

Monocultures, Monopolies, and Militarism

The Environmental Legacy of “Greater Production” in Robert Stead’s *Grain*

Midway through *Grain*, his 1926 novel depicting prairie agricultural life in the early twentieth century, Robert Stead presents a conversation between two farmers that still rings true across many rural landscapes in Canada today: leaning in the shade of a horse stable in the summer of 1914, Jackson Stake jokes with a neighbour that his wife’s desire for household improvements has been encouraged by the mistaken belief that “‘farmin’ was an industry, instead of a pursoot” (86). While Stake’s characterization of farming as a mere hobby is an attempt to justify the postponement of domestic expenditures, the humour of the scene suggests that even this notoriously tight-fisted character knows his bluff is being called by the economic momentum of the times. The declaration of war in 1914 confirmed that agriculture in Canada was indeed an industry, and an increasingly profitable one at that. The wheat boom of the First World War would in turn pay for a new house for the Stake family, but more importantly it also helped shape an ideology that would come to define the development of industrial agriculture in the decades that followed, one underwritten by the imperative to steadily increase production to feed the appetite of a growing world.

Today, Canadian grain farmers again find themselves on the threshold of a boom: after years of low grain prices and drought, a combination of factors, including low world grain stocks and the search for alternatives to conventional petroleum in the face of climate change has fostered the dramatic rise of grain prices. In conjunction with these developments, prairie summerfallow acreage in 2007 dropped to its lowest level since 1920. According to *The Western Producer*, the largest farm newspaper in Western

Canada, the increase in seeded acreage across the prairies was partly a result of higher grain prices fostered by the growing ethanol trend (Pratt 3). Some critics have pointed out, however, that there are several ironies underlying the recent shift towards greener fuel production. First, in many cases more energy is expended to produce the ethanol than is ultimately gained from the production process (Ross 7); secondly, the seeding of large acreages to produce grain for ethanol threatens to put pressure on ecologically sensitive land that is either prone to erosion or otherwise provides valuable habitat for birds, rodents, and rare plant species (Pratt 3); and finally, recent global food shortages directly challenge the policy of prioritizing fuel needs over basic human nutritional needs. Biofuel may be touted as the new secret weapon in the war against climate change, but mounting environmental critique demands that we more carefully examine the hidden costs of this promised harvest. I propose that examining early prairie literature from a literary-environmental perspective offers one important and largely overlooked means of engaging in these debates by situating contemporary ecological challenges within a wider cultural and historical context.

Although some of the reasons given for expanding seeded acreage have changed since the early twentieth century, in what follows I will demonstrate that there are also good reasons not to forget the historical consequences of coaxing every corner of the prairies into grain production. To do so, this article will consider Stead's novel as a text of continuing relevance for the way we think and write about environmental challenges facing Western Canada today, particularly as those challenges relate to industrial agriculture. Reading the novel against the backdrop of the federal government's Greater Production Campaign, a wartime initiative designed to increase agricultural yields across the country, opens up the space to question the ways in which certain socio-political values are promoted through the application of military discourses to nature. It also allows us to situate current agricultural debates within a broader historical milieu, thereby demonstrating that many of the dilemmas faced by prairie farmers today—including the long-term ecological impacts of intensive monocultures and ever-larger economies of scale—are not so new as we might sometimes presume. Stead's novel thus functions as more than an historical document or piece of prairie "realist" fiction; it also offers an overlooked form of environmental critique that speaks to the literary and popular concerns of our time as well as its own.

In the context of Stead's own career, during which he worked as a newspaperman, a publicity agent for the CPR, and as a director in the federal

