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Grain Elevators: The Cathedrals of the Plains

By

Heather Charest

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies**

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis**

“Grain Elevators: The Cathedrals of the Plains”

submitted by Heather Charest, B.A.

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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April, 2002

Abstract

People, culture and the physical environment are intricately connected. This thesis reviews the history and function of grain elevators on the Canadian prairie landscape. It then examines the cultural representation of these elevators by prairie artists and writers. It maintains that through a kind of mythologizing process, these prairie icons have been elevated from the regional consciousness to the national consciousness. Research includes personal interviews conducted with local activists in Leduc, Alberta who are currently struggling to save their town's grain elevator from demolition. This thesis argues that grain elevators are part of a cultural landscape imbued with a history and a social value worthy of active consideration and ultimately of sustainability through some form of preservation.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Gregory MacInnis, a man who may not have been a teacher in the traditional sense of the word but whose own wisdom taught me one of life's most important lessons: strength of conviction. Always and Forever.

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Introduction

“The Question of Canadian identity, so far as it affects the creative imagination, is not a Canadian question at all, but a regional question” (Frye, i).

For many years, grain elevators have been an important icon associated with the prairie landscape. Historically, grain elevators have been an integral part of the region’s economic mainstay. Furthermore, grain elevators served as the focal point for many prairie towns and villages. In recent years, grain companies have sought to replace existing clap-board grain elevators with more economically viable concrete grain terminals called grain condominiums. Not only are these newer facilities much larger than the traditional style elevators, they are also fewer in number. Thus, the recent economic restructuring that has taken place on the prairies has been hard on smaller communities whose identity is disappearing along with their traditional style elevators.

The grain elevator is the most pervasive symbol of the prairies. “For poet, farmer, architect, and artist alike, the grain elevator is the building which is formed by and reflects back the landscape, economic wealth, and the social structure of the prairies.” (Boddy, 26). Elevators are an important facet of prairie identity. They gave people a sense of place and provided a useful means to navigate through an extremely vast and often unrelenting landscape. Le Corbusier referred to them as “the cathedrals of the plains.” Just as cathedrals marked important European cities during the Middle Ages, grain elevators marked important prairie towns at the turn of the 20th century. In this sense, grain elevators were synonymous with prairie settlement. “Evoking other ancient monumental forms, the elevators we see today are as functional as the pyramids, as socially important as cathedrals” (Silver, 10). Out of the estimated 6,000 elevators that once flourished across the three prairie provinces, there are only a couple of hundred traditional style grain elevators still standing.

As the disappearance of grain elevators continues to accelerate at an alarming rate, there is an increasing need to situate them within a cultural framework that acknowledges that they are part of a broader cultural landscape and ultimately worthy of more active consideration.

My interest in the relationship between culture and landscape in the prairies arises mainly from research papers written for a seminar course in heritage conservation. My research for that particular project did not uncover any studies devoted specifically to including grain elevators as part of a cultural landscape as defined by professionals working in the field. In fact, there is a serious absence of academic research of any kind that has been done on grain elevators. What studies there are have focused primarily on their historical function in relation to the development of the West. Articles by John Everitt and Walter Herbert fall into this category. A few studies, specifically those done by Harold Kalman and Alan Gowans, address them as architectural objects, but no study has attempted to explore the issues, particularly social value issues, with which this thesis deals. This would seem to be for one very obvious reason: assessing historical and architectural value fits more easily within the kind of quantitative analysis traditionally found in the heritage field. There has been little analysis of how literary and artistic portrayals of grain elevators establish these structures not only as culturally significant, but, based on that premise, as part of a distinct prairie identity worthy of some form of preservation.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the history of the grain elevator on the Prairies. It examines the historical function of these structures as well as what their recent disappearance from the prairie landscape has meant for smaller rural communities whose identity is tied to them.

Chapter 2 addresses the question, What is a cultural landscape? It provides various definitions of heritage, culture and landscape by government departments and agencies, academics, and heritage conservation professionals working in the heritage

field. This chapter situates the grain elevator within the theoretical framework of a cultural landscape. The discussion culminates in a case study of the Leduc grain elevator and the local initiatives put forward to save that town's grain elevator from demolition.

Chapter 3 examines the artistic rendering of grain elevators by three prairie artists: painters Robert Newton Hurley and William Kurelek and photographer Courtney Milne. This chapter argues that by mythologizing about these structures they have become part of our national consciousness and imbued with a distinct associative value.

With the same purpose in mind as chapter 3, chapter 4 examines the representation of grain elevators in fictional writing and how they have been mythologized by the writings of W. O. Mitchell , Robert Stead and Wallace Stegner.

In summary, this study explores the mythologization of grain elevators in art and literature as a way of ascertaining their cultural significance and social value, and ultimately argues that because of this significance they should be more actively protected and preserved.

Chapter One

Once the prairie was covered by wild grasses. Herds of buffalo ran across it. Now the land is plowed, cultivated, without buffalo. Yet around elevators abandoned to the prairie, the grass is wild again, the grain has become wild, a wild gold in a landscape of yellow grass extending to the edges of the earth. Sometimes the wind makes a pounding sound through the grass that is like thunder in your heart. There are other sounds here too, the chirping sound of crickets, the whistle of harriers, the nighttime song of coyotes. Unobstructed by mountains or woods, wind rages across the prairie. Sun beats down unblocked, without shadow. At night, stars lie as much on the prairie as they do in the sky. The line between earth and heaven is a fine one. The elevator connects the two.

Rudner, 42

1.1 Introduction

The country elevator is a noisy, dirty, and at times unsafe place, and yet it has an undeniable appeal. An unassuming structure designed as a facility to store and handle grain, the simple country elevator has eclipsed its intended role and become a prairie institution that has been woven into the social and economic fabric of the agricultural heartland. For more than a century, the country elevator has notably defined the Canadian prairies; it has afforded all who care to venture inside one, a passageway to the heart and soul of prairie life.

Grain elevators, the stark and imposing signposts of the prairies, have become the best known and most admired symbol of Western Canada. As the only man-made structures to make their presence felt on the endless plains, they have become the one example of architecture that is instantly recognized as “western” and as a visual metaphor for the backbone of the prairie economy, grain farming. Their almost mythical status has prompted many descriptive names over the last century; “castles of the New World,” “prairie giants,” “prairie sentinels,” “Gibraltar of the prairies,” “prairie lighthouses,” “prairie skyscrapers,” and “prairie cathedrals.” All of these are true, yet none quite reflects the real nature of the elevator, a nature that is inextricably linked to its towering

role in agriculture and the prairie way of life. Elevators are to the prairies what the windmill is to the Netherlands, what the igloo is to the Arctic, what the pyramid is to Egypt.

1.2 History

For over a century, the country elevator (since 1971 known officially as the primary elevator) became such an integral part of Western life that a settlement without one was seen as an oddity.

A village or town usually developed sometime after the railroad station and the grain storage shed were built. At first grain was stored in flat warehouses which became meeting places for farmers, who were always glad of breaks from the isolation of farm life. Soon some small entrepreneur would recognize an opportunity and would open a general store or grocery. This often would be followed by school, a blacksmith's forge, a bank, and a church. Regardless of the mixture of services and buildings, what arose unmistakably was a community.

MacKenzie, 53

However, due to a changing economy and technological advances, it would appear that the elevator is headed for extinction, the same fate that other prairie institutions faced: the one-room schoolhouse, the livery stable, and the small town railway station. "They have fallen by the hundreds all across the prairies as railways sell off short-line tracks that feed main lines and grain companies consolidate operations at large grain terminals on those lines" (Strojek, 12). Even though it may make commercial sense to abandon and demolish these structures, members of heritage societies as well as the general public are becoming concerned over the country elevator's extremely rapid and irrevocable disappearance from the prairies.

Grain companies are designing and building new structures that bear little resemblance to the country grain elevator, and this gives the original a certain nostalgic

aura. The elevator is more than a rotting, abandoned storage bin; it is a important reminder of the region's history and a symbol of its economic lifeblood.

The emergence of the Canadian grain elevator in the 1880s was closely connected to the settlement of the prairie provinces, and the development of hardy strains of wheat in the West. At that time there was only one source of livelihood for most Westerners: agriculture. The increasingly overcrowded countries of Europe, unable to grow sufficient grain to feed themselves, looked to the New World to provide them with wheat, one of the world's most important food staples. An ideal producer-consumer relationship arose almost overnight, and in response, prairie farmers started to specialize in wheat production for export.

There were several obstacles, however, which hindered the movement of grain from the interior of the continent to the markets. The first was transportation. "In 1876, 857 bushels of western wheat were bagged and loaded onto a steamboat, carried up the Red River to Saint Paul, Minnesota, and then shipped east by rail" (Siversides, 5). For the next ten years, the physical handling of wheat remained slow and awkward. Farmers would haul grain loose or in sacks to loading platforms along the railroad. After weighing, it would be shoveled or lifted manually into a rail car. As each of the sacks (usually 2 bushels) weighed 54 kg. (120 lbs.), it was back-breaking, slow work, and the grain was moved in extremely small amounts. The farmer might have to stay several days at the track site, or if he lived some distance away, it might take a week or two to fill a single boxcar, the capacity of which was approximately 650 sacks. This was needless time spent away from the farm.

By 1880, farmers who had previously managed to sustain a meager existence found their farms flourishing, and the amount of grain available for market began to far exceed what could be handled by these traditional methods at the track site. "With the gamut of inventions that ran from the reaper, the gangplow, the seeder, the thresher, the binder, the tractor and ended with the crowning glory of the combine, the West came into

its own” (Leacock, 76). The railway company was rarely able to supply enough boxcars to the customers in a timely manner because it took so long to fill them. This began to seriously hinder the system.

The second problem, then, was how could large amounts of bulk grain be stored at the rail site until boxcars were made available, and how could rail car loading be speeded up? Originally, farmers and the railway company disagreed as to what kind of structure would be best suited for handling the grain at railway sidings. Most farmers wanted a small horizontal building, one that they could afford to erect by themselves and that could store their crops separately until each farmer accumulated enough for a boxcar. The Canadian Pacific Railway wanted to erect a larger structure that, because of its size and design, would take advantage of the flowing quality of loose grain and would consequently make the loading of grain cheaper, quicker, and less labour-intensive for the railway. The key to quicker access to boxcars, lower handling costs, and greater profits became obvious only when grain producers, shippers and buyers all realized that they had to handle the product loose and in bulk. The quick decline of sacking in North America meant that Canadian and American wheat was in greater demand than that of other countries.

The vertical type of warehouse that emerged was called the grain elevator. It did not emerge out of thin air; the "first quasi-elevator structure on record was built in Buffalo, New York, in 1841"(Silversides, 7). Although structures similar to the modern elevator were already in use in the states of Minnesota and North and South Dakota by the 1870s, there were as yet no examples in the Canadian West. “The first tall elevator in Canada is believed to have been a circular stone structure built at Niverville, Manitoba, in 1879, a year after the first shipment of Western Canadian grain for overseas markets reached Glasgow” (Kalman, 525). The first angular design, which was stronger and easier to build, was introduced "at Gretna, Manitoba, by the Ogilvie Milling Company in

1881. It was short, square, and squat, with a storage capacity of 25,000 bushels" (Silversides, 7).

In 1881, the Canadian Pacific Railway was eager to play a role in the grain trade. Trains that had come west with settlers and their effects could logically be filled with grain for the return trip east, thus doubling profits. Although it built its own terminal elevators at Fort William in 1884, the CPR could not afford to construct the number of country elevators needed to start the grain transportation network. Therefore, it encouraged private companies to build them along the railway. "As farming became more mechanized and transportation improved, the elevators drew farther and farther apart and, of course, grew bigger and bigger" (Berry, 39). Free site rentals were offered to those who would construct a "standard" type of elevator, driven by a steam or gasoline engine, and who would use the proper machinery for elevating and cleaning the grain. In addition, the railway promised that its cars would not accept grain from anybody but the elevator agent. This guarantee excluded the farmer and so, until the 1899-1900 Royal Commission on the Transportation of Grain, the railway and the grain companies monopolized the grain trade.

Specifications for a "standard" elevator were adopted in 1913, and this was the main reason for the subsequent uniformity in elevator design for the next 50 years. "Its dimensions were 9.3 x 9.9 m (31 x 33 feet) with a 35,000 bushel capacity" (Silversides, 8). Set on a concrete pad, it had a 15-horsepower engine for the elevating device. Other "non-standard" elevators had their own uniform specifications. "The 45,000 bushel structure measured 10.2 x 10.8 m (34 x 36 feet), while the 55,000 bushel structure measured 10.8 x 11.4 m (36 x 38 feet)" (Silversides, 8). Metallic siding started to be used just before World War I.

