s very agreeable, Gran, and what a blessing it is that she has money!”

When Alayne’s aunt arrives at Jalna, the same image is — in *Whiteoak Harvest* — invoked:

“Just what is Miss Archer’s position?” asked Ernest. “She looks like a million dollars.”

“Well — she owns a very nice house which she has let [said Renny]. But she has had very heavy losses. I didn’t inquire into them. You know what Americans are. They cry poverty if they have to do without their accustomed luxuries.”

The minds of the uncles were profoundly relieved. They lost no time in letting the rest of the family know that Miss Archer’s losses had still left her affluent. There was nothing to fear from her; possibly something to gain.

Canadians generally have a well developed image of the United States as a prosperous, well-to-do region whose inhabitants have a natural ability to make money. In particular Canadians often feel that Americans have a shrewd, almost uncanny sense of a good bargain. Miss de la Roche makes effective use of this image. At one time, in *Variable Winds at Jalna*, Renny was contemplating the purchase of a rather expensive colt, East Wind. He felt that the price was too steep until an American arrived and began to extol the virtues of the animal. Such remarks enhanced the horse’s value in Renny’s mind, and he quickly purchased the colt. At another time, the Whiteoaks dabbled in the boom mining shares in the 1920’s. An American, Mr. Kronk, repeatedly increased the attractiveness of the shares by saying that Americans were “gobbling them up”.<sup>5</sup> This same Mr. Kronk represents the standard Canadian image of an American shyster. The entire issue of these Indigo Lake mining shares was false; Kronk managed to swindle a number of Whiteoaks out of many thousands of dollars.

But more generally there is a favourable economic image of the States. The Republic had been a source of wealth and opportunity for Mazo de la Roche and her family, and that country fulfills many of the same functions for the

Whiteoaks. It is a place where one can "exploit" one's abilities to the greatest advantage, as in the case of Eden's writings. Americans set an example to be followed:

... Finch sought advice on the subject of the New York stock. Meg and Maurice threw themselves into the discussion of it with enthusiasm. He would be a fool, they said, not to take advantage of such an opportunity. Why should Americans have all the money in the world? And if they had got it, why should they be allowed to keep it? Finch could do no better than to bring some of it here where it was so badly needed. He might become a rich man.<sup>6</sup>

The United States was even looked on favourably as a developer of Canada's resources:

The dark hand of the waiter taking up the tip pleased him [Ernest], the faces of the other passengers interested. Round-faced, shrewd looking New York business men, some of them. He thought rather ruefully: "Been looking after their interests in Canada, I suppose. . . . Well, if we haven't the initiative or capital to develop our own country, and if the Mother Country doesn't do it, why, there's nothing for it but to let the Americans undertake it."<sup>7</sup>

De la Roche has thus clearly realized the dichotomy in Canadian economic attitudes towards the American Republic. There is a love-hate relationship. While Canadians worship or envy American success and attempt to emulate their example, they also criticize and mock Yankee acquisitiveness and materialism.

THE UNITED STATES also assumes an image of culture and sophistication in the Jalna novels. American magazines and an American publishing house are the means whereby Eden is able to gain success as a poet. The only new books at Jalna are those sent out to Alayne from her friends in New York City. The United States is frequently pictured as a centre of culture where one is able to appreciate the finer things in life. The Republic is also regarded as being more sophisticated and progressive. On arriving in Manhattan, Eden felt that these "New Yorkers would surely look on him as a Canadian backwoodsman."<sup>8</sup> When another member of the family returns from that city, Meg greets him:

"To think," she exclaimed, "that you have been in New York since I saw you last!" She regarded him as if she expected to find something exotic in him. "What you must have seen!"<sup>9</sup>

One is left with a decided impression of Canadian feelings of inferiority.

Yet at the same time the author has captured the prejudice that Canadians feel quite deeply towards America. The Whiteoaks frequently lash out at Americans.

"Prejudices," put in Philip.