Department of Immigration and Colonization (Thompson 2), the publication of *Grain* marks an important transition. While much of his early work, particularly his poetry (*The Empire Builders* [1908], *Prairie Born and Other Poems* [1911], and *Kitchener and Other Poems* [1917]), touted the settlement of the west under the banners of biblical dominion and wheat-growing patriotism (Allison v), the publication of *Grain* in 1926 marks the beginning of a more measured consideration of some of the war's costs on the home front—to the environment, to human relationships, and to the creative self. While *Grain* signals Stead's continuing concern with constructions of prairie life up to and including World War I, the patriotic fervour that had defined much of his earlier work is now tempered and complicated in the figure of its young male protagonist, Gander Stake. The novel shows Gander caught in the struggle between two conflicting ideals, as he tries to decide whether to remain on the family farm or to sign up for military service. The fact that Stead presents this struggle with measured empathy demonstrates just how sharply the characterization of Gander diverges from Stead's earlier portrayals of young men of military age. In a popular wartime verse such as "We Were Men of the Furrow," for example, Stead helped create the myth of a group of Canadian volunteers flooding down from their fields and woods to wage a just war in the name of peace. The closing lines of this poem warn of the consequences of threatening the pastoral life of those located on the imperial periphery: "Loud is the boast of the despot, clanking his nation in arms, / *But beware of a peace-loving people when they sweep from their forests and farms!*" (*Kitchener* 14, emphasis in original). Canada's Expeditionary Force, the myth suggested, was composed primarily of virile "men of the mothering earth" who had willingly beaten their spades into swords (14).¹

With the publication of *Grain* in the mid-1920s, however, the equation of patriotism with military enlistment suddenly became much less clear in Stead's work. Although the myth of the war that developed in the postwar years perpetuated an idea of the Canadian soldier as a child of nature eager to serve at the front (Vance 140), in *Grain* readers are drawn to empathize with a young man who struggles to make any meaningful connection between his own life on the farm and the war across the ocean:

Gander was not very sure of his geography, but of this much he was sure, that the Atlantic Ocean lay between, and the British Navy ruled the Atlantic Ocean, so what was there to worry about? With Gander as with most others, it was a matter of perspective. He was not lacking in courage or in a spirit of readiness to defend his home. [...] But Belgium? Gander was unable to visualize a danger so remote. (106-107)

While the mythic version of the war might lead readers to assume that Gander Stake's reluctance to enlist marks him as an anomaly in a multitude of willing rural volunteers, it is more likely the case that his response was representative of many young farmers' experiences during the war. Jonathan Vance notes, for example, that "[o]f the soldiers who had enlisted by 1 March 1916, only 6.5 per cent were farmers or ranchers; 18.5 per cent were clerical workers, and nearly 65 per cent were manual workers. Even by the war's end, the reality had not changed to meet the myth" (161). What Stead seems to have recognized, however, is the considerable advantage of myth over government data when it came to the public perception of reality. With the announcement of war in *Grain*, Gander finds himself directly confronted with this myth: even as he clings to hope for a future for himself and his childhood love Josephine Burge, he is forced to acknowledge that the excitement of war has generated "a light in her eyes which he could not fathom or understand" (92). While Gander cannot bring himself to identify with the myth of enlistment, he also lacks a counter-narrative powerful enough to contest it.

As the first year of the war passes by and the pressure to join the services mounts, Stead's protagonist finds that actions that would once have been cast as heroic in peacetime no longer carry much weight. For example, at one point in the novel he saves a young farm laborer from certain death at the hands of a threshing machine, an action that leads one threshing crew member to suggest that Gander is worthy of the Victoria Cross. Instead of applauding Gander, however, Jo Burge responds with the stinging suggestion that "Maybe he'll wear a *real* VC there some day" (111, emphasis added). As a result, Gander finds himself in a difficult position: his own reluctance to take orders and surrender his privacy makes the thought of military service repulsive to him, and yet he is haunted by social pressure to conform to the new wartime ideals of heroic masculinity.² At the same time, a close reading of the narrative suggests that he is not the only character with misgivings about military service. Even as Josephine's public actions conform to the myth of heroism that dominated the wartime experience, her private sentiments suggest that she does not entirely believe in it. Her doubts about the narrow path to heroism emerge not only in her misgivings about her brother's enlistment (129), but also in her private remark to Gander following the threshing accident that she is in fact "very proud" of his bravery (111). The conflict underlying the narrative thus seems to reside less in Jo's own perceptions of Gander than in her concern about wider public opinion: "Like any

honest girl, she was not satisfied that she alone should be proud of Gander; she wanted other people to be proud of him" (106).

