

“Such a sort of pariah”: Psychosocial Marginality and the *Bildungsroman*
in Mazo de la Roche’s *Whiteoaks*

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Abstract

This paper explores Mazo de la Roche's peculiar articulation of the *Bildungsroman* in the first of *Jalna*'s sequels, *Whiteoaks*. It argues that the text's psychosocially aberrant protagonist, Finch Whiteoak, is a *Bildungsheld* whose modern coming-of-age process of accommodation and assimilation into a socio-specific norm is not as much a progression toward the centre as it is a simultaneous progression/regression toward a reification of his exemplary marginal status as an other amidst others. This paper further contends that this unique process is made possible only by Finch's particularly unstable and eccentric otherness—established through his treatment by his family as variously mentally ill rather than disabled—and that this process is both externally regressive in a vein similar to the modern, female *Bildungsroman* and internally progressive in the vein of the classic, male *Künstlerroman*. In order to accommodate this duality of publicly typical and privately subversive otherness, Finch must navigate the diegetic realm's social boundaries and liminal spaces through a series of “double lives,” in which the other is ultimately found within the home context and potentially subversive centralities outside of *Jalna* are sacrificed for the sake of representative marginalities at home.

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Dedication

To my life partner, Chloé, who knows more than she knows and who teaches me daily to learn how to learn.

Never, Never ... Could an Outsider Become One of Them (Whiteoaks 86)

Mazo de la Roche, one of the most popular Canadian novelists of the first half of the twentieth century, is best known for what is now referred to as the Whiteoak Chronicles, a collection of sixteen sequels, prequels, and interquels that document the various happenings of the Whiteoak family over a diegetic span of one hundred years (from 1854 to 1954). What is perhaps not as well understood, however, is that these sixteen novels are not generically stable and constant: while every novel in the collection could be generally referred to as a family romance, many of the novels exemplify unique sub-generic and modal aberrations from the family romance's generic protocols. While the collection is consistent in that each novel's primary diegetic space is a colonial family property in Ontario affectionately called "Jalna," and each narrative follows the often romantic and melodramatic episodes of various family members, the narratological conventions deployed in the presentation and characterization of these episodes vary from text to text. The most obvious example of this generic variation occurs in the eleventh novel published in the collection, *Mary Wakefield* (1949), which is a relatively distant prequel that chronicles the titular character's progression from the governess of Jalna to the wife of its master—a narrative trajectory that mimics many of the characteristics of Victorian governess novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).¹

Furthermore, the originary novel of de la Roche's Whiteoak Chronicles, *Jalna*, is specifically about its title's isolated community—this household called Jalna—and since the text was both serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* and published as a novel in 1927 with no explicit aspirations toward sequelization, *Jalna* enacts the sub-generic conventions of a collection of sketches. The narrative drive of this text relies primarily on the interactions between the eccentric inhabitants of this relatively contained world, for in *Jalna*, de la Roche presents no

obvious, singular protagonist or antagonist; instead, she provides a maelstrom of flawed family members who in turn provide a novelistic narrative arc through the episodic resolution of the sub-conflicts within each of the story's sub-narratives. *Jalna*'s chapter titles provide evidence of this narrative structure: chapters such as "Ernest and Sasha," "Nicholas and Nip," "Piers and His Love," "Pheasant and Maurice," "Eden and Alayne," "More about Finch," "Eden and Pheasant," "Wakefield's Birthday," and "Grandmother's Birthday" all introduce specific and independent situational conflicts that decentralize the narrative in terms of characters, while chapters such as "Welcome to Jalna," "Welcome Again to Jalna," and "Inside the Gates of Jalna" centralize and confine the narrative in terms of community. Conversely, the second installment of de la Roche's Whiteoak Chronicles, *Whiteoaks* (1929)—which was published the same year in the United States with the title *Whiteoaks of Jalna*—enacts the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, beginning with a chapter titled "Finch" and proceeding from there with a focus on this multivalently marginal character's encounters with otherness and discoveries of self.

While Finch Whiteoak is introduced in *Jalna* as a pathetic, easy victim, who, aside from exposing his brother Eden's affair with another brother's wife, exhibits very little narrative agency and even less personal development, he becomes a uniquely positioned protagonist in *Whiteoaks*. He succeeds in this role largely due to his static representation in *Jalna*, which functions to necessitate his character's development and to initiate a desire in a community of readers to witness Finch's maturation, education, and formation. These three processes have trajectories in *Whiteoaks* that are surprisingly compatible with those in the more traditional forms of the *Bildungsroman*, which the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines as "the 'novel of education' or 'novel of formation' ... that deals with the maturation process, with how and why the protagonist develops as he does, both morally and psychologically," providing as an example the

prototypical German “folklore tale of the dunce who goes out into the world seeking adventure and learns wisdom the hard way” (“bildungsroman,” n.p.).² However, the external quest narrative has been substantially confined and internalized in *Whiteoaks*, and the caricature of the “dunce” has been thoroughly nuanced. Finch, “an outcast in his own home, unspeakably alone” (124)—a “sort of pariah” (348)—does not need to “go out into the world” to encounter either hostile learning conditions or his own otherness. In *Die Theorie des Romans* (1963), Georg Lukás describes the novel form as “an expression of transcendental homelessness” and the *Bildungsroman* as a thematic iteration of this form that includes “the reconciliation of the problematic individual driven by deeply-felt ideals with concrete social realities” (trans. and qtd. in Hardin xv-xvi). Lukás’s definition, with its abstraction of “home” and its problematizing of the protagonist’s ideals, accurately delineates Finch’s peculiar social position, for Finch’s brief move to New York—to *another* space—only serves to demonstrate the extent to which he is ideologically *othered* at Jalna. It is not, however, as Lukás’s predecessor Wilhelm Dilthey conceives of the *Bildungsroman*’s traditional form in his 1906 book *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung (Poetry and Experience)*,³ “a blissful state of ignorance” that necessitates Finch’s education and that establishes him as “problematic” (trans. and qtd. in Hardin xiv). It is instead a complex array of what are conceived of by the narrator as “mental illnesses,” making his transformation decidedly more internally necessitated and socially resolved than the earlier, traditional *Bildungsromane*. Rather than mimicking the genre’s prototype, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship)*, in which a capable individual works toward an almost transcendental ideal, *Whiteoaks* centres on an incapable or “disabled” individual working toward a socio-specific norm.

A “mentally ill” protagonist and a *Bildungsroman* structure are more than merely

compatible; they are the ideal narrative pair, as they share an innate instability that assumes an eventual inclination toward some form of stability. In “Defining Mental Disability,” Margaret Price asserts that “mental illness,” as both a notion and a particular label, “introduces a discourse of wellness/unwellness into the notion of madness” through its emphasis on health (illness) rather than identity. She proceeds to point out that this “well/unwell paradigm has many problems, particularly its implication that a mad person needs to be ‘cured’ by some means” (300). Moreover, the instability of mental illness establishes not only the assumption of a curative trajectory, but also the potential for an inverse, degenerative trajectory. Identity is especially and uncomfortably unstable for those who are deemed mentally ill, at least until they manage to elude that label either through complete recuperation or complete degradation, the latter of which usually amounts to death.⁴

This definition of the life trajectory of the mentally ill individual mirrors the definition of the *Bildungsroman* presented above in the same way that this trajectory mirrors more contemporary conceptions of the *Bildungsroman*, for either death or the recovery of a fulfilled self await almost every protagonist in modern iterations of the genre. Price makes the argument that “psychosocial disability” is a less problematic term than “mental illness” in that it removes the well/unwell paradigm and encourages an understanding of “mental” aberrance as both a psychological and a social condition—as both a subjective and an inter-subjective phenomenon—and so it is also of import to note that modern conceptualizations of the *Bildungsroman* almost universally refer to the psychological (subjective) *and* social (inter-subjective) development of the novel’s protagonist.⁵ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, two of the earliest, formative literary theorists in disability studies who co-wrote the influential *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependence of Discourse*, more generally assert that

this connection between disability and narrative structuring is remarkably prevalent. In their chapter “Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor,” they argue that “disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device,” lending “a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any character that differentiates the character from the anonymous background of the ‘norm.’” Disability in narrative is, therefore, “a problem in need of a solution,” a plot point in need of a resolution (“Narrative Prosthesis” 49). If the more contemporary *Bildungsroman* can be defined as a protagonist’s pursuit of some type of social and psychological “norm,” then the establishment of psychosocial disability as the protagonist’s particular “abnorm” is one of the most effective manifestations this “stock feature of characterization.”