Not surprisingly, elevators arose in exponentially increasing numbers alongside the railway. Occasionally, a town site determined where an elevator was to be located, but usually an elevator determined where a town was to be established. The structures

were built 13 to 16 km (8 to 10 miles) apart to facilitate grain deliveries from the producers. Originally, these deliveries were made by horse and wagon.

The earliest businesses to take advantage of these incentives were flour and grist mill companies such as the Ogilvie Milling Company, Lake of the Woods Milling Company, Ellison Milling and Elevator Company, and the Maple Leaf Milling Company. There were also many small farmer collectives (known as local unions) that built and operated one or two elevators for the farmers of a particular district. To be accepted into the system, however, "there had to be 40 shareholders with a minimum \$8,000 collected in membership fees" (Silversides, 9).

Flour companies usually bought only enough wheat to supply their own mills. Other companies, however, purchased grain in large quantities to sell throughout the prairie region, or in even larger quantities to market to Eastern Canada or export overseas. These firms prospered and expanded to become "line" companies, operating many elevators along a rail line. "The first line companies included the British American Elevator Company, the North Star Grain Company, the Canadian Elevator Company, the Paterson Grain Company, the Alberta Pacific Grain Company, the National Grain Company, and the Northern Elevator Company" (Silversides, 9).

The number of elevator companies grew at a tremendous rate. "By 1916 there were over 300 companies, a few British-owned, many more American-owned, and the majority financed by Canadians" (Silversides, 9). They decided to form an association to compare notes, lobby governments, and to set guidelines governing their relations with farmers. In July 1899, the Northwest Elevator Association was formed "for the purpose of formulating rules to govern transactions between its members in the handling and shipping of grain, with the object of reducing the expenses of handling the crop of the country to a minimum" (Lamont, 8). The association's name was changed in 1901 to the Northwest Grain Dealers Association and in 1940 to the Northwest Line Elevators Association, but its concerns remained the same.

After the turn of the century prairie settlement increased dramatically as larger areas of farmland were cultivated for the first time. The second and the third transcontinental railways, the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific, also encouraged the growth of line companies. "In 1882, there were six elevators through the prairie provinces, but by the season of 1900-1901, according to one estimate, there were 333 elevators in operation in Manitoba, as well as 88 in the Northwest Territories (Alberta and Saskatchewan), with a total capacity of almost 13 million bushels" (Siversides, 10). By 1910, there were an estimated "707 elevators in Manitoba, 1,004 in Saskatchewan, and 285 in Alberta, with a total capacity of over 57 million bushels" (Siversides, 10).

Because farmers were generally dissatisfied with the service they received from the existing grain companies, they began to form their own grain companies. "The Grain Growers Grain Company (later called United Grain Growers) was the first in 1906; the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company, and the Alberta Farmers Co-operative Elevator Company followed in 1911 and 1913" (Siversides, 11). With the inauguration of the three provincial wheat pools-Alberta in 1923, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1924-the number of elevators soared again, aided by the consolidation of the Canadian Northern and Grand Truck Pacific into Canadian National Railways.

Elevator growth peaked "in 1938 with a grand total of 5,758 licensed elevators" (Siversides, 11). Then, due to consolidation and changes in the grain industry, rural depopulation, technological innovations, and the growing dominance of highways over rail lines, it started its slow but steady decline. "As of 1996 there were 1,190 elevators still serving farmers in the three prairie provinces" (Siversides, 11). Today, this number appears to be down to a couple of hundred.

The reasons for the decline deserve some explanation. When the Depression hit in the 1930s, many families packed up and left their farms, in some cases leaving whole townships deserted. After the Second World War, increased mechanization in prairie

agriculture meant higher profits and larger farms. Consequently, the number of family farms declined and migration of the rural population to the cities and larger towns increased. Many villages became nothing more than elevator points, which were expensive for the railway companies to maintain in the face of the loss of passenger and freight business.

In addition, the grain-handling system was becoming increasingly inefficient. The majority of the country elevators were constructed when grain was hauled by horse and wagon. The short distance from a farm to the elevator suited both farmers and elevator companies at the time. However, greatly improved roads and larger and faster grain-hauling trucks transformed the situation considerably.

The many half-empty elevators were not paying their way, were costing the elevator companies salaries and fuel, and were reducing their profits significantly. The railway companies were also losing their freighting business and, in turn, unofficially started to eliminate unprofitable branch lines that did not carry at least 30,000 bushels per track mile, a figure they considered to be the break-even mark.

After an extremely poor growing season in 1961, which reduced grain production in the prairie provinces by half, the elevator companies stepped up their policy of rationalization and centralization of elevator services. This involved abandoning worn out, small capacity, and uneconomical elevators or, in some cases, the physical relocation of elevators from potential ghost towns to larger centers to add to their storage capacity. "The 1961 MacPherson Royal Commission on Transportation officially recommended that railways not be forced to maintain unprofitable branch lines without subsidy" (Silversides, 13). This opened the way for further branch line abandonment, which the railways generally implemented in consultation with the elevator companies in order to cause the least inconvenience.

A further reason for abandonment involved the buying out or merging of grain companies, a trend that began as early as the 1910s and accelerated during the 1960s and

1970s. Amalgamations and takeovers have been so commonplace that, presently, there are only eight major elevator companies. For instance, "the Pioneer Grain Company acquired elevators from the Goose Lake Grain Company in 1922, the Saskatchewan and Western Grain Company in 1931, the Reliance Grain Company in 1948, the Western Grain Company in 1951, and the Independent Grain Company in 1953, and the Inter-Ocean Grain Company in 1972" (Silversides, 13).

Reducing the number of companies hastened elevator closings. If a town had several elevators, including one owned by the Pool and one by the Federal Grain Company, it was unprofitable to maintain both after the companies merged operations in 1972, especially if one of the elevators was old and needed refurbishing.

The closing of even one elevator, where there had been several, sometimes meant a decline in the total amount of grain delivered to that point. Since there have not been price differences for most grains for years, farmers have tended to deliver where they get better service and more storage space, often playing one company against another. Where there was little competition, farmers frequently kept on driving to a nearby town that did have several different elevators.

1.3 Function

In the most basic terms, the grain elevator is a receiving point for the farmers' grain, a place where it is weighed, stored briefly, and sent, via rail, to domestic and international markets. This is its one and only purpose, which its design and construction reflect.

The grain elevator has three main components; the granary, the drive shed, and the dual purpose office/engine shed. Generally speaking, the granary is a structure "21 to 24 m (70 to 80 feet) high located 2 m (7 feet) from the rail siding" (Silversides, 15). It is square or more often rectangular with a small cupola and a gabled or pyramidal roof on top that covers the upper end of the elevating device. It is placed on a concrete foundation a half metre (2 feet) thick and contains 16 to 18 storage bins, along with the

elevating device. As wheat can weigh 27 kilograms (60 pounds) per bushel, the walls have to be extremely strong. It is of cribbed wooden construction; the inside walls made with two-by-four inch boards, the exterior walls with two-by-six inch boards spiked together horizontally. These can withstand tremendous pressure and, even today, remain so strong that an elevator can be moved without being dismantled.

When the capacity of the granary was being exceeded on a regular basis, an annex or an additional granary attached to the main granary was then constructed. On its own concrete foundation, it was initially built of the same materials, and is connected to the original elevating device by extended chutes leading between buildings. Depending on local conditions, it may hold more or less than the main granary, and can either be of cribbed construction or studded construction (identifiable by the bands of wood struts running around the building). Many newer annexes consist of one or a series of cylindrical corrugated metal silos, reminiscent of Hespeler's first round elevator at Niverville.

The drive shed (also known as the scale shed) is a wooden lean-to structure attached to the entire non-track side of the granary structure. It contains the dumping device for unloading wagons or trucks, a pit or hopper bin under the driveway covered by a grate, and a weighing device. It has both entrance and exit doors large enough to admit a wagon or truck.

The office/engine shed was primarily an encasing for the engine that powered the elevating device. Originally gas or kerosene-fueled, it was required by fire codes to be located at least 6 m (20 feet) away from the granary. It was connected to the granary by a walkway, which also served as a covering for the drive-shaft and belts leading to the elevating device. On top of the engine room, the working quarters of the elevator agent were built containing a desk and chairs, filing cabinets, telegraph or telephone, heater, and any other items needed to carry on the day to day operations. With the advent of the

less dangerous electric motor in the 1920s, the office was often built directly onto the drive shed, eliminating the walkway altogether.

A brief explanation of the grain transaction will illustrate how the elevator worked. First, the farmer drives his wagon or truck up the ramp to the drive shed. The truck is weighed before and after the grain is dumped through a grate in the floor. A quick calculation of the weight difference determines the purchase price.

The grain is collected in a hopper tank below floor level. Then, with the aid of an elevator or “leg”, it is carried up to the tallest part of the building. Depending on the type of grain and grade, it is directed by gubber spouts into the various storage bins. The practice of grading and separating grain bought from farmers was started by the elevator companies in 1885, after prodding by government inspectors.

The grain stays in the bins until grain cars are available and then is loaded, through exterior chutes located on the track side, into rail hopper cars. There is little manual labour involved, and large quantities are moved with ease. As previously mentioned the great height of the elevator facilitated the movement of grain by gravity, the cheapest form of power.

In addition to loading and unloading grain, the elevator agent sells items such as fertilizer, herbicides, animal feed, bulk salt, seed, coal, grease, binder twine, lumber, small implements, ammonia and even property, automobile, and hail insurance. As well, farmers can get their seed tested for weed content and dryness. Thus, for many years the elevator has been the commercial centre of a rural community.

The grain elevator was not designed for the sake of beauty. It is, instead, an exceptionally practical and utilitarian answer to the changing needs of the grain trade. Its shape, volume, and height evolved in direct response to the demands of storing and handling grain more efficiently.

Elevators have attracted much attention over the years for their unique design. For the longest time, popular reaction was unfavorable. The traditional Canadian feelings

of self-deprecation were evident in the earliest descriptions of the local structure. Walter Herbert, in his article "Castles of the New World," expressed the view "Every traveler crossing the Canadian prairies is impressed by the repeated sight of country elevators standing stark and rather unbeautiful at every town and siding along the railway line." He then stated that they were "a bit drab and ugly" and that "architecturally, the country elevator is nothing to inspire delight" (243).

Certainly, no Canadian architect would seriously discuss the structure, engrossed as they were with European styles. Opinions started to change when outsiders cast admiring glances and examined the elevator's origins. The famed French architect Le Corbusier became fascinated with the elevator after a visit to the United States in 1946. In his writings, there are few direct comments about the elevator, but a large number of indirect comments show his appreciation for this structure. In one chapter, he expressed the view that all architecture must respond to a specific need and that the need (in this case, the handling and storage of grain) must first manifest itself inside a structure: "The impulse emanates from the interior and pushes against the exterior, leading to a pyramid-like design which can become contorted if not restrained" (Guimon, 49). The elevator was an elongated and layered "pyramid." Its very height and lines, however, gave it a unique prestige. He was intrigued with the concept of towers and associated tallness with dignity and value.

Perhaps what appealed most to his and many other artistic minds was the elevator's simplicity in purpose, conception, clarity of line, symmetry, material, and colour. It was in one sense, an abstraction, with the complete elimination of all unnecessary decoration, standing vertical on a horizontal, featureless background.

The elevator, as an example of the process of architecture, was considered by Le Corbusier to be a "successful" building. The debate remained, however, as to whether elevators were indeed architecture in the formal sense. Many well-informed writers on the subject thought not. Alan Gowans, in his book *Looking at Architecture in Canada*,

wrote that elevators were “incidental byproducts of commerce, built simply as shelters to serve immediate practical needs.” He went on to say, “If we admit...that is to say ‘form follows function’ is to define the starting point of sound architecture, not its consummation, then it follows that these grain elevators can be no more than the potential beginnings of a distinctively Canadian architecture” (Gowans, 217).

Theoretical arguments are ultimately irrelevant though. Companies built as cheaply as possible and modified the elevator to suit the needs of the grain trade, and to a lesser extent, the railways. For instance, “in the early 1900s elevators could be built in two or three weeks at a cost of \$7,000 for the shell and an additional \$2,000 for all the machinery” (Silversides, 25). Wooden elevators generally had a life expectancy of 40 years. Often the pounding of being filled and emptied weakened the structure, and ultimately shortened its life span considerably.