Gander's response to this dilemma is somewhat unconventional, and reveals a significant change in the discursive framing of agricultural practice in the period. Rather than enlisting in the military, he tries to expand the existing definition of heroism to include his own agricultural labour as a form of service that will help determine the outcome of a war played out on the global stage. As Gander delivers a load of wheat to the railway siding in Plainville, for example, the narrator characterizes the procession of farm wagons as "the march of King Wheat into the gates of the world," and insists that the business of war "cannot be carried on for long without the help of that little red kernel, mightier than siege guns and battleships" (120). In recasting the role of the prairie farmer as military hero, the novel echoes the rhetoric of Canadian government officials at the time. For example, in a wartime address to the Royal Canadian Institute in 1917, Dominion chemist Frank Shutt concluded his speech by quoting a directive to farmers given by the British President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries: "You have your duty quite as clear and as definite as the captain of the cruiser or the colonel of a battalion. England has a claim on you farmers, men and women of every class, as clear as she has on our sons and husbands to go and serve in the trenches" (Shutt 18). Stead certainly seems to have had the parallel between the soldier and the farmer in mind as he wrote *Grain*, for as Eric Thompson notes, one of the titles he first suggested to his publisher was *A Soldier of the Soil* (34).³

While the arrival of World War One reinforced the conceptualization of agriculture as a form of warfare, evidence in the novel suggests that the idea of prairie farming as a form of battle precedes 1914. At several points in the text Stead challenges the idea of the prairie as a beneficent Eden by illustrating how the language and logic of battle defined the settlement experience from its very inception. The narrator describes the Willow Green district schoolyard, for example, as a place in which Gander and his schoolmates fought with each other "as their parents had fought with the wilderness—with the single idea of victory, and few compunctions about the method of attaining it" (36). The conquering of a perceived wilderness through tasks such as brush clearance and sod busting would in turn prompt new forms of adversarialism in the agricultural sector during wartime, especially in the face of a perceived onslaught by pests such as weeds, insects, and gophers. In an exchange between Gander and his sister as they ride around a field on

a binder in late summer, one witnesses the deployment of an increasingly lethal series of metaphors to describe the human relationship to nature on the home front. As his sister remarks,

“I was just thinking as I rode up on the back of the binder that the wheat was Germans and the knives were the Allies. It was great fun watching them topple over, in whole regiments. And where a big green weed would stick up out of the wheat I would say, ‘That’s a German officer, a captain, maybe, or maybe a colonel, but just you wait. Your time’s coming.’ And then the knives would snip him off, and he’d fall with a flop on the canvas, and get swept up out of sight.” (95-96).

In this passage, we see the transformation of what might have once been understood as a mundane activity into a heroic—and violent—undertaking. By growing acre upon acre of clean wheat, the prairie Canadian farmer fills the stomachs of the Allies abroad while simultaneously holding back the threat of homeland invasion by a series of “unnatural” others. The particular form the enemy now takes—that of a German officer—suggests the way in which the First World War took the latent forms of cultural and linguistic xenophobia that had long underwritten Canadian immigration policy and gave them a specific set of targets: Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and others presumed to be affiliated with these groups.⁴ From this perspective, the field that is under threat from weedy irruptions can be read as a metaphor for an Anglo Canadian majority anxious about the possibility that newly-arrived “strangers within our gates” might not only stubbornly resist assimilation, but that in the specific form of the enemy alien, they might also overthrow Canadian society from within.⁵

This fusion of military and agricultural discourses greatly appealed not only to individual farmers and governments of the period, but also to agricultural industries that stood to benefit from the new emphasis on monocropping and increased yields.⁶ For example, anxieties about military invasion are exploited to considerable effect in a 1918 advertisement placed in *The Grain Growers’ Guide* designed to sell strychnine to farmers for poisoning gophers. The text of the ad warns the farmer of the “HUNgry Gophers” spring attack, a siege that parallels the territorial struggle for the western front in Europe: “They charge by thousands and thousands; hoping to ravage the tender wheat, and satisfy their greed at the expense of the farmer. But, when they meet the Allied defense of grain, poisoned with ‘GOPHERCIDE’ their drive is checked – their massed attack is shattered – and the wheat fields of the west are dotted with their dead” (“Gophercide” 36) (Fig.1).



The HUNgry Gophers Spring Drive

They charge by thousands and thousands; hoping to ravage the tender wheat, and satisfy their greed at the expense of the farmer.