"Very well. Prejudices. Prejudice against making a fetish of material progress — against all the hurry-scurry after money that goes on in the big American cities. They [our settler ancestors] wanted to lead contented peaceful lives and teach their children to fear God, honour the Queen, fight for her if necessary. In short, behave like gentlemen." [said Admiral Lacey]<sup>10</sup>

And:

"What Adeline should have been doing in these past months," said Alayne, "is to have gone to a university. I very much wanted to enter her at Smith, as you know." "Never heard of it," declared Nicholas. "Where is it?"

...

"It is the most notable women's college on the continent," she returned.

"Never heard of it," he persisted, and emptied his teacup with audible gusto.

...

"I myself am a graduate of Smith College." Alayne spoke with a little asperity.

"Ha," returned the old man. "That accounts for the only fault you have."

Alayne looked enquiringly at him.

"An air of superiority, my dear."<sup>11</sup>

The materialistic and aggressive nature of American society is frequently noted. Says Ernest: "What is there for you in New York? Crowds, crowds, crowds. Struggle, struggle. You, a Whiteoak, struggling in a foreign mob! Uncongenial work. Homesickness. . . ."<sup>12</sup> American society is represented as matriarchal; husbands are pictured as unmanly and submissive. In reference to Alayne, we read:

"It is all the fault of that American woman," explained Meg. "She is utterly selfish. She is ruining my brother's life with her lack of understanding."

"They are incompatible. That is all there is to it," added Piers.

... "She is a very subtle woman," said Meg. "And a very determined one. She intends to stay away until Renny is thoroughly upset. She intends to frighten him. Then when his spirit is broken, she will come back to Jalna. She is determined to make an American husband of him."<sup>13</sup>

Such a well developed image of American marriage serves as a decided contrast to Jalna (certainly after Gran's death, and in some respects before) where the male dominates and controls developments.

THE OUTLINES of the American image had already been well defined by the series as a whole when *Morning at Jalna* was published in 1960. Although it was the final novel written in the Jalna series, it was situated in a very early time period. The American Civil War provides the setting for a weak plot involving Southern agents in Canada, Confederate schemes and a raid against the North, black slaves, and some Southern guests at the Whiteoak homestead. Many of the major characters of the Jalna series are, of course, absent, notably Alayne and Renny and their generation. And yet one is struck by the continuity of themes presented by Mazo de la Roche in her image of the United States. Here in this final work the symbol of the American Republic is most fully developed.

Lucy and Curtis Sinclair have been invited to stay at Jalna by their friends, the Whiteoaks, until the War ends. The Sinclair home in Southern Carolina has been ruined and their plantation destroyed. The novel clearly attempts (and not too successfully) to evoke some sympathy for these Southerners and to encourage antipathy towards the North. In the immediate context of the War, Yankee devastation of Confederate areas is emphasized; Northern forces have brought with them ruin, property destruction, looting, and rape. Southern plans to raid Union shipping on the Great Lakes are commended:

Adeline [i.e., Gran] threw herself on her plump down pillows, her body quivering with excitement.

"What a glorious revenge!" she said.

"By Jove," he [Philip] said, "you have a wicked grin."

"I feel wicked when I think of those despicable Yankees."

Destruction and killing by Confederate forces was only fair, given the actions of the North.

The Whiteoaks' guests are representative figures of that familiar stereotype, the Cavalier society of the South.<sup>14</sup> Both are well educated, cultured, and refined. Curtis Sinclair had been educated in France, while Lucy had studied music in Europe. Curtis was a Southern gentleman, "a figure of dignity. An arresting figure", and dressed "in the height of fashion".

Outwardly he was as tranquil, as charming as a Southern gentleman should be. "Ah, what a manner that man has!" Adeline exclaimed to Philip.

Lucy Sinclair was "an exotic type", elegant, and dressed in Paris gowns purchased on a visit to France before the War. The Sinclairs have roots, tradition, a family

heritage. Just before their arrival, Adeline is portrayed as being very concerned that the well-to-do, sophisticated Sinclairs will disapprove of the lack of "real elegance", of servants, and of entertainment at Jalna; she wishes that there were an entire suite of rooms for such visitors, rather than "a paltry bedroom and a cubby-hole for Mrs. Sinclair's maid." The Whiteoaks go out of their way to accommodate the Sinclairs. The children are sent away for several days to provide the Southerners with peace and quiet. Adeline and Philip "dress" for dinner and "put our best foot foremost" to impress their guests.