The argument advanced by Mitchell and Snyder is particularly cogent in relation to the *Bildung* of Finch Whiteoak as a mentally ill protagonist: his psychosocial disability is conceived of by his family as an illness in need of a cure, a problem in need of a solution, an instability in need of stabilization, an eccentricity in need of normalization. Finch’s simultaneous degenerative and curative narrative trajectories have a holistic presence in *Whiteoaks*, which variously presents Finch as intellectually handicapped through his “idiotic” expressions (9), sexually degenerate through his “neurotic affair with [Arthur] Leigh” (123), and mentally unsound through his suicide attempt or, as the family is encouraged call it, his “nervous breakdown” (327). *Whiteoaks*, therefore, is a *Bildungsroman* of narrow temporal and spatial scope that is driven almost entirely by the desire to resolve the eccentric otherness of its psychosocially disabled protagonist, Finch, whose psychosocial marginality suits the changeability of this particular type of narrative in its treatment of Finch’s condition as an illness rather than a disability. His mental marginality then functions as a contrast to both the concreteness and fixity of the novel’s

physically disabled male characters and the ontologically-gendered marginality of its female characters, while it simultaneously provides an indefinable connection between Finch and other “mentally ill” characters such as Finch’s friend Arthur Leigh and his grandmother Adeline Whiteoak. The result is a narrative in which Finch, due to the eccentric otherness provided by his so-called mental illnesses, must navigate the diegetic realm’s social boundaries and liminal spaces through a series of “double lives” in order to achieve a more stable and representative otherness within the world of Jalna, even if it means sacrificing potentially subversive centralities found outside of the social context of Jalna for the sake of representative marginalities within that central social context.

We’re All More or Less Oddities, I Fancy (Whiteoaks 155)

In order to fully understand the relationship between Finch’s unique marginality and his participation in the *Bildungsroman*’s maturation or formation process, one must first understand the particular centre/margin dynamics that govern social operations within Jalna. At the most fundamental level, there appear to be four primary categorizations for the plethora of active characters in *Whiteoaks*: the *men*, the *women*, the *physically disabled*, and the *mentally ill*. There are, of course, characters who overlap categories to some degree, but each camp has a few definable characteristics that confine these characters to a very specific social space within Jalna. These categories are then integral to understanding the unique social context from which Finch’s *Bildung* arises, especially in comparison to the modern, gendered conceptualization of the female *Bildungsroman*. The female iteration of the genre is described relative to its male counterpart by Annis Pratt and Barbara White in “The Novel of Development” as a “growing down” into a woman’s prescribed social role rather than a “growing up” (14). Similarly, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland title their collection of essays on this iteration of the

Bildungsroman The Voyage In, which refers to a woman's "active accommodation to society" and "withdrawal" from external agency as opposed to the traditional, male "voyage out" (8). In slightly different articulations, Susan J. Rosowski defines the female *Bildung* as an "awakening to [the] limitations" of life for women rather than an enlightening apprenticeship on the art of living (313), and Elaine Martin likewise defines this *Bildung* as a "vertical" trajectory toward self-awareness rather than a "linear" trajectory toward self-fulfillment (52). But all of these definitions rely on a binary distinction between the male and female iterations of the genre to which Finch's *Bildung* does not conform, for Finch's psychosocial aberrance enables a trajectory that is both vertical and linear, in and out, up and down, awakening and enlightening.

The faction in *Whiteoaks* that I have deemed "the men" is the smallest and most easily defined of the four and is, unsurprisingly, the faction that is least subject to the agency of other characters. Those deemed men are not, however, all of the male characters in the novel, but are particularly the males in the story who exude an uncompromisingly virile and consistent masculinity, who occupy the relatively stable social centre of Jalna, and who would typically occupy the position of the *Bildungsheld* (the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*); therefore, the only men in *Whiteoaks* are two of Finch's older brothers, Renny and Piers. The following passage—in which Finch's friend Arthur Leigh agrees to lend Finch money and Finch ruminates on his position relative to other important male individuals in his life—serves to exemplify the divide between the men and other males, particularly those deemed mentally deviant:

"I want to help, too. Darling Finch, I want everything to be as clear as crystal between us!"

Even while Finch's soul drew strength and happiness from Arthur's love, it shrank within him at the thought of what Renny and Piers would have said if they

could have heard that “darling Finch.” But it was all right. Arthur was exquisite, and could use exquisite words; Renny and Piers were vigorous, and used vigorous words. And somewhere in between [Finch] floundered. (354)

The key word here is “vigorous,” as it succinctly defines that which is considered masculine in the novel: “vigour” is manliness, and Finch is hardly the epitome of manly vigour.⁶ The binary that is set up here does not, however, define Finch as anti-masculine, but instead places him “somewhere in between,” with Arthur occupying the position of the deviantly feminine, “exquisite” male in comparison. In terms of this spectrum, his second-oldest brother, Eden, partially fits in the category of “the men,” as he has an almost pathological tendency toward the “vigorous” seduction and manipulation of women, but his invalid status as a victim of both tuberculosis and an unspeakable “poetic temperament” makes him both physically and mentally deviant to the extent that he cannot be fully redeemed by his heterosexual vigour (47).

Conversely, the faction of characters that is both the largest and has the least influence on the narrative is “the women”; in fact, this category is defined by its lack of agency and its subjection to the inclinations of proximate men. The women are the female characters who exist only as subservient attendants to the desires of male agents and who have indeed “grown down” into their social positions. A close analysis of the effect that women have on the narrative arc of *Whiteoaks* reveals that their influence is consistently indirect, if present at all. Finch’s sister-in-law Alayne shelters him when he runs off to New York, moves back to Jalna to nurse her estranged husband, Eden, and eventually succumbs to the oldest Whiteoak brother Renny’s overwhelming virility. Finch’s elder half-sister, Meg, is relegated to the margins to support her disabled, dipsomaniacal husband, functioning mainly as a matchmaker for Renny and only reentering the narrative to pout about how her step-daughter and sister-in-law, Pheasant, received

one of grandmother Adeline's rings as a gift. Finch's aunt Augusta may appear to exhibit agency in Jalna, but her opinions are consistently dismissed by the house's male occupants, and her status as a temporary visitor to Jalna from England is foregrounded throughout the narrative. Finally, Mrs. Leigh's social agency is summed up in her naming, for as a mere "Mrs." she does little more than fulfill her role as mother to Finch's friend, Arthur, and Arthur's sister, Ada.