But, when they meet the Allied defense of grain, poisoned with

“GOPHERCIDE”

their drive is checked—their massed attack is shattered—and the wheat fields of the west are dotted with their dead.

“Gophercide” is a perfect solution of strychnine, which entirely dissolves in warm water without the aid of acids or vinegar; and is so disguised that gophers smack their lips over it, and it curls them up.

Don't take chances this year. Get “Gophercide” right now—soak the wheat in it, and sprinkle the poisoned grain about the holes of the gophers. It will save your wheat crop. Your druggist or general store has it, or will get it for you.

Made by

National Drug and Chemical Co. of Canada Limited, Montreal.

Western Branches:

Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Nelson, Vancouver and Victoria.

12

Fig.1

Advertisement for “Gophercide” depicting gophers as German soldiers launching an attack (*Grain Growers' Guide* 20 February 1918).

The gopher here is rendered an unnatural, even pathological, prairie species; the best way to encourage its extermination is to dress it in the guise of a well-known human foe. The advertisement also relies upon the use of theriomorphism, a technique sometimes used in contexts of national or racial stereotyping, as for example when the Nazis depicted Jews as rats, or Americans depicted the Japanese as insects during the Second World War.⁷ What is interesting about the rhetorical function of this document is the way it transforms the agriculturist into the *natural* resident of the prairie, while the gopher is made to play the role of outsider.⁸ As the war continued, the appeal of chemical methods of weed and pest control would only become more attractive, since farm acreages and incomes rose dramatically even as the labour supply shrank.

Instead of advocating a cautious approach to agricultural management, the governmental and commercial press of the period largely encouraged an adversarial orientation to prairie nature in the name of boosting wartime grain production.⁹ The slogan “Food will win the war” appeared in farm periodicals such as *The Grain Growers’ Guide* and *Nor’west Farmer*, as well as in the *Agriculture War Books* published in 1915 and 1916 by the Dominion Department of Agriculture (Herd Thompson 189, n.45; MacEwan 130). By the second year of the war, Gander Stake also adopts it as his own slogan:

the world [...] had awakened to the quite obvious fact that the war must be won by wheat. Growing wheat became a patriotic duty into which Gander fitted like a cylinder nut into a socket wrench. [...] True, there were still some who refused to see in the growing of wheat the highest expression of service, some even who were frank enough to suggest that the prospect of a high price had more to do with the sudden increase in acreage than had any patriotic motive. But Gander avoided argument and kept on with his ploughing, his seeding, his harvesting and threshing. (127)

Gander’s retreat from society, however, suggests that he might not be entirely convinced by his own rhetoric. As the war wears on, the narrator describes Gander becoming “more than ever a creature of his father’s farm. He ploughed and harrowed early and late, and found his companionship with his horses and machinery. From even his father and mother he withdrew as into a shell” (134). Here, cultivation of the self through agriculture is stunted by the endless round of seasonal labour. Further, while food may win the war, it does not win the girl, as Stead leaves the main romantic subplot of the novel involving Gander and Josephine Burge unresolved. At the end of the novel, Gander leaves the farm and moves to the city with the goal of becoming a mechanic. While critics have had mixed reactions to the plausibility of this conclusion, the fact that a character once described as a natural child of the prairie grows

up to run away from it seems to suggest Stead's growing discomfort with the triumphal rural settlement narrative of his previous work.¹⁰ The post-war myth may have promoted the image of thousands of farmers returning from the front to their fields, but the increasing mechanization of prairie agriculture actually meant there was less and less room for men of Gander Stake's age on the farm. The narrator recognizes the impacts of this industrial shift well before the war begins, as demonstrated in the description of the Stake farm's adoption of steam and gasoline power in the early 1900s:

Jackson Stake was but one unit in a hundred thousand who were making possible the great trek from the country to the city, a trek which never could have taken place but for the application of machinery to land, so that now one farmer may raise enough wheat to feed many hundreds of city dwellers. But if in this he was adding his weight to a gathering social and economic crisis he was quite oblivious to the fact; he saw no further than the need of bringing more land under cultivation, to grow more wheat (41)

While the war experience pushes Gander away from the natural environment and profession in which he most thrived, the scale with which improved technology transformed the prairie west meant that rural depopulation was already a familiar trend before the war years. At the end of the novel, the prairie is left to the care of aging farmers such as Gander's father, and war veterans such as Dick Claus who are as wounded as the landscape itself.