The necessity to modify an elevator to meet changing needs may, in the long run, have caused it to become obsolete. As well as being worn out, the traditional slope-shoulder country elevator is threatened by improved designs. Elevator companies have been considering different designs and building materials since 1961, most trying to leave behind the wooden construction and gabled roof. In that year, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool constructed the first all-steel elevator at Kenaston. Its weight was half that of the conventional wooden structure, and was 4.5 m (15 feet) higher as well as narrower. It had a flat rather than a sloping roof and the corrugated metal panels became its own structural framework. The Pool built only one other all-steel elevator, as the cost of construction proved to be substantially higher than that of the conventional wooden elevator.

In 1968, the Alberta Pool started experimenting with precast concrete slabs for elevators and annexes. In conjunction with Edmonton Engineer Nick Driedger, the Pool redesigned the elevator. Called the Buffalo Sloping Bin, one observer described it as “a boxy structure that looks like a cross between a drive-in movie screen and the world’s

largest sloped-roof tool shed" (Skene, 17). "The prototype, built at McGrath in 1980 for \$800,000, had a vastly increased storage capacity (170,000 bushels), filled a boxcar 10 times faster than a standard elevator, and needed little maintenance" (Silversides, 27).

A new generation of super elevators, known as concrete silo elevators, have been the trend in construction since 1980 and have rendered all elevators to this point more or less obsolete. "At a cost of up to \$3.5 million, these structures employ slip-form construction, with continuous pouring of concrete throughout its six to eight day fabrication period, and display exposed elevating and weighing machinery on top. A series of up to 28 adjoining, upright, round concrete cylinders, they have a vastly increased capacity---11,000 tonnes, and serve a geographical radius of 120 kilometres" (Silversides, 28). They can unload from trucks or load rail cars at a rate of up to 300 tonnes of grain per hour, all operations controlled by a computer. And as they can take the place of at least 4 and possibly 12 of the old country elevators, the grain companies have little incentive to keep those wooden incongruities in operation, and have thus accelerated their abandonment and demolitionist tendencies.

Physically and psychologically, there have been a number of reasons for the grain elevator's high profile in rural Western Canada. It was, and still is, the economic hub of many small towns. The loss of an elevator generally means that a town is no longer economically viable unless it quickly replaces grain handling with another service. Because the wheat economy is essentially a "boom or bust" economy with prices and demand determined internationally, the elevator became not only the exchange point of the commodity but the site where the politics of that exchange were put into focus. These politics could be contentious and multifaceted, reflecting the sometimes uneasy relationship between the wheat pools and the grain capitalists, between the prairie farmer and the corporation, between the farm dweller and the town dweller, even between the westerner and the easterner. To the casual observer, the names and logos painted on the sides of the elevators serve as location markers but they are also a billboard for the

politics associated with the grain trade. This symbolic role of the elevator is enhanced by its familiar architectural form

One of the most compelling features of an elevator is its height, from the earliest elevators standing a mere 12 m (40 feet) high, to the most recent at 60 m (200 feet). The tallest building in any community commands the most attention and respect. In the Europe and Central Canada of past centuries, the church, with its soaring spires and bell towers, was often the most important structure in towns and cities. These two qualities, height and relative importance, have always been linked, nowhere more obviously than on the prairie.

Similar to a candle in a homesteader's window at night, the elevator is also a beacon showing a traveller where food, shelter, and services can be found. Walter Herbert, the writer who saw no delight in its design, wrote, "As palm trees in the distance foretell the approach to an oasis, the Western Canadian grain elevator is always the shadow-cast-before a village around the bend" (Herbert, 243). One could judge by the number of elevators, the size, population, and importance of a community. Even when not selling grain, farmers tend to loiter at the elevator, socializing, playing cards, gossiping, and sensing from its operation their role in the overall scheme of prairie life.

Chapter Two

2.1 Introduction

Landscapes can teach us a great deal about history and society. They tell us much about ourselves and how we relate to the world. What we as humans construct and place on the landscape, as well as what we remove and destroy, creates an explicit picture of what we value and renounce.

This chapter explores the relationship between the terms heritage, culture, and landscape. This is accomplished by examining some of the significant theories which inform this study and their assumptions about the ways in which cultural identities are constructed in relation to the physical environment within which they are located. Issues of history and memory are also raised and addressed in order to emphasize their role in cultural identity formation.

The theories used in this chapter were developed within a broad range of academic disciplines and, in this regard, they reflect a wide array of perspectives and themes concerning the association between cultural identity and physical environment.

2.2 Definitions

The most fundamental problem in dealing with issues of heritage is the definition of the term itself, and of related ones, such as culture. It is difficult to establish national or provincial definitions because these levels are political and geographical inventions, which necessarily incorporate a great diversity of heritages.

The only way that a definition can achieve a level of inclusiveness, is to recognize the creative symbiosis of man and his perceived history, both material and intellectual. The defining of “heritage” must be approached as the defining of a process rather than a thing.

The archetypal 1960's concept of heritage was based on monuments, ensembles or sites possessing intrinsic or inherent qualities. Humans were seen as passive receptors; they could not determine value but, through scientific evaluation, could identify and grade it, hopefully as objectively as possible. By contrast, the conception of value that is more representative of theoretical deliberation in the 1990s emphasizes its subjectivity and dependence upon personal history, cultural inheritance and idealized conceptions of the world.

Jacques, 91

Intimately tied up with the term "heritage" is "culture". The term culture is a problematic one because it has been used so loosely and frequently to support a plethora of social rhetoric. It is important to understand the very basic difference between culture and society. Society refers to a group of people in a very broad sense, from the mundane to the spiritual, all under the aegis of objectivism. For example, the activity of farming, as such, is a social phenomenon, whereas farming styles and values, are cultural phenomena. Society is the way we look, while culture is the way we see. We can see nothing without placing it within our perceptual order: we have a system for assigning value, likes and dislikes according to a certain schema of meaning.

Culture is that intangible link between the self and the society, which operates using the medium of meaning. Culture allows individuals to express themselves through abstract and concrete forms within a relatively known and stable social context. It is a connection which gives a sense of belonging to the individual and to the group. The individual, simply put, recognizes group achievements or institutions as representative of himself. The group recognizes individuals and their actions as representative of itself.

Culture is that force which shapes the forms of civilization and dictates their meanings. "In constructing cultures, therefore, people construct geographies. They arrange spaces in distinctive ways; they fashion certain types of landscape, townscape and streetscape; they erect monuments and destroy others; they evaluate spaces and places and adapt them accordingly; they organize the relations between territories at a

range of scales” (Anderson and Gale, 4). Culture is only known via its manifestations in either meaning or form. The self and heritage are entities but culture is not. However, culture is an inseparable part of both the self and heritage.

Cultural identity is a fundamental feature of a community’s existence. It can be regarded in two ways: as seen by those who belong to the place and as seen by outsiders. Cultural identity, in its most relevant sense, includes everything that is considered to be representative of a community’s existence. A community constructs its cultural identity by linking itself to both its past and present by means of understanding and reaffirming the roots out of which it emerged. In short, manifestations of cultural identity are often rooted in a shared past constructed of individual and collective experiences of place.

Landscape is a technical term used by artists, and earth scientists, architects and planners, geographers and historians. Like the terms heritage and culture, it is not easily defined. Nevertheless, the formula “landscape as a composition of man-made spaces on the land” (Jackson, 304) is very telling. While it may not provide a comprehensive definition, it does at least shed light on the origin of the concept. It suggests that landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but rather a synthetic space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community. According to Susan Bugey the term cultural landscape is “any geographical area that has been modified, influenced, or given special cultural meaning by people” (252). This definition has been adopted by Parks Canada.

Landscape is an important dimension to issues relating to the development, alternation and management of our physical environment. Meinig maintains that landscape is defined by our vision and interpreted by our minds (3). Landscapes are a part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a group of people together. We endow particular landscape features with symbolic meaning because they are believed to highlight the historical conditions under which certain cultural activities mediated by the landscape have taken form. A landscape should establish bonds between

people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all, a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters the creation of spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them.

Yi Fu Tuan, in his book, *Space and Place* suggests that landscape can be viewed as a “clue to a region’s human personality” (93). This implies that the human aspect of landscape can be understood by evaluating the visual material aspects of place which exhibit certain cultural qualities unique to the community, particularly the built structures of place. These structures display a community’s social practices and the rituals that define its everyday life. They also make apparent the various ways in which a culture can experience the physical elements of a geographical space by subtly referring to the depth and nature of its past interactions with it. The material aspects of place mirror people’s attitudes about place and how they emerged from relations with the landscape. “Settlement patterns are large and complex artifacts, aspects of material culture that mirror humans themselves” (Norton, 136). What is seen in the landscape underscores the connection between a culture and landscape components and its role as a basis for cultural development.

Heritage is the evidence of the creative interplay between culture and the environment in the diversity of cultural patterns extant in history and actuality. Of course, some evidence appears more significant; the grand, the sublime, the noble all leave deep impressions along the pathways of heritages, but it is important to note that these more defined stamps are not necessarily the most valuable indicators with regard to assessing the character or “culture” of a civilization. “In practice, conservation planning is reactive rather than proactive; heritage resources are often only recognized when under threat” (Alfrey, 11). There are patterns of heritage which are made of individually insignificant marks, but which together indicate a dramatic change in the course of the creative dialogue.

To define elements of our past as “of heritage significance”, to a greater or lesser degree, by comparing the elements to preordained or “expert” criteria, can only lead to false and confusing pictures of our heritage especially since significance is always relative to perspective. What is built on the landscape reflects both inner needs and external constraints and, in effect, becomes a part of the landscape that influences the generations that occupy it in particular ways. In his book *Measure of Emptiness: Grain Elevators in the American Landscape*, Gohlke argues that “a grain elevator may at one and the same time be a characteristic element of the landscape, an embodiment of a particular response to a specific set of circumstances, and a multivalent symbol to the community it serves and to outsiders” (21). The vernacular often contains a greater sense of place than the veneer of wealth and power that have traditionally been the subject of architectural history books. The simplicity and directness of form of old places that convey a sense of having grown out of the landscape are, to a great extent, the consequence of how local materials were used and of the need to solve problems of shelter and security as expeditiously as possible. In this context, regional identity is a notion of something that is experienced from within.

Because of this relativity of significance and perspective it is important to understand that what we see now as our heritage is not what was seen in the past nor is it what will be seen in the future. What we choose to preserve as significant in our heritage is an expression of our current culture. The past creates the present and the present creates the past in the same way as the individual creates society and society creates the individual; specifically, both formative symbiotic processes use culture as their interacting medium. It is also true that our heritage, as a cultural construct, will be best understood by the local people who have lived it.

The Leduc Grain Elevator: A Local Case Study

In order to understand these theoretical concepts at a more immediate level, it is worth examining one recent case study where a local community is working to sustain their grain elevator.

The Leduc grain elevator, located in Leduc, Alberta, a small community 18 kilometres south of Edmonton, sits on 61,000 square feet of land, with an estimated value of \$265,000.

Although the Leduc elevator is only 26 years old, it was constructed in the same manner as the four clapboard elevators it replaced. Except for its tin exterior, the Leduc grain elevator is an exact replica of elevators built back in the early 1900s. It is this kind of unbroken tradition of rebuilding that gives vernacular architecture a different kind of authenticity of form than the authenticity associated with one-off high style structures. While some might argue that because the Leduc elevator is a relatively recent reconstruction its historicity or authenticity could be called into question, the community has maintained that the symbolic and functional meaning attached to the elevator is more important than the question of its specific date.

In 1999, Agricore decided to shut down the Leduc Elevator. Like most of the old-fashioned wooden structures, the elevator was too small and too inefficient to compete in the modern world of agriculture. Grain companies like Agricore are ripping down the old elevators as fast as they can to replace them with giant, computerized concrete structures that can do 10, or even 20, times the work of one. The Leduc elevator is one of only a couple of hundred left standing across the three prairie provinces. The elevator has been vacant for the past two years.