The best examples of the women, however, are Pheasant Whiteoak, Ada Leigh, and mother's help Minnie Ware. Finch, in a brief, early moment of surprising vocal agency, growls his disapproval of Pheasant's accepted subjection by her husband when he tells her to "[q]uote someone beside Piers for a change" (13). Arthur, in a later moment that is similarly surprising in that he is usually a somewhat subversive presence in the narrative, encourages his sister's subjection to men, as is made evident when the narrator states that Arthur feels "that it would be good for him to have a man of this sort [Renny] coming to the house, good for Ada, too, who was beginning to expect admiration from all males" (90). The admiration that she expects, though, is a type of subjection itself, so Arthur is then encouraging her to succumb to more than merely the sexual agency of men. Finally, Minnie is exemplar of this faction of characters, for her actions are consistently and explicitly described by the narrator as singularly driven toward the attention of men, a drive that is never nuanced beyond its destructive implications and its patriarchal precedence. Her representation is certainly meant to be critically scrutinized—possibly as a caricature of the type of women that are usually present in the male *Bildungsroman*—and her behaviour functions to contrast that of the only female in Jalna who would not be considered part of this category, matriarch Adeline Whiteoak, whose combination of femininity, disability, and unprecedented social agency allows her to navigate the boundaries between categories.

Similar to Adeline Whiteoak's inversion of the typical gendering of agency, there are male characters who do not participate in the form of objectification that characters such as Minnie appear to desire and who are not afforded the opportunity for *Bildung*, and these are the characters that the text designates as "disabled" (137) or "handicapped" (46). Despite the disparate qualities of their physical impairments, these characters are categorized collectively as those with "various disabilities" by Alayne in her response to the letter she receives from Aunt Augusta, which outlines Uncle Ernest's "cold," Uncle Nicholas's "gout," youngest Whiteoak brother Wakefield's "very troublesome" heart, and Renny's "limping about on a stick as the result of a severe kick on the knee," all in contrast to Grandmother Adeline, who "is exceedingly well," and Finch, who "has *disappeared*" (135-7). But despite these disabled characters' shared status as males, they exhibit very little agency in the narrative, with the exception of Renny, whose temporary disablement serves to foreground his other abilities. Meg's husband, Maurice Vaughan, who has an arm that was injured in the war and that he can no longer use, barely even surfaces in *Whiteoaks*, largely due to the overwhelming presence of the biological members of the Whiteoak family, a presence that establishes his alcoholism as a marginality that keeps him perpetually outside of the social centre.⁷ Nicholas, who has a "bad knee" and a seemingly permanent case of gout due to his tendency toward alcoholic and dietary extravagance, has his right to his mother's fortune as the eldest son constantly questioned, and is ultimately denied that fortune. Ernest, who has some ambiguous affliction in "his chest" that he himself refers to as "a handicap, certainly" (46), is only sent on his mission to retrieve Finch and Eden from New York because the other men are either "too busy" or "unable to travel" due to their more serious disabilities (143); moreover, he is received in New York by Alayne, Finch, and Eden with profound surprise at his temporary independence from both Jalna and its more capable

inhabitants (146, 152, 161). Finally, Wakefield, who infrequently has vaguely defined “heart attacks” (53), really only functions as an occasional foil for Finch. Wakefield has a confidence and manipulateness that contrasts with Finch’s reticence, honesty, and, as is noted at the very beginning of the novel, “humble propitiation” (2): Wakefield, after all, pretends to be the proud recipient of a bequest that Finch only reluctantly receives. Unlike the above disabled men, Renny begins the novel with an injury to his leg that is temporarily treated as disabling, but his seemingly instantaneous recovery and the lack of any mention of his recovery process only reinforces Renny’s masculine vitality and general lack of disability. Eden also only partially belongs to the faction of “the physically disabled” due to his debilitating yet seemingly temporary bout of tuberculosis, but unlike Renny, Eden’s recovery does not lead to categorical stability as one of “the men.” Eden’s “poetic temperament,” which is characterized by Renny as a “sensitive and melancholy and neurotic” form of mental deviancy that makes Eden a near-candidate for the final category (341), compounds with his contradictory participation in both the able and disabled male categories to create an irredeemable aberrance in terms of masculine expectancies at Jalna. Eden’s troublesome simultaneity as both perversely unmasculine and hyper-masculine leads to his pursuit of Minny despite his marriage to Alayne, which in turn leads to his expulsion from the narrative and from the selective social dynamics of Jalna.

There are, however, three major characters who do not fit into any of the above categories and yet who, to some extent, are allowed to participate in the social dynamic of Jalna. These characters—Adeline, Finch, and Arthur—can be categorized as those who are “mentally ill.” They are categorized as such not only because they all have some form of what is presented in the text as a mental affliction, but also because they share some indefinable connection as a result of these afflictions, a connection that becomes especially remarkable when one considers

their significant disparities. Adeline experiences a type of senility throughout the narrative that, on several occasions, prevents her from presenting her ideas coherently on a more superficial level but that does not seem to prevent her from deeply analyzing and astutely commenting on family situations. Arthur is characterized by a combination of “exquisiteness” and “narcissism” (60), which amounts to a representation of psychological deviancy that is uncannily similar to that of Oscar Wilde, reflecting an era in which the conflation of homosexuality with psychiatric aberrance was not merely accepted but expected. Finally, Finch not only shares Arthur’s designation as a potential homosexual as a result of what Piers calls their “disgusting mix-up” and Renny describes as their “neurotic affair” (123), but he is also characterized by the narrator while he is writing in his diary as “depressed” (40), a description that frequently recurs in the text until his suicide attempt—or “nervous breakdown”—at the nadir of the narrative (327).

The spontaneity and indefinability of the bonds between these characters is unique in the world of *Jalna*, and their connections are described as profound in a subconscious way, signaling a deeply mental—rather than a superficially vocal—impetus for these attachments. As such, the affinities between pairs of mentally disabled characters are consistently presented as indescribable. The narrator states that “Finch had, from the first moment of acquaintance, liked and admired Arthur Leigh” (58); shortly after in the narrative, Arthur says, “I can’t tell you what you mean to me, Finch. I’ve been attracted by you from the first moment I saw you” (65). When Adeline first meets Arthur, she refers to him as a “nice-looking boy,” shows “all her teeth in a pleased grin” when Arthur refers to her age as “[o]ld enough to look very wonderful and wise,” and comments that “[n]ot many young men are so apt [as Arthur] to-day” (73). Finally, when Adeline finds out that Finch—a family member toward whom she had never before expressed sympathy—has been found by Alayne in New York, her response is telling, especially since the

first encounter between Adeline and Finch in *Whiteoaks* involves Adeline bloodying Finch's knuckles with "her stick" when she finds out about his lottery ticket for a canary (35):

She dropped her chin to her breast. Was she thinking deeply, or was she fallen into one of her dozes? [Adeline's parrot] Boney hopped from his perch and began to peck at the ribbons on her cap. He pulled at the ribbons till the cap was a trifle askew.

Suddenly she raised her head and said, emphatically: "I want him. I want to see Finch. Take the bird away. He's disarranging my cap." ...

Renny observed: "I think it would be a damned good idea to leave him there for a while. He'll soon get sick of it. Teach him a lesson."