Meanwhile, devotion to wheat production would prove to have both short- and long-term costs for prairie farmers. In the short term, the war had two main effects: first, it fostered a dangerously exclusive economic reliance on wheat as the main crop grown across the prairies; and second, it led to decreased farm diversification.¹¹ Although provincial agricultural authorities such as John Bracken in Manitoba and W.R. Motherwell in Saskatchewan encouraged farmers to diversify their operations into livestock, fodder crops, and even turnips and potatoes, after 1914 the frequency with which farmers tried new crops or types of livestock dropped off dramatically. In fact, most federal authorities in the Department of Agriculture actively encouraged wheat monocropping, and the federal voice tended to override those of provincial or local officials (Herd Thompson 61). When couched in terms of supporting the war effort, it became difficult to argue against increased wheat production without looking unpatriotic.

While the federal government was intensely involved in advising farmers about what and how many acres to sow during the war years, even going so far as to implement policies demanding a militant approach to the

management of weeds and other agricultural pests, government intervention broke down when it came to the handling, transportation, and marketing of prairie agricultural products. Lack of federal regulation of the grain marketing system meant that even with high wheat prices, individual farmers were largely left at the mercy of large corporate monopolies when trying to sell and ship their grain. Although the narrator of *Grain* suggests that wheat is Gander Stake's world (122), Gander's single-minded focus on production is also shown to be a severe limitation, since it constitutes a failure to connect the local, organic world of the farm with transnational economic forces.

Stead seems to have understood the importance of making these kinds of connections: as early as 1899 he was writing newspaper editorials arguing for government ownership and operation of elevators (Mundwiler 186). In *Grain*, he uses Gander's trip to the Plainville railway siding with a wagonload of wheat to illustrate the frustrations of the prairie farmer in the face of corporate concentration and a lack of competition in the days before the establishment of a permanent Canadian Wheat Board.¹² Even though Gander knows that his grain ought to receive the top grade price for "One Northern" wheat, the three grain buyers "who, for competitors, seemed to him to be on much too friendly terms with each other" force him to accept the price for Three Northern wheat (121). Unable to take the risk of trying to get his own railcar to ship his grain to the lakehead by winter freeze-up, and without any means of being able to load his grain into an existing rail car (which in many cases were owned by similar corporate conglomerates), Gander is forced to take the low street price (121). In response to the low grade assigned to his grain, Gander finally responds in frustration: "Oh, take it!" The narrator comments, "This was not his world. He was a producer, not a seller" (122).

While prairie grain producers are now much more likely to be sellers as well as producers, the threat of this kind of exploitation has not been entirely relegated to the past. Indeed, the challenges faced by today's prairie farmers, most of whom are forced to compete in an increasingly deregulated and unevenly subsidized market in which geographical location and scale are crucial factors of profitability, remind us just how *contemporary* many of Stead's concerns are.¹³ The loss of the Crow rate rail subsidy in the mid 1990s, the challenges of addressing increasing vertical integration in the agrifood industry, and fierce debates over how to most effectively market Canada's wheat, collectively demand reconsideration of the ways in which external factors help decide who will succeed in the farming game, and who will be cut off at the knees like so many German weeds.

Although economic hardship and dustbowl conditions are usually associated in the popular imagination with the 1930s, not the 1920s, Gander's decision to leave the farm at the end of the novel accurately foreshadows what would happen to the western wheat industry in the immediate postwar years. By 1920-1921 the prairie economy was entering a recession, and the high commodity prices previously enjoyed by prairie farmers during the war were curtailed by the actions of two competing empires: first, in 1920 Britain pressured the Canadian government into eliminating the set price for Canadian grain previously established under the Board of Grain Supervisors, and then in 1921 the United States implemented an emergency tariff to keep lower-priced Canadian grain from flooding its borders (Larsen 48). As a result, Canadian grain and cattle prices went into sharp decline. Although the economy recovered by the mid 1920s, the warning signs were there about relying too heavily on a wheat economy. It is worth remembering that there were more farm foreclosures in Alberta from 1921 to 1929 than there were from 1929 to 1939, the height of the Great Depression (Larsen 48).