Even the question of slavery is dealt with sympathetically. At various times we are informed that the Sinclairs own a large plantation with one hundred slaves, and then "great plantations and hundreds of slaves"; Curtis' father has several large estates and seven hundred slaves. And yet the Sinclairs hate slavery, according to the Whiteoaks. The blacks are retained in bondage because they are dependent on their white owners; the slaves are happy and contented; even after being freed, the blacks do not drift away, but rather remain on the estates to be clothed and fed.

In contrast to this favourable image of the Cavalier South (which the reader well knows has been destroyed by the defeat of the South in the War), the Yankee is also introduced into the plot. The Northern soldier, as already mentioned, is portrayed in negative terms. The Lincolns are uncouth and "know nothing of good manners". Yankees are aggressive and commercially grasping; it was their greed which first introduced slavery into the South. Curtis Sinclair declares:

They're the people who have made money and are still making it. They sold the slaves to us in the first place.

Later in the story, Mazo de la Roche briefly introduces a New England merchant, Mr. Tilford. The stereotype is finely drawn. He "was a shrewd business man — still youngish, with a future far from dark ahead of him" and through relatives had prospered in the cotton trade with England. Tilford is a rich, clever, knowledgeable, unemotional, hard-headed, able, firm New England entrepreneur in the typical Yankee mould.

**Y**ET THESE CONTRASTING IMAGES of Cavalier and Yankee create in the reader some nagging uncertainties. There is evoked no simple commitment to the cause of the South. The Sinclairs are not entirely likeable. Curtis is physically deformed, a hunchback, and this characteristic seems to play no

important role in the story except to raise certain emotions in the reader. Slightly repulsive physically, Mr. Sinclair presents a somewhat ludicrous picture of a Confederate warrior riding off to mortal combat with the foe. This element of burlesque is underlined when the raid itself, after considerable planning and subterfuge, is thwarted with ease. The Sinclairs do not like children, a characteristic almost guaranteed to cause at least partial alienation of the reader and certainly presenting a contrast with the Whiteoaks. The slaves are ill-treated by their owners; the servants brought to Jalna are poorly clothed, but Sinclair does not care. After all the talk of Northern destruction and ruin of the Confederacy, the Sinclairs remain wealthy. In describing conditions in the South at the end of the War, Adeline declares:

Ruin, James, ruin. But Curtis Sinclair has bought a fine house in Charleston, or what is left of Charleston. They beg us to visit them when conditions are more favourable.

At the end of the novel, the Sinclairs suddenly reappear on a ship bound for England. They are affluent, have enough money for a business holiday in Britain in good style, and are making excellent profits from the cotton trade. American "know-how" and commercial ability is stronger even than the Cavalier image of the South, and this idea appears elsewhere as well. All of these elements combine to moderate considerably any compassion one may have for the Confederate States.

While the North, then, has a decidedly negative image, the representations of the South are certainly ambivalent. This ambivalence is found also amongst Canadians in *Morning at Jalna*. While the Whiteoaks are clearly sympathetic to the South and opposed to the North, contrasting attitudes appear very early in the book. Two neighbouring families are strongly "on the side of the Yankees". The Busbys consider Lincoln to be "a splendid man"; they pray daily for the President and for their son who has joined the Northern Army. So opposed to slavery (and this is the determining issue) is this family of U.E.L. descent that they refuse to enter Jalna while the Southerners are there, and the Busbys succeed in discovering and foiling the plans for a raid. And yet even Elihu Busby has mixed feelings.

On the other hand, the Whiteoaks, the Laceys, James Wilmott, and Lucius Madigan are all opposed to the North. No wonder that young Nicholas asserts:

If I were grown I shouldn't mind going to that war. The trouble is I shouldn't



know which side to fight on. Our friends are all for the North, but our mother and father and you [Madigan] are for the South.