Grandmother arched her neck and turned her beaklike nose toward him. "You do, eh? You would, eh? And you his guardian! Always ready to cross my will! Unnatural grandson! Unnatural brother!" Purplish red suffused her nose. (141)

Not only does Adeline demonstrate a sudden attachment to Finch now that his alienation from his family has finally managed to push him outside of Jalna, but she does so in a way that confounds the most central member of the family, Renny. Moreover, this attachment is expressed through the metaphorical unfolding of a Platonic proverb, for this entire confrontation is meant to recall the adage "birds of a feather flock together": not only does Adeline dismiss Boney, a bird for which she had always expressed a special affection, and is herself described as having a "beaklike" nose, but this attachment is redirected toward Finch, whose name is, of course, that of a *bird*.⁸ Furthermore, this "affinity of birds" supersedes that of family, for the connection established between Finch and Adeline is presented as "natural" in contrast to Renny's "unnatural" abuse of what should be signifiers of ontological bonds, and the allegorical depth with which the connection between Adeline and Finch is expressed also contrasts with the

immediate and superficially textual expressions of “grandson” and “brother.” It is a rare occurrence in Jalna that any particular relationship trumps those between the Whiteoaks *as family*, and the special bond between Adeline and Finch signals not only a sharing of mental affliction, but also a sharing of the instability of mental illness in general: while the degenerative trajectory toward the death of the former is somewhat tangential to the plot of *Whiteoaks*, the formative trajectory of the latter is the very substance of the novel’s narrative structure.

I, Finch, Am Nothing (Whiteoaks 39)

The discussion of the *Bildungsroman* at the beginning of the essay provided a broad, foundational definition of the term, but a more specific definition is necessary for the following close analysis of Finch’s personal trajectory. In Marianne Hirsch’s 1976 letter-to-the-editor response to David H. Miles’s “The Picaro’s Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German *Bildungsroman*,” she provides some useful, if somewhat arbitrary, boundaries within which the *Bildungsroman* can be analyzed.⁹ Hirsch asserts that “Miles’s view of the *Bildungsroman* simply as ‘a novel that ‘educates’ by *portraying* an education’ ... is so broad as to be useless” (122)—although, according to Miles, this is not his view but is a “statement made in 1820 ... in the spirit of the Enlightenment” (123). Instead, Hirsch argues that any definition of the *Bildungsroman* cannot completely disregard Goethe’s notion of *Bildung* as “the organic unfolding of a totality of human capacities by the contact with worldly experiential powers, a process which results in an accommodation to those powers,” and goes on to nuance this definition of the genre in relation to the picaresque novel and the confessional novel as follows:

the *Bildungsroman* represents a progression of connected events that lead up to a definite denouement...; the *Bildungsroman* concentrates on actions, thoughts, and

reflections equally and attempts to portray a total personality...; the Bildungsroman maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal and explores their interaction. (122)

Miles's subsequent response to Hirsch's letter was then published alongside the letter in *PMLA* as "Defining the Bildungsroman as a Genre," and in his response, he asserts that Hirsch ignores the changeability of genre when prescribing these fixed definitions. The criteria presented by Hirsch above are certainly valuable in the discussion of the *Bildungsroman*, but when Hirsch states that "one might distinguish between the picaresque hero who is an outcast, the *Bildungsheld* who is a representative and often exemplary member of society, and the protagonist of the confessional novel who is a spiritual outsider," she does indeed appear to dismiss an important mutation of the genre (122). Finch, along with other twentieth-century protagonists, is simultaneously an outcast, a spiritual outsider, and an exemplary *Bildungsheld*. The interaction between "the social and the personal"—the "psycho—" and the "social"—in *Whiteoaks* allows for an individual to operate both as an outsider and as a representative member of a society of singular outsiders. As has been demonstrated above, Jalna is an asylum for, in the words of Finch's uncle Ernest, "more or less oddities" to the extent that the central characters occupy the minority and are often treated as such by marginal characters. Therefore, Finch's formative contact is with *other* manifestations of the other and with the other within himself, and his process of accommodation and assimilation is not as much a progression toward the centre as it is a progression toward a reification of his exemplary marginal status as an other. Somewhat paradoxically, Finch's status as an exemplary outsider in the world of Jalna gives him the potential opportunity to occupy a particular type of social centre, and his movement toward this unique position is made possible only by means of the instability and mobility of his status as

mentally ill and the unique affinities afforded by this status.

Accordingly, Finch is introduced into the narrative as a character who is seemingly perpetually on the outside, regardless of context, and so when Finch refers to himself as “*nothing*” in one of his more solitary and depressed episodes near the beginning of the narrative, his seemingly hyperbolic statement is, in the social context of Jalna, surprisingly accurate (39). Before Finch is even introduced by name—and since Finch is the first character introduced in the novel, this delayed naming is indicative of his paradoxical centrality/marginality in the text—he is described as being among the “few stragglers” who mean to attend the horse show that initiates the narrative (1); he is, quite literally, among those who are *not yet inside*. Moreover, Finch further recognizes himself as an outsider among the stragglers and negotiates with himself as to which visual marginalization is less exposing, for he must decide whether to conceal his “textbooks and dilapidated notebook” under his raincoat, which would make “a repulsive-looking lump on his person,” or bear the “mark of a student” and advertise his relative immaturity and incomplete education. He chooses to advertise his lack of formation rather than posture as someone repulsively “formed,” and it is perhaps this sincere acceptance of his status as “unformed” that catalyzes his *Bildung*. Once “inside the hall,” Finch remains outside of “the inner part of the building” for some time, and instead of proceeding to the inner sphere in which Renny will find out that Finch has left school early in order to attend the show, he navigates this boundary area in a manner that demonstrates Finch’s own liminal status.

His existence as “somewhere in between” (354) is reflected in the areas with which he is fascinated. First, he is taken by the “monstrous chrysanthemums”—“[t]heir elegance, their fragility, combined with the vividness of their colouring, gave him a feeling of tremulous happiness”—and the “pretty young woman,” whose “female loveliness” is, to some extent,

equated with the flowers. Next, he is “roused by the sound of a man’s voice shouting,” moves to the automobile section from which the shouting came, and looks as “sagacious” as he can while talking to a salesman, leaving with his shoulders thrust back and his expression “tightened” into one of “manly composure.” Finch then proceeds up a “long stairway” to “look at the kennels of silver foxes,” whose “glittering eyes, . . . pointed muzzles and upstanding, vigorous fur” are rendered unattractive by the reality that the foxes are “[t]rapped, all of them, behind the strong wire of their cages.” All three areas have their draws—the beauty of flowers, the “deference” that accompanies the augmented authority of the vehicles, the vigour of the foxes—and their drawbacks—the chrysanthemums are “monstrous,” the automobiles represent a performed masculine affectation, the strength relative to the foxes demonstrate a “drear imprisonment”(1-3). More importantly, Finch does not belong in any of these spaces. If the display of flowers represents an almost obscene femininity, the automobile section’s moto-prosthetics represent a masculine lack—a disabled masculinity—and the caged foxes represent the boundary-detesting vitality of successful masculinity, then these scenes demonstrate that Finch can appreciate and, to some extent, connect with these various social spheres, even if he does not belong and cannot be allowed to remain in them.

Finch finds, however, a particular boundary space between the automobiles and the foxes—between disabled masculinity and vigorous masculinity—within the larger boundary space of the outer building, and it is here that he approaches a state of belonging. It is “[a]t the head of the stairs” that lead up to the silver foxes that Finch encounters “an elderly man [who is] drooping mournfully before an exhibit of canaries” (3). The only character at the horse show whose description approximates that of depression offers Finch the lottery ticket for the canary that not only introduces the “affinity of bird” motif, but that also sets into motion the entire plot

of the novel. Moreover, Finch decides to purchase the lottery ticket because he is longing for some kind of special affinity within his family, one which he imagines he might have “if he had had a mother living” to whom he might give this canary as a gift (3).