Even in the pre-Depression years, then, Stead's work illustrates that some prairie writers were expressing concern about the ecological price paid by the land for short-term profitability. For example, at one point in the novel, the narrator describes how the Willow Green district farmers burn straw piles that lie "on all quarters of the horizon," and in so doing, "lavish their humus and nitrogen into the air" (52). Besides providing an eerie echo of Marx's description of the transmuting effects of bourgeois capitalism ("All that is solid melts into air" [Marx 58]), the technique of straw burning robs the land of moisture and destroys necessary organic matter, thereby leading to soil depletion and drifting.¹⁴ This technique was fostered by wartime conditions, because a shortage of labour and a market for straw often led farmers to choose the most inexpensive, time-saving way of dealing with stubble, especially after the exhausting harvest period (Herd Thompson 67). Rising grain prices during the war years also led farmers to increase field acreage dramatically in hopes of paying off debt and making a profit amidst unpredictable market forces. However, as John Herd Thompson explains, the lure of quick profit also meant that "hundreds of thousands of acres were seeded which should have been left fallow. Equally serious was the fact that because of the shortage of labour and the increased attention paid to grain crops, those acres that were left fallow were not tilled as thoroughly as they should have been" (67). Weeds thus gained a deep foothold on the prairies, draining soil moisture and nutrients and ultimately reducing yields. By the

conclusion of the war, farmer and agricultural writer Seager Wheeler concluded that low yields could no longer be blamed entirely on the weather or on growing heavy crops; instead, they were a logical consequence of “the abuse and illtreatment of the soil by the many slack methods in force to-day” (Wheeler 100). The continuance of monocropping would only be sustained by the application of another product of the military-industrial complex, ammonium nitrate, which in the postwar years eventually made a successful transition from the munitions plant to the farmer’s field in the form of chemical fertilizer.¹⁵

In their assessments of *Grain*, critics have generally agreed on the novel’s value as a social document of the changing patterns of prairie life during the first two decades of the twentieth century (Harrison 102; Saunders xi). Stead was acutely aware of how new technologies were changing the prairie agriculturist’s relationship to the land, and of how the long reach of war came to affect those people and landscapes that initially seemed most insulated from its effects. For prairie agricultural communities, the costs of the Great War went beyond the loss of young men overseas; the prairie environment itself also bore the costs of a shortsighted emphasis on a single commodity at the expense of farm diversification and the development of the prairie north. The emphasis on King Wheat was encouraged not only by farmers, who stood to benefit from high wartime grain prices, but also by governments and investment in the region by large, powerful companies (Waiser 21). It is the lingering notes of ambivalence about the wheat boom in *Grain* that make it a text of continuing importance for those contemplating the ongoing relationship between prairie literature, landscape, and agriculture.

As in the 1920s, today’s prairie agricultural climate is characterized by intense market uncertainty. The fierce debates among farmers about the continued need for a single-desk Wheat Board to market Canadian wheat and barley, and the federal government’s continuing push towards “free market choice” highlight the extent to which farmers are divided on the issue of how best to deal with this volatility.¹⁶ Under such circumstances, any new development that might give a boost to yields and prices is usually welcomed, particularly when it enables the pursuit of profit under the banner of a nobler cause. In Stead’s time, attempts to justify “greater production” clothed themselves in the patriotic dress of red, white, and blue; today, the riches promised by those pushing Big Ethanol suggests that the official colour of greater production is now green. In its purported eagerness to declare war on climate change, the Canadian federal government has begun to offer large

financial incentives for ethanol research and production, fostering the idea that farmers' exploitation of this "new market opportunity" might also be interpreted as an act of environmental stewardship.¹⁷ Many environmentalists, however, express concern about conceptualizing environmental action in terms that focus on changing the means and materials of fuel production without fundamentally altering habits of consumption. Reading Stead's work in an environmental context thus offers an important reminder of the need to consider some of the long-term implications of our choices when it comes to structuring the prairie economy in light of future economic and environmental challenges. In going round our daily furrows of production and consumption, farmers, governments, and consumers alike must take care not to dig so deeply that we wind up with our heads in the sand.

