

Fine Character Portrayals Aid Propaganda

"Whiteoaks," which was staged by the Repertory Theatre Society last night, is propaganda. It contains a plea for those sensitive and artistic spirits who lack the power to cope with the harshness of the world, and it indicts their unimaginative brothers for not recognising their value.

Mazo de la Roche the author, must have felt passionately about the injustice of the scorn that is the lot of those whose ambition is not material. She must have been one of them herself. She has embodied her message in a moving drama, enacted by well-drawn characters, with a strong climax that is always delayed by the humour of the dialogue.

The play depends mostly on the characterisation, rather than drama. It deals with one idea, not the interplay and conflict of several themes. Consequently the chief responsibility of the cast was to portray the subtle and diverse personalities of the roles, and this it accomplished with great merit and apparent ease in almost all cases.

FINE PORTRAYAL

One of the chief characters round which the story revolves is the grandmother of the Whiteoak household, impetuous, with a Rabelaisian wit, determined not to die, ridiculing the weaknesses of her sons and grandsons. The other is the musical Finch, the second youngest grandson, whose burning ambition is to be a great pianist, but who is scorned by his brothers and uncles for his unpractical nature.

Peggy Aspry gave a thoroughly convincing and really gripping picture of the grandmother, Adeline Whiteoak.

Her will is the subject of the speculation of the rest of the family—except Finch. Judged by the standard of most "old women" and "old men" played by young people on the amateur stage, it was a masterpiece of characterisation, but judged by any standards it was exceptionally good.

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The more emotional role of Finch was also well drawn by John Dolby. His interpretation of the part was a mixture of idealism and bitterness, ambition and despair, tenderness, and "resentfulness of his brothers' cruelty."

But a more finished piece of acting was that of Peter Buchanan, who played Piers, the scornful brother, who bursts in'o laughter when Finch plays the piano. Renny, another brother who looks after the estate, is a more complex character, and a more difficult one. Although Renny belongs to the same world as Piers, he is the only one, apart from the grandmother, who understands and sympathises with the downtrodden Finch.

Alan Ward who played the role, avoided the sentimentality which might have destroyed the dignity of the character.