At this point in the novel, however, Finch’s in-between status precludes any opportunity for substantial affinities with others, as is demonstrated once Finch enters the inner part of Coliseum. Even once inside, he is relegated to margins of the “cheaper seats,” where he is chastised by a drunken, dialectically Scottish man and humiliated as a result by the laughter of surrounding spectators. Conversely, the “inside of the ring” is ideally meant for individuals such as Renny: “No women... Only men. Men and horses” (4-7). Even though the narrator enters Finch’s consciousness and attempts to question this boundary by asserting that Renny’s mare was “feminine enough,” it is ultimately Renny who receives the coveted “blue ribbon,” Pheasant who receives the secondary “red ribbon,” and Finch who is “clinging to the paling” looking “little more than an idiot” (7-9). In the hierarchy that the contests of the narrative’s first chapter represent, Finch is merely a spectator; the “idiot” is not necessarily lower than the woman in the social hierarchy—even if Pheasant subsequently and condescendingly refers to him as a “horrid little pig” (11)—but is instead a non-member of the social dynamics, an immeasurable other.

He Took the Part of an Idiot—Too Damned Well (Whiteoaks 95)

Despite the multiple early descriptions of Finch as an “idiot”—coming almost exclusively from the perspective of Renny, who is especially disheartened by Finch’s acting proficiency in taking “the part of an idiot” for a play (95)—Finch is more than the “dunce” of the early *Bildungsroman*. He is established as an other amidst others, and it is Arthur Leigh, a peculiar other himself, who eventually articulates the way in which Finch occupies that position. Arthur is the first of only two characters to establish a profound bond with Finch, and as such, Arthur is

positioned to catalyze the transformation of Finch's self-image. A crucial distinction is made in the following exchange between Finch and the Leighs, one that describes Finch's social position in a way that could only have been articulated by Arthur:

Mrs. Leigh observed: "Arthur has talked of you a great deal. He thinks your acting of the idiot boy quite wonderful."

"Ah, that's easy for me," grinned Finch. "The idiot part."

"Mother," broke in Leigh, "how can you? Cloutie John isn't an idiot. He's mad. Absolutely, gloriously mad."

Ada Leigh said, in a low deep voice, with a look into Finch's eyes which set them definitely apart from the others: "Is that easy, too, for you? The madness, I mean."

Her brother answered for Finch, fearing that he would give another stammering, grinning reply. "The easiest thing in the world my child. All he has to do is be himself. He's absolutely, gloriously mad also. Just wait until you see the play. When Cloutie John comes on the stage, madness, like an electric current, is going to thrill the soul of that simple-minded audience..."

"I expect I am a little mad," [Finch] answered... (61)

Arthur is adamant here that Finch is not an idiot; rather, he proposes, in a manner that is simultaneously romanticized and purposeful and that recalls Price's preference of madness as an identifier over illness, that Finch is "mad." By making this distinction, Arthur emphasizes eccentricity rather than inferiority, a unique perspective rather than a flawed one, for a genius, artistic or otherwise, can be mad but cannot be an idiot. At this point in the narrative, however, Finch has accepted an outsidership founded upon his supposed stupidity and has accepted this position as "easy" or natural to him. Finch is convinced that his marginality, that of idiocy, is one

that precludes the possibility of social agency, but Arthur is convinced otherwise. For Arthur, Finch is “absolutely, gloriously mad,” and instead of Finch being the object of derision and laughter that is the idiot, he acts as “an electric current” upon audience members who are themselves simple-minded and are, therefore, better representatives of “the idiot.” Arthur effectively inverts the idiot/agent binary that had an internal, hegemonic hold on Finch’s understanding of self, but Finch has not concretized this inversion. Therefore, Arthur must present this interpretation of Finch on Finch’s behalf while concealing his disappointment that Finch’s own replies make “no impression but one of stupidity on his mother and sister” (62). Finch does accept that he may be “a little mad” at the end of the conversation, though, and it is this small acceptance that leads to a further acceptance of Finch’s agency both in himself and in his family.

The difference between Arthur’s successful approach and Renny’s unsuccessful approach to the facilitation and understanding of Finch’s development is also characterized by Renny’s conception of Finch as an “idiot” and Arthur’s conception of him as “mad.” Renny, on one hand, conceives of Finch’s *Bildung* in a traditionally masculine manner.¹⁰ When Arthur tells Renny about Finch’s interest and talent in acting, Renny eventually responds with, “I don’t object to anything so long as it’s not gong to interfere with his studies” (85), expressing Finch’s *Bildung* explicitly as an education, an enlightenment, and when Renny is informed that Finch has kissed Ada, Renny is amused by what he conceives of as Finch “getting to be a man” (91). However, Arthur, who considers “the personalities of the Whiteoaks too *vigorous*,” finds that “Renny’s words” regarding the encouragement of Finch’s *Bildung* “scarcely encourage him [Arthur]” (85; emphasis mine). This is because Arthur, on the other hand, conceives of Finch’s development in a manner more particular to Finch’s peculiar social position and unique set of proficiencies, as

Arthur knows that Finch's "madness"—and the genius that accompanies it—require a more holistic education than that which is provided through "his studies." When Arthur asks Finch to play the grand piano that Arthur is fortunate enough to have in his home, he realizes the type of encouragement that is necessary to facilitate Finch's *Bildung*:

[Finch] had never touched [a grand piano] in his life. . . . His awkwardness fell from him as he slid on to the polished seat and laid his hands on the keys. Leigh noticed then what shapely hands he had despite their boniness. He noticed the shape of his head. Finch was going to be a distinguished-looking man some day. He was going to help Finch to attain his full spiritual growth, foster with his friendship the genius that he felt sure was in him[.] "Play," he said, smiling, and leaned across the piano toward him.

The piano was a steed. Finch's hands were on the bridle. (67)

Arthur realizes that Finch's hands are far from manly, but they are—along with Finch's head—"shapely" nonetheless, and while Finch may never be typically or exemplarily handsome, the development of his head and his hands may lead him to be "distinguished," which denotes a paradoxical combination of eminence and difference, importance and distinctiveness, centrality and otherness.¹¹ While Finch is incapable of actually playing anything at this time—"though his fingers ached to gather the notes, his brain refused to guide them" (68)—Arthur intuitively recognizes that playing the piano is precisely what Finch must do if he is to become "distinguished" and fulfill his potential as a genius.

The paradoxical position of a potential genius, however, generates a substantial amount of flux in terms of identity. Perhaps the most important aspect of the distinction between idiocy and madness is the relative allowance for changeability in these statuses, for the subsequent narrative

episodes demonstrate that Arthur was correct in identifying Finch as part of the more mutable category of the mentally ill—and potentially genius—rather than as fulfilling the more prescribed position of “the idiot” who may eventually become “a man.” It is, after all, the establishment of Finch’s implicitly homoerotic relationship with Arthur that solidifies Finch’s marginality as something beyond the idiocy and weakness that characterize him up to this point. While the relationship is presented as innocent and as something that never develops beyond a profound affection, it is perceived by “the men” as something truly deviant, as is made evident in their homophobic responses to the intimate language used in a letter from Arthur to Finch. While Renny and Piers’s responses do not explicitly raise the issue of Finch’s sexual preference, descriptors of Finch’s behaviour as “disgusting,” “deceptive,” and “neurotic” all point toward this reading (122-3). Their assertion of his psychological deviance causes Finch to embody his outsider status by actually leaving Jalna, and this excursion initiates the cycle of acceptances and rejections that continues for the remainder of the narrative.