NOTES

- 1 For a history of the development of a mythic version of the First World War in Canada during the interwar years, see Vance.
- 2 Dagmar Novak notes that although Stead received some military training during the summer of 1915, he did not enlist in the Canadian armed services. While I hesitate to let biography overdetermine my reading of the novel, I agree with Novak's assertion that "it is intriguing to speculate how much of Gander Stake's refusal to join the army in *Grain*, the chief conflict in his life, is a reflection of the dilemma that Stead experienced himself" (15). Stead's ambivalence about the relative merits of agricultural versus military service are evident elsewhere in his work; for example, in the poem "In the Wheat", a young prairie farmer leaves his crop in the field for the worthier sacrifices of battle in Europe: "His wheat is red for harvest, but his blade / Is red with richer harvest at his feet" (*Kitchener* 22).
- 3 The Dominion government also set up a national initiative called "Soldiers of the Soil" during the First World War as a way of recruiting boys between the ages of 15 and 19 to work on labour-strapped Canadian farms during the summer and harvest season. Over 20,000 boys were enrolled in the SOS program across Canada (*Champ* 7).
- 4 For a detailed examination of the pressures of Anglo-conformity during World War One, see Palmer 148.
- 5 The phrase "strangers within our gates" is drawn from Winnipeg Methodist minister and social gospel advocate J.S. Woodsworth's 1909 book of the same name. Woodsworth's primary concern involved the assimilation of vast numbers of European immigrants into the Anglo-Protestant Canadian mainstream, particularly in prairie cities.
- 6 There were exceptions to this enthusiasm among prairie farmers, most notably in the conscientious objection of groups such as the Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites.
- 7 For an explanation of theriomorphism as compared and contrasted with anthropomorphism, see Garrard 141. For some examples of how theriomorphism was applied to Italians, Germans, and the Japanese in American insecticide advertisements during World War Two, see Russell 116, 120, and 121.

- 8 On the layered ironies of this “de-naturalization” of gophers as prairie residents, see Calder 396.
- 9 The Greater Production Campaign also led to the federal expropriation of First Nations reserve lands across the prairies for grain production with minimal compensation to reserve residents (Dawson 21).
- 10 See, for example, McCourt 87; Davey 134; and Thompson 43 for differing assessments of the novel’s plot resolution.
- 11 See Friesen, *Canadian* 328-329.
- 12 The federal government established the first Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) in 1919, but this initial attempt at regulation lasted only one year. Not until 1935 did R.B. Bennett’s government establish a permanent CWB. In 1943, it became a compulsory pool for the export marketing of all Canadian wheat. For a history of the CWB and the development of Canadian grain marketing, see Irwin 85-106. For a discussion of farm protest actions against the CWB in the mid 1990s, see Epp 731-732.
- 13 The National Farmers’ Union points out that many smaller agricultural producers in Canada continue to struggle financially, in part because of a gross imbalance in market power between agri-food industry multinationals and the individual family farms that do business with these firms (2, 15). For useful background information on the current economic challenges in prairie agriculture, see Warnock.
- 14 See Wheeler 116; Bracken 44.
- 15 For a recounting of the development of synthetic ammonia by German chemist Franz Huber and its industrial production in Germany during World War One, see Smil.
- 16 For opposing viewpoints on whether or not prairie wheat and barley producers would benefit from ending the single desk marketing system run by the CWB, see the arguments of former federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl 7; and Schmitz and Furtan 8-10.
- 17 See Natural Resources Canada’s statement on the environmental benefits of ethanol at <http://oeenrncan.gc.ca/transportation/fuels/ethanol/benefits.cfm?attr=16>. Accessed 22 Jan. 2008.

WORKS CITED:

- Allison, W.T. “Robert Stead, Poet of the Prairies.” *Kitchener and Other Poems*. Toronto: Musson, 1917. v-xi.
- Bracken, John. “Wheat Growing in Saskatchewan.” *Field Husbandry Bulletin No. 1*. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture. Regina: J.W. Reid, 1917.
- Calder, Alison. “Why Shoot the Gopher? Reading the Politics of a Prairie Icon.” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 33.3 (2003): 391-414.
- Champ, Joan. “The Impact of the First World War on Saskatchewan’s Farm Families.” 2002. *Winning the Prairie Gamble*. Exhibit. Saskatoon, SK: Western Development Museum, 2005.
- Davey, Frank. “Rereading Stead’s *Grain*.” *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983. 113-135.
- Dawson, Bruce. “‘Better Than a Few Squirrels’: The Greater Production Campaign on the First Nations Reserves of the Canadian Prairies.” *Plain Speaking: Essays on Aboriginal Peoples and the Prairie*. Eds. Patrick Douand and Bruce Dawson. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2002. 11-21.

