

Novelist captured old Canada

"Wakefield Whiteoak ran on and on, faster and faster, till he could run no farther. He did not know why he had suddenly increased his speed. He did not even know why he ran. When, out of breath, he threw himself face down on the new spring sod of the meadow, he completely forgot that he had been running at all, and lay, his cheek pressed against the tender grass, his heart thudding against his ribs, without a thought in his head. He was no more happy or unhappy that the April wind that raced across his body or the young grass that quivered with life beneath it. He was simply alive, young, and pressed by the need of violent exertion."

With this lovely opening paragraph begins the only Canadian novel I knew in a German translation before I came to Canada. Actually there had been three novels, it was a trilogy by a writer with the wonderful name Mazo de la Roche, and the novels titles had been "Jalna", "Whiteoaks" and "Finch's Fortune". Here in Canada I discovered that, true to Canadian fashion, this country's critics were not that happy with Mazo de la Roche's books. She was too successful for their taste, she had become too rich. By 1968 11 million copies of her books has been sold world-wide! I also suspect that what bothered the critics was the carnality of her characters. Young Renny, for instance, with his red hair and his foxy smile, was not only the master of a stud farm, but quite a bit of a stud himself. Last the critics objected that the Whiteoak family was too upper-class and therefore not representative for the majority of the Canadian population! As if literature was a game of percentages and equal opportunity!

Yet we found, when we came to Canada and lived through our first winter in Northumberland County, hidden away in a secluded little valley dotted with farms, that Mazo de la Roche's books had prepared us quite well for the rural life in our adopted country. The people who became our friends had the same texture, homespun and yet courtly, that is the trademark of many of the unforgettable characters she has brought to life in her books. Later I saw the same



John Sommer
IDEAS AND THE ARTS

quality in old Canadian furniture, one always gets folk and high style in the same piece.

Most of our new friends knew Mazo's books and they told us that the Whiteoak saga consisted of far more volumes than the three known to us, 14 books in all. Shortly after we got to Canada another novel of the series was published, bringing the number to 15 and the chronicle of the family to the year 1953. The moment our English was good enough to make the reading of books enjoyable we got them all and had a tremendously good time with them.

In 1962 in Georgetown, many called the most beautiful house on Maple Avenue "JALNA" (I hear that there are plans to pull it down), and one evening at Marjorie Nazer's house she told us that she had known Mazo de la Roche, her companion Carolyn Clement and the couples adopted children, quite well before Mazo moved her "family" to England.

Many years later Lovat Dickson came to Georgetown. He had been Mazo de la Roche's publisher. We talked about our mutual fascination with the writer and he told us that Mazo's father had once managed a hotel in Acton and that her novel "Delight" takes place in

this hotel. Lovat Dickson called her style "gutsy" and he compared her in her best works to Emily Bronte. He thought that the present literary climate was not kind to writers like her but that her time would come again. The CBC had just made a television series out of the Jalna books and instead of following the story, they had rewritten the material and added to it and messed it up into something quite idiotic. He was angry about that.

This was almost 20 years ago and I often wonder if anybody reads her books today. We have learned to like our old houses and churches and townhalls, and we try hard to save them from destruction, but we have not yet rediscovered Mazo de la Roche's romantic novels. Go to the library and get them from the shelf where they are waiting for you. You will have an unforgettable summer reading them.

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NOTICE
OF ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD HEARING

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL BY WAYNE OLSON FOR AN ORDER REZONING THE LANDS OF MONARCH RESOURCE RECOVERY AND TRANSFER LTD., 309 ARMSTRONG AVENUE GEORGETOWN, COMPRISED OF PART OF LOT 12 AND 13, PLAN 617, TOWN OF HALTON HILLS, FROM "M2, SECOND INDUSTRIAL" TO "m2-1, SECOND INDUSTRIAL, SPECIAL" TO PERMIT A SALVAGE YARD.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to the Order of the Ontario Municipal Board, that this Hearing shall resume on Monday, April 23, 1990 at 11:00 a.m., in the Council Chambers at the Halton Hills Civic Centre, 1 Halton Hills Drive, Georgetown (North of Maple Avenue).

JOHN E. SCHALJO
Solicitor, Town of Halton Hills

Earth Day celebration begins on April 22nd

Sunday, April 22 marks the beginning of a week-long demonstration of caring and concern for our environment by people around the world. Earth Day will be a celebration of a commitment to live in harmony with nature. Twenty years ago 25 million North Americans took part in the first Earth Day. For Earth Day 1990, ordinary citizens are encouraged to do something positive for the environment.

P.O.W.E.R. will recognize Earth Day with a special event on Sunday, April 22 at 1:30 p.m. All are invited to gather in the escarpment at the Acton Quarry lookout, south of Acton on the Third Line, north of Sideroad 22. The quarry is a favorite place for hawks to soar. Local businesses are donating free food. P.O.W.E.R. will give a free seedling to the first 100 families. The group can direct you to the Bruce Trail. Share birthday cake to celebrate P.O.W.E.R.'s third birthday.

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