Despite the North's opposition to slavery, the Canadians at Jalna (who also disliked slavery) in this novel sympathized with the Confederates for two major reasons. First, the South had a social structure and a civilization which was admired. This has already been indicated in the images of the Sinclairs, but it is also found in the depiction of the South itself. "How I should love to see Richmond!" proclaimed Adeline. "The very name captivates me. It's so romantic, so civilized, while here we are in the wilds." Second, the Confederate States were the victims of Northern aggression. The War was being fought, Augusta informed little Ernest, because the Yankees would not allow the Southerners to keep their slaves in peace. Southern agents were planning raids because they "don't want to see our [their] country swallowed up by the Yankees." This was something with which the Whiteoaks and their friends could empathize; it could happen to British North America.

"Before many years" — Madigan spoke sombrely — "this country will be taken by the Americans."

"We have the North Pole," said Ernest. "The Americans can't take that from us."

"Wait and see," said Madigan.

THERE ARE thus a number of constant elements to the symbol of the United States and Americans in the Jalna novels.<sup>15</sup> The culture and sophistication of the Republic (or the South) is there; all Americans seem to possess the economic ability, acquisitiveness, and wealth of the Yankee. But most important, the United States and Canada are different, even in conflict. Americans are aggressive, self-confident, and sometimes even "cocky". The Republic and its people are a threat to the inhabitants of the Dominion. Physical seizure, cultural and economic take-over, the changing way of life in the Twentieth Century (represented in part by noisy, disharmonious — but vibrant — big city life in Manhattan) — all of these represent important threats to the way of life at Jalna/Canada.

The image of the United States at Jalna acts as an effective counterpoise to the British-Canadian environment which predominates the rural and family setting in the novels. American characteristics and trends are used as a means of

emphasizing by contrast the British aspects of the Whiteoaks. But more than this, the attitudes of rural Ontario towards the United States are portrayed as a means of revealing more fully the kind of people — the kind of British Canadians — the Whiteoaks are. Attitudes towards the United States have always been an important element within Canadian thought, and Miss de la Roche has effectively caught the general thrust of Canadian images of the Republic. The animosity, the prejudice, the criticism, the envy, the emulation, and the respect are all captured in the representation of the Whiteoaks. The Jalna novels are an interesting and valuable reflection of one author's assessment (however idealized) of the nature of the English-Canadian environment in the first half of the twentieth century.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the very helpful comments of my colleague, Professor D. M. Daymond, on earlier drafts of this article.
- <sup>2</sup> Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, 1970); Norman Penlington, *Canada and Imperialism, 1896-1899* (Toronto, 1965).
- <sup>3</sup> See for example: A. MacMechan, "Canada as a Vassal State," *Canadian Historical Review*, I, 4 (December 1920), pp. 347-353; P. E. Corbett, "Anti-Americanism," *Dalhousie Review*, X, 3 (Autumn, 1930), pp. 295-300; "American Influences in the Dominion," *Round Table*, 43 (June 1921), pp. 671-675; J. E. O'Brien, "A History of the Canadian Radio League, 1930-1936," Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 1964; J. C. Weaver, "Canadians Confront American Mass Culture, 1918-1930," unpublished paper delivered to the Canadian Historical Association annual meeting at Montreal, 1972.
- <sup>4</sup> Mazo de la Roche, *Renny's Daughter* (London, 1953), pp. 5-6.
- <sup>5</sup> Mazo de la Roche, *Whiteoak Brothers: Jalna — 1923* (Toronto, 1953), pp. 54, 83, 160, 162.
- <sup>6</sup> Mazo de la Roche, *Finch's Fortune* (London, 1931), p. 92.
- <sup>7</sup> Mazo de la Roche, *Whiteoaks of Jalna* (Toronto, 1929), p. 144.
- <sup>8</sup> *Jalna*, p. 103.
- <sup>9</sup> *Whiteoaks of Jalna*, p. 192.
- <sup>11</sup> Mazo de la Roche, *Mary Wakefield* (Toronto, 1949), p. 54.
- <sup>11</sup> *Renny's Daughter*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>12</sup> *Whiteoaks of Jalna*, p. 156.
- <sup>13</sup> *Finch's Fortune*, p. 318.
- <sup>14</sup> For an excellent analysis of this image in American literature see W. R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (London, 1963).
- <sup>15</sup> Some of these elements are also found in De la Roche's other works. See, for example, *The Two Saplings* (1942) and *The Return of the Emigrant* (1928).