- Epp, Roger. "Two Albertas: Rural and Urban Trajectories." *Alberta Formed Alberta Transformed*. Vol. 2. Ed. Michael Payne, Donald Wetherell, and Catherine Cavanaugh. Edmonton: U of Alberta P; Calgary: U of Calgary P, 2006. 726-746.
- Friesen, Gerald. *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Gophercide. Advertisement. *Grain Growers' Guide*. 20 Feb. 1918: 36.
- Harrison, Dick. *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1977.
- Herd Thompson, John. *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- Irwin, Robert. "Farmers and 'Orderly Marketing': The Making of the Canadian Wheat Board." *Prairie Forum* 26.1 (2001): 85-105.
- Larsen, Ken. "The Empire Strikes Back: The Global Grain Trade and Farmers' Struggle to Market Collectively." *Our Board, Our Business: Why Farmers Support the Canadian Wheat Board*. Eds. Terry Pugh and Darrell McLaughlin. Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2007. 42-57.
- MacEwan, Grant. *Grant MacEwan's Illustrated History of Western Canadian Agriculture*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980.
- McCourt, Edward. *The Canadian West in Fiction*. Toronto: Ryerson, 1949.
- Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Ed. Frederic L. Bender. New York: W.W. Norton, 1988.
- Mundwiler, Leslie. "Robert Stead – Home in the First Place." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 11 (1978): 184-203.
- National Farmers Union. *The Farm Crisis and Corporate Profits: A Report by Canada's National Farmers Union*. Saskatoon: National Farmers Union, 2005.
- Natural Resources Canada. "Environmental Benefits." 16 April 2007. <http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/fuels/ethanol/benefits.cfm?attr=16>. 20 Jan. 2008.
- Novak, Dagmar. *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Palmer, Howard. "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century." *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation*. 4th ed. Ed. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1994. 143-161.
- Pratt, Sean. "Summerfallow acreage lowest since 1920s." *The Western Producer*. 3 May 2007: 3.
- Ross, Nicola. "Science Desk: Economic Cornfusion." *Alternatives Journal* 33.2-3 (2007): 7.
- Russell, Edmund. *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- Saunders, Thomas. "Introduction." 1969. *Grain*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982. v-xiii.
- Schmitz, Andrew and Hartley Furtan. *The Canadian Wheat Board: Marketing in the New Millennium*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2000.
- Shutt, Frank. *Agriculture in War-Time. The Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute*. Vol. 11. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1917.
- Smil, Vaclav. *Enriching the Earth: Fritz Haber, Carl Bosch, and the Transformation of World Food Production*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2000.
- Stead, Robert J.C. *The Empire Builders and Other Poems*. 2nd ed. Toronto: William Briggs, 1909.
- . *Grain*. 1926. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

- . *Kitchener and Other Poems*. Toronto: Musson, 1917.
- . *Prairie Born and Other Poems*. Toronto: William Briggs, 1911.
- Strahl, Chuck. "Majority wants changes to CWB." *The Western Producer*. 3 May 2007: 7.
- Thompson, Eric. *Robert Stead and His Works*. Toronto: ECW, 1988.
- Vance, Jonathan. *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1997.
- Waiser, Bill. "Our Shared Destiny?" *The Heavy Hand of History: Interpreting Saskatchewan's Past*. Ed. Gregory P. Marchildon. Regina: U of Regina P, 2005. 7-29.
- Warnock, John. *Saskatchewan: The Roots of Discontent and Protest*. Montréal: Black Rose, 2004.
- Wheeler, Seager. *Profitable Grain Growing*. Winnipeg: The Grain Growers' Guide, 1919.
- Woodsworth, J.S. *Strangers Within Our Gates; or, Coming Canadians*. Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 199.