It is this cycle that creates the most substantial connection between Finch’s “madness” and the *Bildungsroman* narrative structure, for if the formative trajectory is to be understood as a series of encounters with the other that lead to a protagonist’s centrality of self, then it is the doubleness that is ascribed to psychosocially marginal characters that transforms these encounters into a measured, progressive cycle. Every character in *Whiteoaks* who is deemed “mentally ill” is described as having multiple selves as a result of this instability.¹² Arthur admits that he’s “so damned self-conscious” and, as a result, is “always posing” as someone he is not (66). Finch is accused of deception on multiple occasions throughout the narrative and admits that he finds it “the easiest thing in the world to lead a double life” (104). Even Adeline is accused of being “deranged” for altering her will from her earlier, more obvious decisions to the

final resolve to bequeath her fortune to Finch (285). Finch's progression can then be characterized as a sequence of "double lives" in which an acceptance in a life outside of Jalna is succeeded by a collision between the two lives and Finch's subsequent—and often superficial—rejection from both.

Although Finch travels outside of the social dynamic of Jalna to experience his secondary lives—as is typical of the traditional *Bildungsroman*—the actual encounter with the other only really happens when he returns to Jalna. Finch's friendship with the Leighs in the nearby city, along with the play-acting that led to that friendship, is the first of his additional lives, and while both his performance in the play and the Leighs' family dynamic are foreign to Finch when he encounters them, he grows accustomed to both the dramatic performance of his role and the exquisiteness of his friend and his friend's family. Rather than being treated like the other, he is accepted into both the theatre and the Leighs' home, and in the case of his relationship with Arthur Leigh, this acceptance leads to an accommodation or adoption of Arthur's marginality. Arthur's otherness makes Finch question why "[t]he pressure of Leigh's slender, small-boned body against his [makes] him feel stronger than he had ever felt before" (59), while Arthur's sister Ada's presence makes him feel uncomfortable and "confused" (68). Finch ultimately embraces Arthur's intimate friendship and even eventually kisses Ada, and thus achieves a degree of centrality in this life that would have been unfeasible in Jalna. However, when Finch's adopted dramatics on the stage and "exquisiteness" in the presence of Arthur are translated back to Jalna through Renny, who witnesses both the play and, later, Arthur's letter, Finch's behaviour is deemed deviant, and his acceptance in Jalna is compromised. This pattern repeats when Finch's life with his friend George as a member of a dance-hall orchestra—a secondary life to which Finch resorts after having to distance himself from Arthur—collides with Jalna. Since the

letter from Arthur is revealed to the brothers at the same time as Finch's intoxication reveals his secretive, late-night orchestra performances, these rejections from secondary lives coalesce and ultimately manifest in Finch's running away to New York.

Finch's seemingly stable life in New York then similarly intersects with Jalna when Ernest is sent to retrieve him, and upon Finch's return, he immediately procures a new existence outside of Jalna through his late-night organ practice at a nearby church. This in turn leads to Finch's second important affinity with a mental other, as his late nights lead to a series of "bizarre assignations" with Grandmother Adeline after the rest of the house's inhabitants are asleep (239). Even though their relationship takes place within Jalna, it does not take place within the social dynamics of Jalna, for they avoid "each other in the presence of the family, fearing that some intimate look, some secret smile, might betray their intimacy" (239); thus, this relationship functions as yet another of Finch's alternate lives. Once again, Finch encounters a figure whose otherness is initially regarded as foreign but whose perspective is subsequently and naturally adopted by Finch, and this figure is not Adeline as the Whiteoaks know her, but as "Finch came to know her, ... as he was sure no other member of the household understood her" (239). This Adeline is not only a mental deviant, but a spiritual deviant as well, one who feels that "Western religions are flibbertigibbet beside Eastern religions" and who presents a statue of "Kuan Yin"—"in Chinese Buddhism, the bodhisattva of infinite compassion and mercy" ("Guanyin," n.p.)—to Finch as an expression of their special affinity as outsiders and as a gesture of encouragement for Finch's spiritual development (237-8). Unfortunately for Finch, the pattern of acceptance in one life followed by a collision of these lives and a subsequent rejection in both repeats itself here. When the family finds out about these meetings after Adeline dies and her fortune is left to him, he is accused of unintentionally causing the death of his own grandmother by preventing her

from getting the sleep that she needed, a fallacious accusation that thrusts him so far outside of both Jalna and the relationship he had established with Adeline that suicide appears to be the only recourse. Finch's subsequent attempt to drown himself in the nearby lake represents his final endeavour to find a second life, and his return to life at Jalna is the final encounter with the mental other—and this time the only remaining mental other is himself.

How Natural! He's Bound to Have Spectacular Things Happen to Him! (Whiteoaks 349)

While Finch's trajectory up to this point appears to amount to little more than a sequence of recurring failures in which a secondary centrality is abandoned for sake of life at Jalna—and this succession of similar events seemingly fails to amount to any profound realization in Finch—there are subtle reminders that Finch has indeed been learning, both before and after his suicide attempt instigates a consolidation of his experiences. This process of learning in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, however, is normalizing rather than empowering. For Finch, learning is the process of transforming his eccentric otherness into an exemplary otherness, one that comforts rather than alienates, and while the bequest that Finch receives is rightly interpreted by Arthur's sister Ada as a “spectacular thing,” the optimism with which Ada makes this observation is misplaced, for the spectacle of his wealth initially only alienates him further from Jalna's social centre. Furthermore, Finch does not become a more complex and esoteric character, as might be expected after the formation process of a “mad” character, a genius. Since his two major allies no longer have an effective proximity to him—Arthur has been pushed away and Adeline has passed away—Finch merely becomes more representative of Jalna's variegated otherness and more compatible with its varied inhabitants.

The main textual examples of how Finch progresses in this direction manifest in the novel's successive treatments of Finch's friendships with Arthur and George. Throughout the

narrative, the eccentricity and excitement of Finch's relationship with Arthur Leigh is treated in an increasingly negative manner: "the sense of adventure and exhilaration of [Finch's] friendship with Arthur" that made his relationship with George seem obligatory and boringly normal in comparison becomes progressively less desirable, to the extent that, after the suicide attempt, Finch admits that he "thought oftenest of his friend, George," the friend with whom Finch spent "the happiest time of his life" while performing in the orchestra (96, 325). Even immediately after Finch's performance in the play, "he felt a change, which was not so much a change as a development" in his relationship with Arthur (97), which eventually leads to Arthur's secondary status relative to George.¹³ It is George who first visits Finch and who "further [forwards Finch's] recovery" after the suicide attempt (328), while Arthur is only able to send a short letter, one that is regarded as a "charm," an object whose "exquisite" hand "symbolizes . . . the dignity and elegance of Arthur's life" rather than symbolizing their actual friendship (330). Arthur is becoming foreign here, more an idea than an individual, but his foreignness is established—yet not recognized by Finch—much earlier in the text. There is a parallel between Arthur and Narcissus that Finch identifies early in their acquaintanceship—after seeing the narcissi by Arthur's bath, Finch tells Arthur that it would not be "hard to picture you gazing at your reflection in a pool" (59)—that is actualized during their final meeting in the novel. Finch's reaction both normalizes the experience and decisively rejects Arthur's epistemology:

[Arthur] perched on the railing of the bridge and extolled now the beauty of the sky, now that of his own reflection in the pool below.