From Agricore's point of view, closing the Leduc elevator was a simple business decision. Once the decision was made, the company scheduled the elevator for demolition. "An elevator left standing is a liability" explains Phil Hyde, Agricore's regional manager (Hyde qtd. in Piercey, 33). There are still taxes to be paid, insurance

bills, not to mention rent to be paid to the railway. The cost of demolishing an elevator is \$50,000 whereas the cost of maintaining an elevator after its been closed ends up costing considerably more. This explains why Agricore demands \$20,000 up front before it will even entertain the notion of selling a grain elevator to a conservation group.

On May 29th, 2001, two days before Agricore's deadline, the Alberta Legacy Development Society, then known as the Leduc Save the Elevator Committee, went to Agricore and handed them a cheque for \$20,000. It was the first step in achieving the success they had been fighting for. This was no small accomplishment. It took over two years to raise the money and almost all of the donations came from the local residents of Leduc.

Currently, the Society owns the land and the buildings on the site, which of course includes the elevator. According to Yvon Theriault, the consultant working on the project, "Our goal is to develop the Leduc Grain Elevator into a distinctive symbol of our Western Canadian pioneering heritage" (Personal Interview).

Bob Caine, chairman of the Alberta Legacy Development Society, maintains that the first development in the prairie region was the Hudson's Bay trading posts, the second was the railroad and the third was the grain elevator and as such, these buildings must be preserved. "A lot of communities Leduc included started with just the railroad, a rail station, a grain elevator and then a few shacks and huts around the elevator" (Personal Interview).

According to Bob Caine the mission of the Alberta Legacy Society is to "develop viable and sustainable concepts that will benefit Canadians in the education of our children and the children of generations to come through the preservation of the architectural and functional integrity of historical resources" (Personal Interview)

This of course, he recognizes, would require a new definition of the term heritage so that it could include those historical resources that have traditionally been excluded. "The barns and local villages of the vernacular landscape all express a sense of

belonging, a directness and timelessness in form and materials; they are evidence of man working on the land, but in ways that are not always immediately apparent” (Hough, 39).

When I met with Bob Caine and other members of the Alberta Legacy Development Society in December 2001, they told me that they were currently working on five major objectives in their proposal for the site. These objectives centered around securing and maintaining the architectural integrity of the site as well as educating the general public as to the historical function and significance of the elevator.

The business proposal included plans for a two-part historic site. The development plan for the annex includes the construction of a retail business complex. The exact use of these rooms will depend on the result of the structural analysis and a consultation with the architect working on the project. However, preliminary descriptions, assessments, critical factors and revenue projections have been done for several retail entities. The development plan for the elevator itself consists of building an interpretive centre. The service offered to the community will be the opportunity to visit a traditional grain handling facility that is complete in every aspect of its working ability. It is envisioned that guests will ride to the top on a “people” elevator to witness two floors of switching spouts, grain augers and trap doors which unlock the secrets of handling hundreds of tons of grain in a single day. Moreover, they will be able to look North, South, East and West over the spread of Leduc and the surrounding landscapes.

Grain elevators are often referred to as “prairie sentinels.” “The grain elevator was the tallest building in every prairie town” (Piercey, 33). The name of the town was always boldly written at the top. The size, style and colour of a town’s grain elevator was directly related to the prestige of the town itself. When Calvin Steinley, another member of the Alberta Legacy Development Society, was flying small planes, he relied on those tall, bold letters as a navigational aid. “I can remember getting lost in a storm. My radio went out. I had no idea where I was. And then I got down to 400 or 500 feet above, I

could still see the ground and I passed the elevator at Richmond and I knew where I was” (Personal Interview).

In order to gain understanding into the cultural significance of grain elevators, I decided to talk to some of the people currently involved in the struggle to keep them from disappearing entirely from the prairie landscape. These people, in my opinion, are the real experts. They are the ones who have best been able to explain the cultural significance of grain elevators.

I met Bob Caine, Yvon Theriault and Calvin Steinley December 18th, 2001 at the local Tim Horton’s in Leduc, a place they refer to as their headquarters. They answered all of my questions, giving me a sense of the importance of these structures, economically and culturally. According to Bob Caine, “A grain elevator is the greatest single symbol of our Western Canadian heritage.” He then went on to say, “Every few miles, you would see at least one. To be exact, it was every eight miles. The elevators were spaced that way to allow farmers to deliver their grain by horse and wagon in one day. Just how prosperous those farmers were, along with the towns they supported, could be judged instantly by counting the grain elevators. The grain elevator was the place to meet, to share news and gossip” (Personal Interview). Grain elevators have a definite intrinsic meaning. They mean “prairie.” They represent not only the prairie landscape and the activities that took place on the landscape but the social organization and interaction that took place in the landscape.

The last part of the interview took place out at the elevator site itself. I had the opportunity to walk around the site and go inside the elevator. I was impressed by the sheer size of the structure. It finally made sense to me why grain elevators were referred to as “prairie giants”, “prairie sentinels” and “the cathedrals of the plains.” As I stood there next to the elevator I was innately aware of its physical presence. Its verticality served as a powerful reminder of its long and complex history in the region. The sheer size of the elevator seemed to be magnified by its surroundings. I also noticed its

location within the city of Leduc. It was located at what would have historically been the centre of town. Clearly, this building, aside from its obvious function, was meant to be a place of gathering, of social interaction.

Photograph: Leduc Grain Elevator, Leduc, Alberta, December 2001

In this sense, grain elevators served more than just their functional purpose, they were part of a larger cultural landscape, one that recognized their associative value. As a regional icon, the grain elevator means many things to many people. It is a structure on which we project different meanings and these meanings continue to change and evolve

over time. Grain elevators are a living landscape, they tell a story about “place” and “community” and how the two are interconnected.

During the duration of researching and writing this thesis, I was frustrated by the lack of information about grain elevators. Aside from a few academics in the Prairies who specialize in agricultural history, no one has written very much about these structures, at least not in terms of their cultural significance. It seems obvious to me that these structures are important. Why else would communities like Leduc fight so hard to keep them from being demolished?

Since Agricore’s decision to shut down the Leduc elevator two years ago, many local artists and writers have begun to create a local mythology about the elevator. While I was conducting research for this thesis, I came across several paintings and a couple of poems specifically about the Leduc elevator done by local residents. In their work, these artists and writers had successfully captured what in my opinion was the social value of these structures. In her poem, *The Grain Elevator*, Christel E. Travnik very poignantly illustrates the importance of the Leduc grain elevator and why it is such an integral part of the community.

The Grain Elevator

*There is an icon in this land
Where the grain elevator stands.
It has been there many years
Built by our prairie pioneers*

*It held all the farmer’s grain
That they bought to ship by train
And if the harvest showed good health
It was a sign of prairie wealth.*

*That grain that in the bins was held
Was stored there ‘til it could sell.
Then it went by rail and ship
Across the ocean on a trip.*

*It was sold to many lands;
Canadian grain was in demand.
It is the richest grain by far;
There is no other that's on par.*

*It fed hungry mouths around the world;
Starving little boys and girls.
They sent oats and barley, wheat and rye
Which without they'd surely die.*

*Some people think it is progress
But to some it means distress
To replace the elevator
With ideas that they claim are greater.*

*In the name of revolution
Some seem to think it's the solution
To knock these structures to the ground
Until none of them are left around.*

*What these folks do fail to see
Is that they stand for history.
At least one of them must stay erect
Our farming heritage to protect.*

*There is a group here in Leduc;
A determined stand they took
To preserve this monument
For what it means and what it meant.*

*They are a group of volunteers
For the sake of pioneers
Who say the elevator must remain
Even if it stores no grain.*

*It stands tall and it stands proud
And it makes a statement loud,
"If we remove each standing wall
We'll have no history at all."*

*It is meant to be a stage
For our Canadian heritage.
It's to become a museum grand;
One of the finest in the land.*

*In appreciation I tip my hat
To those volunteers who agreed to that.
I commend you for what you've done,
For your hard work and dedication.*

*It's because of you that this landmark
Will be rescued from the spark.
And for all the years that are yet to come,
I ask God keeps it from all harm.*

Christel E. Travnik

Travnik's poem illustrates how myths begin at the local or community level. A myth, according to John Ralston Saul in his book *Reflections of a Siamese Twin* is defined as "a marriage of the past and the present" (17). Myths embody important cultural values and elevate them to the same status normally given to legends. They speak of collectivity and shared experiences. Saul states that "it is only in the countries lying on the geographical margins, where the place itself carries a force of uncontrollability, that the concept of solitude had been built as a positive into the local mythology" (55). If this is the case, then Saul's argument could easily be expanded to include the prairies as a representation of marginalized solitudes relative to the rest of the country.

In her poem *The Grain Elevator*, Travnik writes,

*There is a group here in Leduc;
A determined stand they took
To preserve this monument
For what it means and what it meant.*

Travnik sees the work of the local activists as the starting point in creating and perpetuating the local mythology about the Leduc elevator. These local activists would include the Alberta Legacy Development Society as well as the local residents who whether as professionals or as amateurs have written about or represented the structure

artistically in any form. In this manner, Travnik herself is an activist, and is involved in the mythologizing process.

In another poem about the Leduc grain elevator written by Gwen Hooks titled *Our Elevator*, the elevator has come to represent the local agricultural history of the community and by extension its lifeblood. In her poem she writes:

*The Alberta Wheat Pool decided,
Leduc's need for an elevator was great.
So they built the present one
In nineteen seventy eight.*

*Now it has helped the farmer,
Plus the whole community too,
Because without an elevator
What would farmers do?*

*It stands so elegant and proud,
In its original state,
It served the whole wide area
Its service has been great.*

*But in the year two thousand,
Its future wasn't bright,
The elevator would be closed-
Which surely wasn't right.*

*So Alberta Legacy Development,
Began working heart and soul,
We will "keep" our elevator
To us it means more than gold.*

*Now all good things are valuable
This relates to our history,
We'll keep the elevator standing
For all the world to see.*

While Travnik's and Hooks' poems are certainly not comparable to the poetry of Eli Mandel, John Newlove or even Martha Ostenso they do capture the vernacular form of the grain elevator by their own amateurish and vernacular literary form.

It seems interesting to me that studies of prairie architecture have had a hard time determining the social value of the grain elevator. Maybe this is because this type of vernacular form does not fit into the standard categories of architecture, engineering or landscape. In any event, it seems that artists and writers are better prepared to deal with issues of social value than professionals in areas such as heritage conservation where historical and architectural value are more highly developed and therefore given more importance. Therefore, I have deliberately chosen to continue to use the work of artists and writers to support my argument that grain elevators are part of a cultural landscape imbued with a distinct history and social values worthy of active consideration.

Chapter Three

“Landscapes, and their representation in painting, texts and so on, are powerful components in the construction of identity”

Herbert, 1995, 51

3.1 Introduction

The exhibition catalogue titled *Pluralities*, published by the National Gallery of Canada in 1980, states that, “whether acute or subliminal, regionalism has always been an inescapable factor in Canadian life, and thus in Canadian art, it is destined to remain inextricably bound to climate, geography, and population, as well as cultural and political history” (14).

As Northrop Frye has remarked, before a new land can be home, it must be confronted and imaginatively digested or absorbed. Western Canadian artists turned to the landscape of the prairies to create a new regional consciousness. They were doing for the West what the Group of Seven was doing for Canada in general: namely, inventing images of the West that would become symbols of identity.

As the construction of elevators along prairie rail lines proliferated, “they became a popular subject in photographic and artistic depictions and a common motif in ‘booster’ posters promoting the economic attractions of the region” (Prystupa, 20).

In an attempt to demonstrate the cultural value and significance of grain elevators in the prairies, I will examine eight images by three well known prairie artists: Robert Newton Hurley, William Kurelek and photographer Courtney Milne. These three individuals are by no means an exhaustive list of artists who have relied on the iconography of the grain elevator in their work. Illingworth Kerr, C.W. Jeffreys and F. Scott Fitzgerald produced some of the earliest images of grain elevators while in more recent years the work of artists Adrian Cooke and Robert McInnis, as well as photographers Tim Van Horn and Karen Brownlee has focussed on the grain elevator as a

symbol albeit a disappearing symbol of Western Canada. It is, however, the images of Robert Newton Hurley, William Kurelek and Courtney Milne that seem to best capture the cultural significance of the grain elevator for Western Canadians, elevating them from the regional consciousness to the national consciousness. In particular, the work of these three artists was chosen because it suggests a sequential pattern of increasing awareness and understanding of grain elevators. As Westerners, Hurley, Kurelek and Milne represent the beginning of an appreciation of these structures at the local or community level. Through their work and because of its popularity first regionally and eventually nationally, they have successfully given this regional icon a national audience.

3.2 Robert Newton Hurley

Mastering prairie landscape painting was the achievement of Englishman Robert Hurley. Hurley was born in 1894 in Bromley-by-Bow, a picturesquely named slum district of London. He came to Western Canada in 1923 and he dismissed the prairie, hyperbolically, as "a desolation-an abomination of desolation" (Rees, 1984, 47). Until the Depression he worked on farms and in labour camps. To convey the flavor of his new life he, like many an immigrant before him, illustrated his letters home. He also began to sketch discovering that perspective came to him "as naturally as breathing" (Rees, 1984, 47).

Robert Hurley's career in painting was launched by a chance meeting in Saskatoon in 1933 with the Austrian-born Canadian artist, Ernest Lindner, who was then teaching in the city. Although best known for his detailed close-up studies of moss-covered trees and stumps in northern Alberta forests, symbols of decay and regeneration, Lindner has also produced some panoramic landscapes, capturing the prairie landforms, space, and light in such paintings as *Road and Fall*, *Thunderstorm*, and *Autumn in Saskatchewan*. Lindner's experience was instrumental in establishing the direction of Hurley's career.

Lindner encouraged Hurley to attend his sketching classes and the informal weekly gathering of painters at his home. Caught up in the general enthusiasm for landscape painting Hurley began, like his English predecessors, by painting the river valley near Saskatoon.

Hurley's valley paintings were commonplace. His talent was for design and he could exercise it only when he moved away from the irregular terrain of the valley onto the settled, well-ordered plain.

What distinguishes Robert Newton Hurley from other Western landscape painters of the same time period is that he managed to break away from the Romantic art tradition by changing his iconography from streams and wooded valleys to flat distant horizons, railways, telephone posts, grain elevators and expansive sky-images that he stereotyped as representing the essence of the prairie. He inaugurated a new era in Western Canadian art by shifting the image of the West from a promised land to a harsh, foreboding environment, thereby forcing the artist to seek the meaning of the land in abstraction or symbolism.

Hurley acknowledged the geometric simplicities of the landscape and resolved the artistic problems they presented in practical ways. His instruments were a ruler, pen or pencil, and watercolours. He established space through the use of broad watercolour washes, and linear perspective. Watercolour is a translucent medium and when applied in broad washes, it is ideal for rendering prairie light and space. To master the effects of shadow and perspective, Hurley constructed cardboard models of elevators and houses and, later in his career, he would work from photographs taken from a low-flying plane.

Hurley's studio was the town of Sutherland, a railway divisional point of tracks, grain elevators, and telephone poles close to Saskatoon, that was also the main subject of his work. His house faced an elevator and a railway track allowing him to paint without going outside during the winter months.

Hurley's paintings are distillations. He reduced an already spare landscape to its essentials: an empty foreground backed by silhouettes of elevators or a town and, to lend perspective to the scene, a railway track, a road, or a line of telegraph poles. The paintings are without figures, or movement of any kind. Their stillness is their reality. Scenes of winter and early spring are studies in austerity: the light harsh, the buildings stark and isolated, and the prairie limitless.

The elevators caught Hurley's eye as he travelled by train west from Winnipeg, and the ones at Milden soon became a landmark by which he judged direction and distance. Later he remarked that he was "impressed by the immense vistas and by the unique quality of the elevators" (Swanson, 18). He claims that he was not stirred esthetically by his surroundings. However he experienced the same feeling of monotony and desolation which has disturbed or bored many newcomers to the Prairies.

Harmony, order, and proportion, were the qualities Hurley was striving after in his paintings. As his work developed he tended to eliminate unessentials, and to concentrate on patterns, rhythms, and shapes.

Dr. Lightbody, a former professor in the history department at the the University of Saskatchewan, was the first writer to compare Hurley's use of the grain elevator as a prairie symbol to the use of the windmill by Dutch painters. Many writers, to this day, continue to make similar comparisons. "What the windmill was to painters of the Dutch school, the grain elevator is to Hurley; it is his achievement to have made many of us see it for the first time as an object of visual romance, as an expression of our feeling for our western homeland" (Lightbody, 68).

In his painting, *Untitled* (1962), Hurley stresses the verticality of the grain elevator against the horizontal plane of the prairie. There is a sense of loneliness in this painting, which is heightened by the fact that there is snow on the ground and heavy luminous clouds hanging in the sky. Hurley's choice of colour also lends itself to creating the feeling of loneliness. The blending of white against the cool blue sky to

create the impression of an endless expanse of heavy clouds contributes to this dramatic effect. The darkest colour Hurley uses is the dark brown of the grain elevator and it stands in stark contrast to the pale greens and yellows of the surrounding buildings. It seems there has also been the attempt on Hurley's part to try to document the rural settlement structure of the prairies. As well as creating images of the prairie landscape during the era of the Depression, Hurley is also documenting visually, rural architecture. Along with the coming of the railway, grain elevators were among the first signs and symbols of settlement that occurred in this region. While the focus of this, and many of Hurley's paintings is the grain elevator set in a harsh and lonely landscape, his paintings are also important reminders of the powerful role of these structures in the social and economic life of the community.

Robert Hurley, *Untitled*, 1962

Hurley described his prairie paintings as "potboilers," by which he meant paintings worked up from memory or from a pencil sketch. By changing perspective,

composition, and minor details he could make several paintings from a single sketch. Hurley also has a remarkable capacity for suggesting, within a small compass, the spaciousness of the prairie.

Robert Hurley, *Reflections*, ca. 1947

In *Reflections* (1947), Hurley paints another image of a grain elevator. While it does not tower over the nearby buildings as it does in the painting *Untitled*, there is still a sense of its dominant physical presence. The grain elevator, along with the other buildings are dark, presumably because it is a late evening or night scene. The yellow light, emanating from the windows of some of the nearby buildings suggests this. Again, in this painting there is an overwhelming sense of isolation and desperation. It also seems that Hurley has tried to illustrate the functionality of the grain elevator in rural society. He was documenting the landscape in much the same way that artists such as Paul Kane or William Hind did as they travelled with early North American explorers.

Hurley's non-idealized representation of the grain elevator adds to the functional quality of the structure in the painting and stresses the role grain elevators played in the development of the West.

Hurley's compositions are now so familiar as to be visual clichés, but in the thirties and forties they were a revelation. His paintings sold as fast as his formalized procedures could produce them. Hurley kept no record of sales or gifts but he has calculated that he produced an average of five paintings a week for thirty years. The popularity of his paintings, which was immediate, was a classic example of the "shock of recognition." Tempered by pioneering and the hardships of the Depression, prairie people no longer needed the protection of the picturesque.

Robert Hurley, *Nocturne*, 1933

Hurley's 1933 painting, *Nocturne*, illustrates how art, especially that produced in the prairies, was tempered by the pioneering experience. To convey the physical and temporal harshness of the land, the colours are dark and heavy in both the foreground and background of the painting. Since the painting was produced during the time of the Depression, the viewer can assume that the dark tone of the painting is deliberate. The community portrayed appears to be abandoned. There is no evidence of activity; a familiar reality during the Depression years. The five elevators stand in stark contrast to the prairie sky, like monuments to the realities and dreams of prairie life.

Hurley's gift to prairie painting was to demonstrate the susceptibility of the landscape to abstract or symbolic treatment. His typical prairie town became an abstraction that acknowledged the difficulty of realizing the prairie artistically without focussing on a representative part of it, and presenting this as typical. By constructing an assemblage of typical prairie features, Hurley's inspired simplifications were the first sustained abstracts of Western Canada.

3.3 William Kurelek

Nostalgia for the past, coupled with a genuine pioneering pride and a desire to record the experience, is clearly reflected in the folk art of the prairie region. Most folk artists begin painting relatively late in life, usually from a desire to record the past.

Folk art is the most regional of all art; folk artists paint directly from experience so their paintings are always anchored in time and place. Incidents and events are recalled in memory and set down artlessly on paper or canvas. Things in the background may be brought near, ignoring perspective, and space may be treated in a two-dimensional fashion. The paintings record a mood and a spirit about how the painter feels about his, or her, life and place. They tell us not so much what the past looked like but what it felt like to be in it, at least some of the time.

Paintings that evoke the past kindle memories of childhood and youth when life seemed simple, pleasant, and secure. But although dreams of a lost Eden are alluring,

nostalgia alone cannot explain the profound feelings for place that such paintings sometimes evoke.

Adult memories of childhood, even when they are nostalgic, seldom suggest the need to be a child again. More often, they refer to the more limited desire to see the world in a child-like way, to feel at one with the environment, to be at home on earth. The regional world, and perhaps Western Canadians in particular have been blessed with two peerless exponents of their land: the writer W. O. Mitchell, and painter William Kurelek.

William Kurelek, *Skating on Spring Run-Off*, 1974

Kurelek's painting, *Skating on Spring Run-Off* (1974), is a colourful and whimsical piece. Four children are shown skating on what is most likely a farmer's field that flooded and then froze in early spring. On the horizon in the distant background of the painting there are three grain elevators. They are the only buildings visible. Without these grain elevators, this painting could be representative of any rural community anywhere in the world. However, because Kurelek included them in his painting, we know for certain that this is a Canadian prairie scene. In this sense, the grain elevators clearly act as a regional identifier. They are a symbol of place and communal identity.

William Kurelek has been described as "the suffering genius." Yet his talent for depicting the essence of common experience has led journalists to call him "The People's Painter" (Morley, 2). He is best known for his realistic paintings of farm scenes, most of them set in Manitoba where he lived most of his youth. He was born in 1927 to Ukrainian-Canadian pioneers near Whitford, Alberta, seventy-five miles northeast of Edmonton. To outsiders Whitford might look bleak, with two grain elevators and three buildings huddled under a vast sky. But to Kurelek, even as a small child, the austere emptiness was compelling. He felt the same way about Stonewall, Manitoba, where he moved when he was seven, and where his father owned and operated a dairy farm.

In his relatively short life, he died in 1977 at the age of fifty, he followed his vision with a stubborn disregard for fashion. He took a degree at the University of Manitoba and then attended art schools in Mexico and Toronto. But neither school satisfied him and he decided that he could learn to paint only by doing. To all intents and purposes he was self-taught. "He settled in Toronto where he worked as a picture framer at the gallery of his first sponsor and exhibitor, Avrom Isaacs" (Rees, 1984, 57). He painted in all parts of Canada as well as in England, Russia, and India, but his true center lay in the Ukrainian districts of Manitoba. "From the beginning, Kurelek favoured the panorama-a distant, high horizon, a limitless expanse" (Murray, 13). He painted best in

places that were open to the sky and he felt most comfortable with the common folk of whichever country or region he happened to be in. Kurelek's lumpy, anonymous figures stand for all men, and their triumphs and trials are common to all of mankind.

Kurelek often used photographs as a reference. Ironically, his work has been criticized for its camera-like vision. In fact, his paintings are less camera conscious than theatrical. His scenes seem more like dramatic stage-sets in which figures act out a choreographed narrative.

Four themes are apparent in Kurelek's work: childhood, the prairies, Christianity, and Ukrainian settlement. Kurelek observed wryly that he was seen either as a portrayer of farm life or as a missionary in paint. He espoused Roman Catholicism after a profoundly troubled youth, and for the rest of his life was an affirmed proselyte. He declared that paintings that had no specifically religious or prophetic content were potboilers.

The themes of childhood and the prairies are as inseparable in Kurelek's work as they are in W. O. Mitchell's. *A Prairie Boy's Winter* and *A Prairie Boy's Summer* are visual analogues of Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Kurelek's imagination, like Mitchell's, was grounded in memories of childhood and, like all gifted artists, he retained the capacity to see the world with a child's unmediated vision. "He didn't separate what he saw from what he knew and so make perception serve inference" (Rees, 1984, 57).

Kurelek's imaginative home was his parents' house near Stonewall, Manitoba, about nine miles north of Winnipeg. Around Stonewall the fields, and farms, and the people who lived there became Kurelek's subjects. He regarded the landscape as a vast stage for a human drama that he found both heroic and frivolous. In his paintings the point of view was always elevated. By keeping the horizon line high he was able to create a sense of the stage-like immensity of the land. Kurelek's prairie is a metaphorically solid platform, and in spite of his views of the precariousness of man's tenure on earth, his figures have the perennial, indomitable qualities of peasants.

Kurelek was also an excellent painter of skies, which were often the keynote of his pictures. In the flat landscape they were often the chief source of drama. In allegorical paintings they would be used to heighten effects. But Kurelek was a painter before he was an allegorist.