"If I were as charming a fellow," he said, "in my actual person as I am in that shadowy reflection, I'd have the world at my feet! Lean over and look at yourself, Finch."

Finch peered into the pool, as he had done a thousand times. “Mostly nose,” he grumbled. (358)

Finch recognizes that his social position as an other will never lead to him having the “world at his feet,” but in the context of Jalna, it may lead to a consolidation—or at least a coexistence—between the person he sees in the reflection and the person he sees as “his actual person.” For Finch, his reflection is neither extravagantly positive nor entirely alien, and the difference between how each of these two characters perceives his own reflection signals an irreconcilable gap between their epistemologies: Arthur can imagine eminence, both in himself and others, and Finch can only see amalgamable difference.

The expansion of the gap between Arthur’s eccentricity and Finch’s relative normalcy in turn leads to an increased proximity between Finch and the social centre of his family. After his recovery from his suicide attempt, Finch agonizes over what his return to Jalna will entail, even if the majority of the family at Jalna “were told that Finch had had a ‘nervous breakdown’ (most convenient of illnesses) just as he arrived at the Vaughans’ house, had been taken in, and had been nursed back to health by the blameless Meggie” (327). However, when he finally summons the courage to reenter that world, he is immediately “needed,” “regarded without bitterness,” “taken under Aunt Augusta’s crêpe-trimmed wing,” and offered a special relationship within the house with, unsurprisingly, the canary that served as the impetus for his education (332). After being “needed” once more by Uncle Nicholas, “the one [Finch] dreaded [to encounter] most of all,” he thinks that his “homecoming [may] not be so harrowing after all” (333). The ease with which his reintegration occurs is largely due to Finch’s new status as the acceptable other, one who has shed—through a variety of means—the discomfiting eccentricities of idiocy, homosexuality, and depression.

But more than just smoothly reintegrating into Jalna, Finch reenters the family dynamic occupying an entirely different social position in the family. The inherited money, and the acceptance by Adeline that the money represents, eventually lends Finch a central otherness that gives him positive agency in the family, especially when he agrees to be generous with that money. Finch is still an other amidst others, but he is now an active and representative participant in the family dynamics of Jalna instead of merely being acted upon by these dynamics, as he was at the beginning of the novel. The final chapter then sums up the extent to which Finch has been transformed by his encounters with psychosocial marginality, as he can no longer be considered mentally ill in any of its narrative-dominating forms.¹⁴ His apparently feminine desires for Arthur Leigh and play-acting have been subverted by the significantly more masculine desire for “wild-duck shooting” (381). The “nervousness” that led to his suicide attempt has been transformed into a “fierce” anxiousness, a “glad eagerness,” a disembodied “trembling with excitement” (383). Piers, who is Finch’s antithesis and the only consistently “able” male in the story, demonstrates an acceptance of his brother’s capacity to “be of some use” (382). Finally, Renny consults Finch about the last words of their grandmother, Adeline, giving both Finch and his psychosocially marginal ally the final word of the novel, a word that signals a minor conquest in the black-and-white, us-and-them battle of backgammon. The processes of education and formation have finally led to Hirsch’s “definite denouement” with Finch’s relative mental centrality, unity, and stability, even within the world of Jalna. Finch has “come of age,” and the novel ends in a celebration of that victory: “Gammon!” (384)

But this is, of course, a qualified success. In order for Finch to achieve this relative centrality at Jalna, he must abandon the temporary centralities of the “second lives” that he achieved outside of Jalna, including those associated with the most substantial advocate of his

formation, Arthur. If the modernist *Bildungsroman* is formation through “a dissent from social order,” a “resistance to the institutionalization of self-cultivation (Bildung)” itself (Castle 24), and if Finch returns to the highly situated social order of Jalna, then he measuredly participates in a more traditional form of *Bildung* at the cost of full participation in the more modern, subversive form advocated by both Arthur and Adeline. Unfortunately for Finch, his lack of masculine vigour and surplus of residual psychosocial aberrances make his character incompatible with the more optimistic iterations of the traditional, male *Bildungsroman*, and so his formation functions similarly to that of the female *Bildungsroman* in that he “grows down” into a recognition of his limitations and obligations rather than “growing up” into an ideal, fulfilled self.

This is, however, only Finch’s public recourse to what is potentially a more profound and subversive private formation of purpose, a secondary *Bildung* that points toward a simultaneous success in both subversion and accommodation, otherness and centrality, and it is this simultaneous success through both public normalization and private fulfillment that may be the distinguishing characteristic of the psychosocially disabled *Bildungsheld*. In the novel’s last depiction of Finch in relative solitude, Alayne notices an improvement in Finch that could only have been precipitated by a persuasion away from Renny’s ideals: “Finch played for [Alayne] during the evening and she was filled with delight by the improvement in him, pride that it had been she who had persuaded Renny to have him taught” (370). The final scene that depicts “the women” and “the disabled” seeing off “the men”—significantly now including Finch—on their duck-hunting expedition explicitly suggests that Finch will take the more normative path prescribed by Renny, that Finch will make himself useful, find an admirable vocation, and become a contributing “man.” However, this earlier, more intimate moment between Finch and

one of his longstanding female allies from outside of Jalna's social core signifies his more penetrating and extensive personal growth as an artist, a growth that mimics the *Künstlerroman* over the span of several novels as Finch goes from a minor character struggling to maintain access to piano lessons in *Jalna* to a titular character in *Finch's Fortune* (1931) and a respected concert pianist in later Jalna novels. Furthermore, Finch's ability to perform—and perform impressively well—for Alayne despite his struggle to perform for Arthur earlier in the novel intimates that Finch's pivotal *Bildung* in *Whiteoaks* utilizes the best advice that he receives throughout the entire novel, advice that comes in the form of Arthur's encouraging smile accompanied by one word: “Play.”

Notes

¹ This generic reiteration was first explored in Sherry Klein's 1988 essay, "'The Damnable Plot': Female Roles and Elements of Romance in Mazo de la Roche's *Mary Wakefield*," and has since been examined in Wendy Roy's recent conference paper, "Jane Eyre's Twentieth-Century Sister: The Governess as Disruptive Force in Mazo de la Roche's *Mary Wakefield*."

² This definition functions as an intentionally general baseline for more nuanced explorations of the term throughout the essay. As more scholarly perspectives on the *Bildungsroman* are introduced, the definition itself—along with its application to *Whiteoaks*—will be subject to an analogous formation process.

³ Wilhelm Dilthey was, for many years, credited with coining the German term *Bildungsroman* in a biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher (*Leben Schleiermachers*) written in 1870 (Shaffner 3). However, in Fritz Martini's 1961 paper "Der Bildungsroman: Zur Geschichte des Wortes und der Theorie," Martini relates his discovery that Dilthey merely popularized a term that was first publically used by Karl von Morgenstern during a lecture on December 12, 1810, titled "Über den Geist und Zusammenhang einer Reihe philosophischer Romane." Morgenstern's conception of the *Bildungsroman* was substantially influenced by the ideologies of the Enlightenment—particularly the concept of individualism—so he understood the genre as a cultivation process, one that was pragmatic, pedagogical, and rational and that had a similar "cultivating effect" on the reader: for both the protagonist and the reader, the genre's gendered purpose was "to foster moral elevation and masculine strength of character" (3).