Like all regional painters, Kurelek embraced a place and a people, making them peculiarly his own. Kurelek had the gift, rarely given, for what Ruskin called “seeing to the heart”, and it gave his paintings authenticity. They seem to govern common perceptions of the twentieth-century prairie landscape.

Kurelek’s realism is, in general, objective and descriptive; it is, however, often emotionally charged as well. His depictions of the world around him were always crucially important to him, even when the objects he depicted were themselves quite plain and unremarkable. The rustic and prosaic simplicity of Kurelek’s studies of nature and farm life has also been described as “acute realism,” a term that reflects the artists “passionate exploration of what reality means” (Friesen, 55).

Kurelek’s *Blessing Easter Paska*, is a religious painting that pays tribute to his Ukrainian heritage. In the right background of the painting there is a row of grain elevators. While the church in the foreground is the principal image of the painting, there is no doubt that the grain elevators are still taller and therefore still an important presence in the piece. It is interesting to note how Kurelek manages to combine in one painting three of the dominant themes of his work: Christianity, the Ukrainian community and the prairies. The religious association in this piece, goes beyond the representation of the church and even beyond the presence of the row of “cathedrals.” The cultivation of the land itself as represented by the grain elevators has a certain religious connotation. Farming has traditionally been seen and described as a holy activity. The symbolism of wheat is also important especially when it is connected to the presence of the grain elevators. While the grain elevators in Kurelek’s *Blessing Easter Paska* are peripheral, their symbolism is of paramount significance.

William Kurelek, *Blessing Easter Paska*, ca. 1974

In his 1974 painting, *A Bumper Harvest*, William Kurelek illustrates, and, in effect pays tribute to, agriculture on the prairies. It is evident from this painting that agriculture is the backbone of the prairie economy. A series of grain storage facilities occupy the lower foreground of the painting. These are not the traditional style grain elevators typically found in Kurelek's art, but rather, newer, cylindrical storage facilities. Their presence however, is still undeniable. They still mark the landscape and provide a vertical plane cutting across the two horizontal expanses of earth and sky. About the same time Kurelek made this painting, the prairies were undergoing major economic restructuring. Grain elevators, which were once common images in Kurelek's work begin to disappear just as they began to disappear from the actual prairie landscape. The

absence of the traditional style grain elevator in this painting is just as telling as the type of structure it seems to have been replaced with.

William Kurelek, *A Bumper Harvest*, 1974

3.4 Courtney Milne

Courtney Milne was born in 1943 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He has been a freelance photographer since 1975, concentrating on landscape and nature. In addition to formal training in photography, his academic background includes two master's degrees; one in psychology, and the other in journalism and mass communication. He has written more than 170 illustrated articles for photographic magazines. His publications include

three popular books of photography of the Canadian prairies: *Prairie Light* (1985), *Prairie Dreams* (1989) and *Prairie Skies* (1993). In 1999, his highly acclaimed *W. O. Mitchell Country* was published.

Courtney Milne, *Untitled Photograph from W. O. Mitchell Country*, 1999

Milne's photographs take the viewer far beyond a documentary replication of prairie and foothills. His celluloid is not simply a passive tabula rasa that reflects, casually and randomly, popular images. His photographs take the viewer into the prairie and foothills much more deeply than the casual eye most of us bring to these places. "Wherever you go on the prairie, there is a feeling of freedom, limitless space, and room to explore" (Milne, i). Courtney Milne's eye searches for and communicates what is symbolic and evocative about a "place." He uses camera angle, movement, lens, light, filter, and multiple exposure to shape and give aesthetic and spiritual significance to the landscape and to convey their emotional and psychological impact on human consciousness.

For an examination of his representation of prairie scenes, particularly those of grain elevators, I focused on two photographs from his book *W. O. Mitchell Country*. These photographs are nostalgic and they tell a story of desolation and abandonment. Supporting this program and commitment, Milne tends to photograph them alone against the backdrop of open prairie sky.

Milne's images, while making their own unique statements about prairie and foothills landscapes, beautifully complement W. O. Mitchell's word pictures about these same landscapes. His photographs, like Mitchell's descriptions, invite us to see and feel familiar places in a fresh way, and surprise us by magically revealing new landscapes through older ones. Telephone poles now have a new look, with fewer crossbars, or have disappeared all together with the advent of underground cable. Round bales of grain have largely replaced square bales, which in turn replaced stooks many decades ago. Jet trails blaze across prairie skies, often becoming the dominant feature. Farms have been modernized, grid roads paved over. The locomotive has disappeared, and even now the familiar grain elevators are being abolished from the skyline at an alarming rate.

Spending several hours alone in a building that still harbours memories of pioneer life has indeed left me with vivid memories of my own. Whether or not these derelict structures contain ghosts, they certainly feel haunted; just as I was convinced that I was truly alone, I sensed an almost inaudible whistle through the skeletal shell of the house and my heart leapt as a pigeon flapped wildly past my head. I resolved not to be deterred by the eeriness of working there. These broken buildings, scattered around the Weyburn area and across the Great Plains, though showing the wrinkles and cracks of their age, have borne witness to the human drama, the real-life stuff of Billie Mitchell, the child, and grist for W. O. Mitchell, the author.

Milne qtd. in Mitchell, Orm and Barbara, 267

Courtney Milne, *Untitled Photograph from W. O. Mitchell Country*, 1999

W. O. Mitchell's work portrays a prairie world that has changed or simply disappeared. The upright miniature teepee-stooks of grain have been transformed into giant bread-loaf bales, the horse-drawn wagons called democrats have been replaced with four-wheel-drive trucks, and the dusty dirt ruts of Government Road are now a paved highway. Even the grain elevators which shouldered prairie town horizons are rapidly disappearing. Half a century after the writing of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Courtney Milne's photographs capture the timeless elements of Mitchell's novel: the drama of cloudscape, the seasonal extremes, the promise of harvest, and the geometry of land and

sky. “Milne’s work is evidence that the timeless themes of spirituality, of reverence, and of transcendence are as contemporary now as they were when humans first looked up to the night sky or into the mists of dawn” (Collinson, 26).

In summary, the representation and depiction of grain elevators in art, particularly in painting and photography, have contributed to the creation of a grain elevator mythology. “The elevators became so characteristic a feature of the landscape that the fact that they were not indigenous to it became lost in their very familiarity” (Swanson, 17). They were identifiably rural; identifiably prairie. “Buildings and topographical poems, insofar as they are artworks, clarify experience” (Meinig, 97). These structures were common subjects in the art of prairie artists like Robert Newton Hurley, William Kurelek and photographer Courtney Milne because the grain elevators with their symbolic and metaphoric verticality and height were a division point between the huge expanse of land and sky. They serve as a reminder of the history of “place” and “community” and the culture that they have contributed to Western Canada.

Chapter Four

The writer who seeks to inform his readers of the peculiar quality of a region such as the prairie provinces should be a pictorial artist able to describe accurately the physical features of a characteristic prairie landscape; he should be a poet with power to feel and to recreate imaginatively the particular atmosphere which invests the prairie scene; and lastly, he should be a psychologist with sufficient knowledge of human nature to be able to understand and describe the influence of the region upon the people who live within its confines.

McCourt, 56

4.1 Introduction

The Canadian prairies: a region, a place, an imaginative landscape shared by all Westerners. For many of us, the prairies are little more than the coming together of two parallel infinities: land and sky. We describe the region in terms of its “vastness” and make constant references to its rural characteristics. We use words such as frontier, borderland and hinterland to describe the region and in a sense, to try to understand it. The prairies invoke a sense of regional consciousness, one that recognizes the struggle of a marginalized people economically, politically and culturally.

The process of constructing the Prairie West as a cultural region-what historian Richard Allen called "A Region of the Mind"-was slow. A sense of regional consciousness developed only gradually, and only in the last two decades of the twentieth century has this regional identity been honed to such anguished perfection that it coexists, uneasily, with the nationalist aspirations of the nineteenth century.

In her book *Marketing Place: Cultural Politics, Regionalism and Reading*, Ursula Kelly defines regionalism as “a form of consciousness which, in its dominant usage, along with and often in opposition to nationalism, suggests limitation, difference, and disparity” (11). To be from the prairies, is to have an identity based on regional affiliation.

Thus, any history of the Canadian Prairies must include the myths of the people who shaped a regional prairie identity and through it shaped the Prairie West. "Myth" in this context is not the opposite of fact, something that stands in contrast to reality. A myth is a story that through persistent repetition comes to symbolize a society's beliefs about itself; where it came from, where it has been, and where it might be going.

The relationship between literature and culture is an interesting approach to exploring a person's historical and continuously evolving relationship with a place. In this respect, the choice of literary analysis as a means of exploring the relationship between culture and landscape is important for two reasons. First of all, literature that concentrates on a particular culture locates it in time and space through a collection of representations composed of the blending of fiction and reality. The explicit interplay between literature, fiction, and actual historical reality often constitutes a cultural expression that provides clear evidence that the landscape can be directly implicated in the construction of cultural identity. The language of literature does more than just give an account of the elements that make up the physical environment. It frequently underscores the place of landscape in our social and cultural history and serves to remind us that the past can be relived and have an impact on the present. Secondly, and with this in mind, literature can also serve to reveal the inter-relatedness of history, culture, the natural and built environments, and the spatial dimensions of landscape as powerful determinants in people's interpretations of themselves and their world. In general terms, literature often articulates the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which people have experienced the landscape within which they are located.

A literary analysis of the writings of W. O. Mitchell, Robert Stead, and Wallace Stegner will illustrate how, through their writing, they have mythologized grain elevators and contributed to the creation of a identifiably prairie landscape. It is often suggested that it is in the margins that creativity flourishes, and the prairies are no exception. Over the years, many prairie writers have contributed to the myth of the "West" and the role

that the grain elevator played in that myth. Sinclair Ross, Martha Ostenso and Margaret Laurence are among some of the finest writers the region has produced. Not only did their work create the quintessential prairie landscape we have come to recognize, but they gave new writers including Mark Abley and Stuart McLean standards to strive for in their writing and thus in their representation of that same landscape. Similarly to the art of Robert Newton Hurley, William Kurelek and Courtney Milne, the writings of W.O. Mitchell, Robert Stead and Wallace Stegner also suggest that awareness and understanding of the prairie landscape and, in particular, the role of the grain elevator in it, must begin locally so as to serve as a precursor to national recognition. It is at this point that as icons, grain elevators become important beyond the individual visions of the artists and writers. In Western Canada it has been the work of artists and writers who have brought these structures into existence. This awareness, as can be seen in the analysis of the chosen works, can be ironic at times. The importance of the grain elevator as mentioned at the onset is both abstract and familiar. There are political and economic dimensions as well as purely functional ones that are represented in these selected works.

4.2 W. O. Mitchell

W. O. Mitchell was born in 1914 in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. He was the second of four sons. His father, Ormond Mitchell, was a druggist originally from Waterdown, Ontario and his mother, Maggie MacMurray was a nurse from Clinton, Ontario. When his father died in 1921, his grandmother MacMurray moved in with the family. Mitchell was strongly influenced by his grandmother and an uncle who owned a farm nearby. From 1927 to 1931, Mitchell was sent to school in Long Beach, California and St. Petersburg, Florida. He attended the University of Manitoba from 1931 to 1934 where he studied philosophy and psychology. From 1934 to 1940, Mitchell worked in sales, journalism and radio, all of which prepared him for his eventual career in writing.

When Mitchell enrolled at the University of Alberta in 1940, he had begun to write but had not yet been published. He received his B.A. and teaching certificate in

1943, but the true significance of the time he spent in Edmonton was personal and artistic. In 1942, Mitchell met and married Merna Hirtle. During this same time, he also met and was greatly influenced by Professor F. M. Salter, a well respected creative writing teacher at the university. Salter encouraged Mitchell to develop his interest in the prairies through his writing. "As part of an association which was to continue after Mitchell left the university, Salter helped to arrange for the publication of three of Mitchell's short stories in 1942: "But as Yesterday" in *Queen's Quarterly*, and "You Gotta Teeter" and "Elbow Room" in *Maclean's*" (Harrison, 2).

From 1942 to 1947 Mitchell combined his own writing with teaching in a number of small communities in Alberta. During this five year period, Mitchell's two sons were born, and his writing culminated in the publication of *Who Has Seen the Wind*.

Until his death in 1998, W. O. Mitchell remained a prolific author publishing an extraordinary number of novels, short stories and plays. Mitchell's fiction parallels his own childhood experiences on the prairies. It is no coincidence that *Who Has Seen the Wind's* Brian and Uncle Sean are central characters in the novel just as Mitchell's own grandmother and uncle were very influential in his own life. "Mitchell stresses the importance to the artist of the vivid experiences of childhood, the "litmus" years which colour the imagination, and in his advice to young writers he speaks of the need to draw from the well of subconscious memory which is replenished by the flow of personal experience" (Harrison, 1).

Mitchell's own feelings about being raised on the prairies are described by one of his characters, Hugh, the seventy-year old narrator of *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, who returns after many years to visit the prairie haunts of his childhood:

Now and as a child I walked out here to ultimate emptiness, and gazed to no sight destination at all. Here was the melodramatic part of the earth's skin that had stained me during my litmus years, fixing my inner and outer perspective, dictating the terms of the

fragile identity contract I would have with myself for the rest of my life.

Mitchell, 1981, 11

As a child, Mitchell absorbed the wide spaces of the prairie, its dramatic shifts of light and shadow, its straight lines, and its salient signs of life and death. For the rest of his life he was marked by this landscape, emotionally and even, it seemed, physically. "His face was as transparently expressive as a field of wheat, bright and mobile in the wind, but as easily transformed by the shadow of clouds" (Mitchell, Orm and Barbara, 18).

Who Has Seen the Wind opens with one of the most recognizable lines in Canadian literature: "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky-Saskatchewan prairie" (Mitchell, 3). The mathematical metaphor catches not only the visual image of a landscape reduced to the bare minimum of sky, horizon line and land, it also suggests the skeletal destiny of humans. The novel depicts Brian's quest for answers to the basic, "skeleton" questions about birth and death. Visually precise and metaphorically suggestive though it is to Canadian eyes, this first line of the novel was considered dull and boring by Mitchell's American editor. When asked to remove it, Mitchell argued that it expressed the "bareness of the prairie itself" (Mitchell, Orm and Barbara, 28) and that it must stay in. There was, he thought, a distinction to be made between bareness and dullness.

In *Who Has Seen the Wind* Mitchell celebrates prairie landscape in rich lyrical prose and explores the growth of this way of seeing in his child protagonist, Brian. He called the prairie, and later the foothills, his "grass tower" making sure to distinguish it from the "ivory tower." As a young boy W. O. Mitchell and his friends had the whole prairie around Weyburn as their world, their grass tower.

W. O. Mitchell believed that one's childhood landscape did more than imprint its physical geography; it also fixed an inner perspective. He learned to see drama and

poetry in small things, and he became acutely aware of his own separateness and his own mortality. Prairie was a landscape that he could not remove from his imagination. His first twelve years on the prairies marked him indelibly, and he circled back to that landscape time and again, in his "Jake and the Kid" stories, in *How I Spent My Summer Holidays*, in the reminiscential performance pieces collected in *An Evening with W. O. Mitchell*, and in his last, unfinished novel.

The experience of "otherness" in the prairies is effectively represented in the writings of regional authors like W. O. Mitchell. Through their creative interpretations of locale, writers describing particular places also simultaneously create those places. Terrence Heath claims in his book, *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada* that "some artists [including writers] create a place or sense of place by highly personal involvement in a landscape or way of life directly, but they create highly personalized images of their involvement in their surroundings or community which amount to a creation of what at one time would have been called the spirit of place" (59).

Mitchell has made significant contributions to Canadian literature whether he is regarded as novelist, playwright, humorist, or regional writer. "Mitchell's fiction is thoroughly regional, not simply because it is all nominally set within a small area of Saskatchewan prairie and Alberta foothills, but because the fictional region he creates and the metaphorical significance with which he invests it are vital elements in his novels" (Harrison, 4). Mitchell creates not only characters with whom we can identify, but a distinct sense of place in rural Saskatchewan that we have come to recognize as part of the cultural landscape of the West. "Just as he reached the road the sun exploded softly over the prairie's eastern edge, its long, red fingers discovering the clouds curved down the prairie sky. He began to walk along the road at the end of which he could now see the sloping shoulders of the town's grain elevators" (Mitchell, 229). Like Frederick Philip Grove, Sinclair Ross and Edward McCourt, Mitchell is a prairie realist. Throughout *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Mitchell uses the symbolism of the empty grain

elevators to heighten the feeling of disparity and isolation that were common sentiments felt by Westerners especially wheat farmers during the Great Depression, the period in which the novel unfolds. The symbolism of the empty grain elevators is ironic for two reasons. Firstly, grain elevators were symbols of wealth and prestige. The number of grain elevators a town had in conjunction with their outer decor (signage and colour), was directly related to the economic status of the town itself. During the 1930s the grain elevator which only ten years before was seen as a symbol of prosperity, became a symbol of the hardships of prairie life. Secondly, the absence of wheat in the grain elevators is important. According to the Harold Innis and staples theory, wheat is the commodity upon which the West developed and the fact the grain elevators are empty suggests the hopelessness Westerners felt during the Dust Bowl. The grain elevators that were once in full operation across the prairie provinces were now monuments serving the memory of an agricultural heartland bustling with opportunity. Mitchell's metaphor of the empty grain elevators was deliberate and it serves as an ironic reminder of the rise and fall of these monolithic structures.

Shadows lengthen; the sunlight fades from cloud to cloud, kindling their torn edges as it dies from softness to softness down the prairie sky. A lone farmhouse window briefly blazes; the prairie bathes in mellower, yellower light and the sinking sun becomes a low and golden glowing, splendid on the prairie's edge...stooks, fences, horses, man have a clarity that was not theirs throughout the day.

Mitchell, 59

Throughout the novel's entirety, the landscape figures prominently. It is central to the story itself. Without the landscape there would be no story. The two are intricately connected and dependent upon one another. One of the best illustrations of this in the novel is when, during the drought, farmers are packing up and leaving their farms to find

work in Alberta. The effect of the drought on the landscape, is the motivation for Mitchell's characters to leave their communities and go elsewhere.

Fall brought another crop failure to the district; the land was dotted now with empty farmhouses, their blank windows staring out over the spreading prairie, their walls piled high with rippled banks of black dust; farmers and their families moved westward and northward to Alberta and the Peace River country. Freights were dotted with unemployed, many of them young boys who had never had jobs in their lives.

Mitchell, 167

Throughout his novel, W. O. Mitchell creates a very distinct sense of place. It is a sense of place that is undeniably prairie. "She crossed the railroad tracks, looked down them to the seven grain elevators, then began to cross the wooden bridge that spanned the river" (Mitchell, 131). He relies on the use of prairie icons, like grain elevators to heighten that sense of place he so convincingly creates.

He does not create an imaginative landscape represented by the alienation of man from the land which has come to define prairie realism, but rather, he creates a landscape that embodies the connectedness of man to the land. According to Ken Mitchell in his book titled, *Horizon: Writings of the Canadian Prairie*, "all discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian West must out of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (249). In this manner, W. O. Mitchell has not only created a distinct sense of place in Rural Saskatchewan, but he has contributed to the creation of a uniquely Western Canadian cultural landscape with the grain elevator being one of the most important points of reference of that landscape.

4.3 Robert Stead

Robert J. Stead, although born in the East, is a Westerner by upbringing; and it was in the West that, as teacher, journalist and author, he earned his livelihood for many years. He first attracted public attention through his verse, written in successful imitation of Robert W. Service. His early novels, *The Bail Jumper* (1914), and *The Homesteaders* (1916), attracted less attention than his verse collections; but the public gave an enthusiastic welcome to *The Cow Puncher*, published in 1918. *The Cow Puncher* has been the most successful of Stead's novels, selling over 70,000 copies.

It is much to Stead's credit that he did not attempt to capitalize, as he might easily have done, on the popular success of these two novels. Instead of emphasizing the sensational and romantic, he turned to the serious portrayal of the ordinary men and women of ordinary western communities in their ordinary occupations. From 1920 on his popular reputation declined, almost certainly as a result of his choice of subject matter. From 1926 onward, the year his novel *Grain* was published, he wrote little.

Indeed, it is not too much to say that *Grain* just misses being one of the most important novels in Canadian literature. Stead's hero, Gander Stake, is an almost wholly convincing characterization. Gander is born on a Western Canadian farm. His physical environment is described with unfaltering vividness and accuracy, and the details of description are artistically justifiable because they are never extraneous to the character of the hero. His complete ordinariness is his predominant characteristic. He goes to school rather unwillingly and learns nothing that has much permanent effect on him. For, as the author makes clear, Gander's interest is not in books or even in people but in the earth itself.

Throughout the novel *Grain*, Stead uses the metaphor of the grain elevator to symbolize progress and prosperity. "As they crested a ridge, the cupolas of the wheat

elevators at Plainville came into view, and down the long road between stretched a procession of buggies and automobiles. The whole countryside was crowding into Plainville” (Stead, 90). The dichotomy in the novel between the countryside and the town is made evident by this quote. The countryside, because it lacks the “cupolas” of the grain elevators and “procession of buggies and automobiles” is seen as less prosperous whereas the town, Plainville, is meant to be seen as the bustling “metropolis.” The road, the grain elevators and the automobiles, all of which are examples of technological sophistication, are meant to symbolize the forward-thinking of the new urban population.

This theme is continued throughout the novel when both Gander’s younger sister and older brother opt to leave the family farm and move to the “big” city. Stead’s novel, although obviously fiction, does account with some accuracy the rural depopulation that was starting to happen historically in the prairies during the First World War, the time in which Stead wrote this novel.

Robert Stead masterfully describes the literary landscape he creates in the novel *Grain*. He leaves no detail to the imagination. His description of Plainville is so precise and detailed that when reading the book, one can imagine that this fictional place almost certainly exists.

Gander drew up in the straggling street that skirted the railway track at Plainville. On his right a row of garages, livery stables, implement warehouses, grocery and hardware stores, offices; on his left the huge bulk of the grain elevators, each with its squat little engine room from which came the intermittent spit...spit...of the gasoline motor. The air was filled with the dust of wheat; around the elevators were drifts of chaff in which one or two outlaw cows of the town were browsing; from the railway track came the sound, like rushing water, of wheat being piped into cars for shipment, first to Fort William or Port Arthur and later to those hiving lands of Europe now so assiduously engaged in a business of their own, but a business which could not be carried on for long without the help of that little red kernel, mightier than siege guns and battleships....Gander

straightened into the attitude of a biped and awaited the verdict of the buyers.

Stead, 120

Stead's novel is characterized by his realistic unfolding of agricultural history. In this unfolding, the grain elevator plays a preeminent role. In his descriptions of agricultural practices on the prairies, the grain elevator is central. It is not only a symbol of wealth, prosperity and prestige, it is the very backbone of the agricultural history of the region.

Gander drove his team up the gangway into one of the elevators. He guided his four horses with a dexterity that was an art, bringing the great load to position to an inch. This was his world. The load was weighed as it stood in the wagon: the warehouseman touched a lever; the front end of the wagon went up, the rear end down; a trap door in the back of the wagon-box was opened and the wheat rushed out in a golden stream into a hopper under the driveway. It was all over in a minute. Gander got his ticket, good for cash at the bank, and drove on.

Stead, 122

In saying this, it is no wonder Stead's descriptions are so detailed. To Stead, the functionality of these structures is of paramount importance. "Stead was fascinated with technology and its application to the agrarian setting. The telephone, motor cars, milking machines, motorized cream separators and motion pictures made life easier and more enjoyable and opened the door to a wider world" (Karr, 46).

Stead also alludes to the cultural significance of the grain elevator, although it is really just a matter of consequence in the novel. "He made some purchases for his mother at Sempter & Burton's; then, wishing to give his horses ample time to feed and rest, he loitered about the elevators" (Stead, 124). As this particular quote indicates, the grain elevator also happened to be a place of social gathering whether or not it was intentional.

In many of Stead's novels there is a deep sense that the earth is the source of all true wealth and virtue. Stead shared with many modernist thinkers an empirical as well as an idealist perspective. He accepted the modern technological world and sought to incorporate its best features into the rural area while at the same time preserving the best of the rural virtues and rural lifestyle.