⁴ The potential autobiographical parallels between Finch and de la Roche, who both have a questionable sexual identity and a history of mental instability, are explored in Joan Givner's 1989 critical biography, *Mazo de la Roche: The Hidden Life*.

⁵ In “Cultivating Gender: Sexual Difference, *Bildung*, and the *Bildungsroman*,” John Smith emphasizes the social element of the *Bildungsroman* from a particularly scathing, gender-critical perspective: “*Bildung*, and its narrativization in the *Bildungsroman*, is not an ‘organic’ but a social phenomenon that leads to the construction of male identity in our sex-gender system by granting men access to self-representation in the patriarchal symbolic order” (216). In *Whiteoaks*, however, the inevitable inter-subjective socialization that accompanies any *Bildung* is emphasized—rather than downplayed—through the atypical number of subjectivities that are present in the narrative, for unlike many *Bildungsromane*, Finch’s dominant narrative perspective as the protagonist does not preclude the inclusion of multiple other influential narrative perspectives.

⁶ When Hardin describes his reasoning for titling his quite recent collection of essays on the *Bildungsroman* genre *Reflection and Action*, he reinforces the traditional tendency to associate the *Bildungsheld* with masculine vigour: “It is not sufficient for the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* to reflect, though this is essential. . . . But action is also important. . . . It is [the *Bildungsheld*’s] enthusiasm, his naive *vigor*, his energy and drive that are attractive and that maintain the interest of the reader in him” (“Introduction” xiii; emphasis mine).

⁷ The effect of Maurice’s disabled arm on his identity is also explicitly used to contrast with the effect that Finch’s mental condition has on his frequently volatile *Bildung*. When Finch is being interrogated by the Whiteoaks after the family has found out that Adeline has bequeathed her entire fortune to him, the narrator conveys Finch’s envy of the stabilizing, comfortable, and unmoving influence that Maurice’s arm seems to have on his social identity: “Maurice dropped into a comfortable chair and began to fill his pipe with his active hand, the disabled one lying,

unmoved and smooth, on the leather arm of the chair. Finch, seeing it, felt a sudden morbid envy of it” (295).

⁸ Two additional observations can be made here. First, Adeline’s violent opposition to Finch’s lottery ticket for the canary is made explicable by the “affinity of birds” motif, for Adeline is justifiably wary of any external and unknown influence that could potentially compromise this special affinity. Second, Arthur’s first encounter with Adeline demonstrates a measured inclusion in this special affinity, as is demonstrated by her parrot’s simultaneous curiosity in and comfort around Arthur during the subtle exchange that follows their conversation about her age: “[t]he parrot ... flew heavily to her shoulder and pressed his head against her cheek. Their two old beaks were turned with preposterous solemnity on Leigh. ... Finch, very much pleased by Leigh’s evident delight in the scene, observed: ‘I’ve never seen [Boney] in such a good humor. He’s usually swearing or sulking or screaming for food’” (74).

⁹ While Hirsch’s letter is published under the name “Marianne Hirsch Gottfried,” I refer to her as “Hirsch” due to the scholarly familiarity with that name, and while this letter is perhaps less scholarly than some of her other work on the *Bildungsroman*, the inclusion of the letter has the significant latent effect of highlighting the continuing contention around the definition of this particular genre. As Hardin—along with many other *Bildungsroman* scholars—has noted, “there is no consensus on the meaning of the term Bildungsroman” (“Introduction” x), and it is this lack of consensus that, in my opinion, creates a contentious space that allows for a “psychosocially disabled” iteration of the genre. Furthermore, Hirsch’s prescriptions are actually quite accommodating in terms of potential generic mutations such as a psychosocially disabled *Bildungsroman*, especially compared to some scholars’ more stringent articulations of the genre’s parameters, such as Randolph P. Shaffner’s “Fundamental Principles” of the

apprenticeship novel (his translation of *Bildungsroman*), which include twenty-three concrete features, five presuppositions, and eight frequently emerging themes (17-19).

¹⁰ In “Introductions: Pathways to Inner Culture” from *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*, Gregory Castle states that “[i]n the modernist Bildungsroman, Bildung so often turns out to be dissent from social order, from the bourgeois appropriation of self-cultivation, a dissent as well from the ideas of pedagogy and parenting that sanction restrictive and punitive models of development. Particularly those elements that demanded stability and predictable development in the classical Bildungsroman—harmonious identity formation, aesthetic education, meaningful and rewarding social relations, a vocation—become problematic in the twentieth century” (24). The dichotomy presented here between the classical and the modernist iterations of the *Bildungsroman* is precisely the same dichotomy that de la Roche presents between Renny’s and Arthur’s approaches to Finch’s *Bildung*: Renny’s “restrictive and punitive” model of pedagogy pressures Finch to grow up, be a man, and get a job, while Arthur’s problematization of this model encourages Finch to grow *out* and find his own way (even if Arthur’s notion of Finch as a potential “genius” is traditional in that it assumes that one can fulfill a static and ideal identity).

¹¹ In the same manner that a master facilitates the formation of his or her apprentice in the apprenticeship paradigm, Arthur initiates the text of Finch’s *Bildung* in *Whiteoaks* while also catalyzing Finch’s more broad artistic fulfillment, which occurs over the course of the *Whiteoak Chronicles* as a whole: Arthur “help[s] Finch to attain his full spiritual growth, foster[ing] with his friendship the genius that he felt sure was in him.” When one considers that Arthur’s given name and the use of that name is explicitly emphasized—“Call me Arthur,” he tells Finch once they are more thoroughly acquainted (65)—it becomes likely that the phonetic commonalities

between Arthur and “author” are more than mere coincidences: Arthur is the potential “author” of both Finch’s *Bildungsroman* and his elongated *Künstlerroman* (the “artist’s novel”).

¹² One of the major reasons that Finch’s brother Eden is expelled from Jalna and from the narrative of *Whiteoaks* is that the doubleness of his mental condition becomes a duplicitousness, as the “double lives” afforded by his “poetic temperament” are consistently self-serving and deceitful. Regarding Eden’s literary inclinations, the narrator states upon Eden’s return home from New York that “Renny had hoped that [Eden’s] illness [tuberculosis] might have cured him of this other disability. But no, while Eden lived he would make verse, and trouble” (218). The use of “disability” and “illness” as interchangeable and nearly synonymous here—along with the comparing of these two terms with the following “verse/trouble” zeugma—conflates the disabled and the ill in a problematically inclusive manner. The mental and the physical, the ontological and the incidental, the intentional and the accidental, and the productive and the destructive combine to form some loosely-defined “disabled duplicity” that ultimately amounts to a “trouble” in Jalna’s social dynamic that requires Eden’s expulsion from that dynamic.

¹³ De la Roche’s coopting of the phrase “not so much a change as a development” here is one of several similar instances in which she decontextualizes and destabilizes language that is typically used in the description of the *Bildungsroman*. Here, the narrator uses this phrase to describe Finch’s movement away from Arthur, who is, paradoxically, the character who is most focally concerned with Finch’s holistic self-development.

¹⁴ The problematic implication of Finch’s transformation is that maturation solves or “cures” psychosocial aberrance, that sexual deviancy and depression are not facets of one’s identity, but are rather “phases” out of which one will eventually grow. There is, however, a latent lack of affirmation regarding the result of Finch’s transformation that functions to question this

normative presentation of *Bildung*, for Finch's position at the end of novel is more compromise than fulfillment, and his rectification is more public than personal.

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