Even though Robert Stead's novel *Grain* is not deemed the quintessential Western Canadian novel, it is an important contribution to the Canadian Literary canon. It is most definitely a novel about place; specifically Western Canada. Not only does it tell a story but it documents a disappearing landscape with enough detail to reconstruct a somewhat realistic history of agriculture in the prairies and the role the grain elevator played in the overall development of the region. Like Robert Newton Hurley, Robert Stead documents the Western landscape and in doing so, has contributed to the creation of a distinct prairie identity.

4.4 Wallace Stegner

The North American prairie, Wallace Stegner has written, is a land, "notable primarily for its weather, which is violent and prolonged; its emptiness, which is almost frighteningly total; and its wind, which blows all the time in a way to stiffen your hair and rattle the eyes in your head" (Stegner, 3). Though written during the mid-twentieth century, this description is a fitting point of departure for a book examining literary adaptations to the prairie because it encapsulates the essence of an "outsider's" imaginative response to the landscape.

Wallace Stegner was born in Idaho on February 18, 1909. His father was determined to make his family fortune on the frontier, and Wallace and his older brother Cecil spent most of their childhoods traveling across the West.

Wallace Stegner's contribution to literature is impressive. He not only gave Whitemud a prominent place in North American fiction, "he laid much of the groundwork for contemporary Western Canadian fiction" (Simons, 42). He is credited

with influencing many of the region's finest authors, including Rudy Wiebe and W. O. Mitchell.

Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier is a strange book, something of a generic anomaly that offers, as its subtitle suggests, a mixture of authorial impulses. In it, Stegner describes a pilgrimage he made to his boyhood town, Whitemud, Saskatchewan, where his family homesteaded during the 1910s, to see what was still there. "One way of coming to terms, making sense of one's roots, is to become a creator, and most artist figures in Canadian fiction are in fact third-generation children" (Atwood, 181). Throughout the novel, the landscape exerts a pull on his imagination, as land, through memory, and through its history. But to Stegner, the prairie is emphatically a personal landscape, one that seems to elude his struggle to express it.

Wallace Stegner's accounts of Whitemud are childhood remembrances, memories that to a certain degree are nostalgic. There is a reminiscential quality to his prose that is child-like and unhampered by the burdens of adulthood responsibility.

From wheat we got certain fringe benefits. When we could sneak by the elevator man, the elevator bins were fine places to play in, a good deal like enormous clean sandpiles. We were constantly being warned about the danger of drowning in the grain, but we discovered early that only flax could really suck you down. In wheat we deliberately started avalanches and buried one another.

Stegner, 258

The symbolism of the grain elevator in this passage is little more than a childhood playground, a place of forbidden curiosity. Nevertheless, it is still a place that holds meaning for Stegner, even now as an adult. It is part of the landscape of his childhood, a place of social interaction; a place that still exists even if only in his mind. It is a symbol of a place that once was.

In much the same way as Robert Newton Hurley's paintings illustrate the verticality of the grain elevator against the horizontal plane of prairie, so too does Wallace Stegner's description of them in the landscape.

So it is still quiet earth, big sky. Human intrusions seems as abrupt as the elevators that leap out of the plain to announce every little hamlet and keep it memorable for a few miles. The countryside and the smaller villages empty gradually into the larger centres; in the process of slow adaptation to the terms the land sets, the small towns get smaller, the larger ones larger. Whitemud, based strategically on the railroad and river, is one of the ones that will last.

Stegner, 11

Stegner sees grain elevators as prairie signposts, as markers of settlements. They represent permanence on the prairie landscape as they stand tall and erect breaking the monotony of land fading into sky.

Wolf Willow blends memory, history, and fiction to offer one man's evaluation of his place, a personal landscape at a particular time, a series of associations seemingly as coincidental as the aroma of the local shrub, wolf willow. "The imaginative effects of prairie space have persisted in weighing heavily on the minds of native-born writers, so much so that allusions to the landscape are central to their comments touching upon the West as personal heritage" (Thacker, 188)

The landscape is typically seen "as the overriding image and metaphor of Western Canada" (Ring, 7). To "absorb" the prairie, painters and writers had to replace imaginative patterns imposed by Eastern and European sensibilities with others that acknowledged the austere character of the land. The representation of grain elevators in the work of prairie writers, specifically, W. O. Mitchell, Robert Stead and Wallace Stegner has led to their mythologization and thus, has elevated them from the regional consciousness to the national one. Their work has created, out of the ordinary, an extraordinary symbol of Western Canada. "As people share their stories with others, they

name and shape the meanings of their unique life experiences” (Harvey, 9). Stories and storytelling, therefore, are an expression of cultural identity. Grain Elevators are synonymous with prairie identity and part of a distinct regional history and if for no other reasons than these, they are cultural artifacts invaluable to society.

Conclusion

Poetry is seldom useful, but always memorable. If I were a sociologist anxious to study in detail the life of any community I would go very early to its refuse piles. For a community may be as well judged by what it throws away-what it has to throw away and what it chooses to-as by any other evidence. For whole civilizations we sometimes have no more of the poetry and little more of the history than this.

Stegner, 36

For almost a century, some of the most distinguished aspects of the prairie landscape have been found in its small towns. "At regular intervals throughout the region can be found settlements with a main street some two or three blocks long, oriented to a railroad station and an elevator complex, and backed by partially filled grid of residential streets on one side of the tracks" (Everitt, 173). Through interlocking monopolies by grain companies and the railway, the landscape of small towns became characterized by repetitive features; the standard country style grain elevator being just one example.

The farm population has declined steadily in all parts of the prairies since the 1920s, and evidence of the outflow lies all around. "Dead or dying shelterbelts, decaying barns and machinery, abandoned houses, elevators and railway stations are strewn across the landscape" (Rees, 1988, 167). Old artifacts rot or rust so slowly in the dry air that the prairie, seen through antiquarian eyes, is a great open-air museum.

Now that contemporary cultural taste sees heritage and culture as creating each other, the theoretical underpinnings of policy must begin to reflect the interactive nature of its context. The mechanical theory of the past is no longer suitable because it relies on analyzing the past in a self-obscuring fashion as opposed to synthesizing the past in a self-reflective process.

Knowledge of the past provides insight into the past. The ever increasing complexity of the scope of the heritage conservation discipline is unbalanced because all

the diverse areas of knowledge are not being integrated into policy. Paradoxically, insight is being obscured by knowledge. The current policy treats the past as objects in a linear temporal continuum, which can be plucked out and examined for information about the past. This objectifying of the past diminishes the significance of its creative dynamic aspect. Therefore, this procedure neglects one of the most significant aspects of our heritage's nature. The organic and creative language of the modern definitions ("living context...from which we derive sustenance") does not lend itself to object-based theory. It is hypothesized that if heritage policy itself were more interactive and inclusive, with regard to its inherent biases and their implementation, it would be more efficient in synthesizing the past and the present, and would therefore have more integrity.

Day by day, prairie grain elevators are disappearing from the prairie skyline as a result of so-called technological obsolescence and economic restructuring. "The globalization of agriculture and the need for more efficient means of transporting grain has prompted companies such as UGG and the Alberta Wheat Pool to tear down the structures" (Ohler and Wagner, B7). The grain elevator which was once a symbol of the region's wealth and prosperity has now come to symbolize its struggle to survive in the modern world of agriculture.

In recent years, there have been signs of communities responding to the disappearance of grain elevators from the prairie landscape. Several towns in Alberta and Saskatchewan are starting to fight to save these local landmarks. Leduc is just one of several examples that is beginning to receive national news coverage.

In the early 1990s, the Inglis Area Heritage Committee was formed by a group of local residents who were concerned to learn that their community's grain elevators were going to be demolished. The mission of the Committee was to "preserve, protect, sustain the architectural symbol representative of Western Canadian agriculture-the standard

country grain elevator-for the education, interpretation and enjoyment of present and future generations” (www.ingliselevators.com).

Like many agricultural communities in the prairies, Inglis grew exponentially with the coming of the railway. By 1925, the town had four grain elevators. The town continued to grow until the 1950s when the railway threatened to abandon its line. Despite the possibility of the line’s closure, the Inglis elevators continued to operate for the next forty-five years, until 1995. The mid to late 1990s saw grain elevators across the prairies being demolished at an unprecedented rate. According to Statistics Canada, “1,578 licensed country grain elevators had been destroyed” (www.ingliselevators.com).

The Inglis elevators are considered unique because of their number and their near original condition. The southern-most elevator was built by the United Grain Growers in 1925. This particular elevator is actually the second one built by the UGG on that site. The original one built in 1922 burned down shortly after its construction. The second grain elevator on the site is the N.M. Paterson elevator which was in operation until 1979. This elevator was constructed by the Northern Elevator Company in the early 1920s. Perhaps the most unusual elevator on that site is the double elevator owned by the UGG. The shorter of the two structures, a standard medium elevator was built by the Matheson Lindsay Company in 1922. In 1940, the Reliance Company decided to add a standard tall elevator. “While actually two elevators with separate legs and pits to handle the grain, these buildings were intended to function together and share a single office and driveway” (www.ingliselevators.com). Located at the north end of the site is the original N.M. Paterson and Sons Ltd. grain elevator. It was also built in 1922 and was in full operation until 1995. At the time of its construction, this elevator was considered to be the “cadillac” of grain elevators.

In 1996, Parks Canada in partnership with Heritage Canada designated the group of grain elevators in Inglis, Manitoba, as a National Historic Site. It is estimated that there are only a couple of hundred traditional style country grain elevators still standing.

While Parks Canada's involvement with the grain elevators in Inglis, Manitoba, would seem to suggest there is hope for preserving these icons, no further attempts have been made towards creating a broader preservation movement. Clearly, if these buildings are to be protected and preserved, society must attach new uses and values to them. While no one in the heritage field would disagree with this intent, the problem is who gets to decide what these values should be in the case of grain elevators. Should it be the local community? the provincial government? the federal government? What if the local community is divided in its opinion? For vernacular architecture in particular, the role of the local community would seem to be of primary importance. A community may not be unanimous in its opinions, but the debate itself can help create more awareness of the traditional role of the elevator as a site of both coherence and contention.

Chris Johnston, in her discussion paper, "What is Social Value?" argues that we attach meanings to places, meanings known to individuals and meanings shared by communities" (iii). Social value embodies the qualities for which a place has become important spiritually, politically, and culturally to a group of people. "In seeking to understand social value we are looking at the essence of ourselves-our cultural traditions (past), our cultural identity (present), and our cultural aspirations (future)-and how we create or give meaning to our environment" (Johnston, 6). The built environment is an expression of these fundamental aspects of our identity.

If farm structures continue to disappear, we will lose another irreplaceable reminder of our heritage. Nowhere is architecture tied more organically to the land than in the pursuit of agriculture. Agrarian structures rose out of the land's riches and depend for their utility on its continued vitality. Ironically, not only are these structures dependent on the land; in many cases the preservation of the land depends on saving the buildings. "If the farm gives way to 'progress,' so may the land" (National Trust, 96).

With mechanized farming and centralized grain handling, what had become the symbol of the Prairies, the country grain elevator, is now an endangered landmark.

Without these local landmarks, many prairies communities would just be Anytown, Canada. Grain elevators are a living landscape, they tell a story about “place” and “community” and how the two are intertwined.

Thus, heritage is a result of past cultural dialogue which expresses itself through and is expressed by current cultural dialogue. Therefore, when we try to establish degrees of cultural significance embodied by certain aspects of our heritage, it is better to first try and isolate them as types of cultural manifestation, and then to use the types to understand the whole. Obviously, the types of intervention and interpretations used to analyze or preserve the past should accord themselves with the type of past element being preserved. Furthermore, our present actions must be considered within the context of our current social, political, and geographical environment. It is of paramount importance to incorporate a thoughtful and genuine interpretation of our current cultural context into any policy which evaluates the relative significance of aspects of the past, because we are using the past to perpetuate an enduring sense of self-recognition and belonging, and thereby taking a more active role than ever in defining ourselves. To define ourselves we must not look at our past, but rather see our present.

With respect to grain elevators in particular, their interpretation, their modes of conservation and preservation, will be specific both to the grain elevator as a type but also to its place within a specific prairie culture. Once they are better understood, which has been the purpose of this thesis, it will be possible to move beyond the specific examples of Leduc and Inglis to a larger discussion concerning the preservation of these landmarks. While this thesis has used the work of artists and writers as a means to ascertain their cultural significance, other perspectives such as those found in film and drama could also have been used to arrive at a sense of their symbolic role in our collective consciousness. Recognizing and understanding the cultural significance of the country grain elevator is the first step in the struggle to preserve it.

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