

Hockey on the Moon

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Hockey on the Moon

Imagination and Canada's Game

JAMIE DOPP

 AU PRESS

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Introduction

[Few] activities so combine reality and fantasy in such paradoxical ways as does sport.

—Michael Oriard, *Dreaming of Heroes*

Much of my early life revolved around hockey. When I was a boy, I played in the Waterloo Minor Hockey League in the winter and all year round on the street. I followed the National Hockey League (NHL) on television and our local Junior A and B teams live and in the papers. I tracked my personal statistics in a notebook. I invented hockey dice games, was the official statistician for a table-top hockey league among my friends, and played solo hockey for hours with makeshift nets and pucks in our basement. I decorated my room with hand-drawn logos of every NHL team at the time, as well as drawings and clippings of my favourite players—Bobby Orr, Gerry Cheevers, and Johnnie McKenzie—all from my favourite team, the Boston Bruins. When I was thirteen, I tried to write a hockey novel.

Each winter, I also built a backyard rink. Some of my most vivid memories of childhood have to do with this rink. I still remember fragments of games my friends and I played there. More than the games themselves, however, I remember the building of this rink. I loved the process of construction: first pack down the snow, then water lightly and shape with your boot, then fill in the cavities in the manner of a linesman patching arena ice mid-game (plug the hole with snow, water lightly, and smooth with something akin to the flat surface of a puck), and finally, water and scrape and water again until

a skate-able surface emerges. All this construction took place in the frigid cold, the colder the better, often in the dark of night. I was proud of the fact that my father, after showing me the basics when I was eight or nine, left me to do the work myself. How manly I felt as I tended my ice. At one point I learned the trick of deliberately splashing water on myself. I'd lightly splash my pants and boots, flood the rink's surface for a while, then splash myself some more. Eventually my boots would have a thick topcoat of ice and my jeans would be white and stiff from the thighs down. To walk I'd have to move stiff-legged—like the Tin Man. The alarmed look my mother gave as I teetered in the back door this way was very gratifying.

The long hours of working on the rink were prime time for day-dreaming. In the dark and cold, my body occupied by repetitive physical tasks, my mind would wander. Many of my fantasies, predictably, had to do with hockey. I'd replay games I'd recently played and imagine myself as an NHL star. But many of my fantasies weren't about hockey. They were about outer space. As I watered my backyard ice, I'd remember the science fiction novels I'd read. From these I'd extrapolate heroic fantasies about aliens and space battles and fortunes lost and recovered again among the stars. Or I'd think about the American Apollo space program, which was in the news at that time, the various missions leading up to Neil Armstrong's giant leap for mankind, which I watched live on television in July of 1969 just a few days before my twelfth birthday. The next winter, as I watered my ice under the stars, I replayed what I'd seen on television and dreamed of becoming an astronaut.

Amid my space fantasies, I'd pretend my backyard rink had become the surface of the moon. There was, in fact, an uncanny resemblance between the two: like the moon, my rink had a gleaming surface, grey-white and contoured, with lighter flat areas and darker areas like the bottoms of craters. Water spread like lava upon it, then hardened into rock. The resemblance was made stronger by the sheen from the work light my father clipped to the laundry line for me, a

sheen like the half-light of the moon itself. If the sky were clear, as in my memory it always was, the real moon would appear surrounded by brilliant stars—and my attention would shift back and forth excitedly from the fantasy surface of my rink to the real moon in the sky.

When I look back on my childhood experience with hockey, what strikes me now is how imaginative it was. Not just how intense my response to the game was but how many different kinds of imaginative activity were involved. As someone who grew into a writer and a professor of literature, I am naturally curious about all this imaginative activity. Was it mainly a reflection of the kind of boy I was? Was it typical childlike behaviour? Or were there deeper implications to it, implications that perhaps suggest links between two of the enduring passions of my life—hockey and literature?

As the existence of this book suggests, I believe there are implications to my boyhood responses to hockey that go beyond my own passions. Although my responses reflected my own experiences and interests, they were also common—no different, really, than the behaviour of any number of other hockey fans, younger and older, over the years. The widespread nature of such responses hints at a greater significance. This significance, I would like to suggest, lies in the complex mix of “reality and fantasy” that Michael Oriard argues is fundamental to sport. Here’s the longer passage from which the epigraph to this introduction comes:

[Few] activities so combine reality and fantasy in such paradoxical ways as does sport: the realities of hard work, business practice, discipline, and failure; and the fantasy dreams of freedom, perpetual youth, and heroism. All sports epitomize . . . dreams, fears, and obsessions; qualities like rugged individualism, teamwork, striving for the pinnacle of one’s profession, self-reliance, fair play, and fear of retirement or failure are as intrinsic to . . . life as they are to sport. Sport is both a metaphor for . . . life and an escape from the banality or complexity of life. (Oriard 1982, 8)

Notice how many elements in this passage have to do with the imagination: sport is described as a place of “fantasy dreams,” “fears, and obsessions,” and as a “metaphor for” as well as “an escape from” life. Oriard’s focus in *Dreaming of Heroes* is on sport in the United States, but his description applies equally well to hockey in Canada. Indeed, I suspect that few sports in the world contain as complex a mix of reality and fantasy as does Canadian hockey. This book is my attempt to understand that mix.

The book itself grew out of research I have undertaken as a professor of Canadian literature at the University of Victoria. After a long period in which hockey was snubbed as a subject for serious writing in Canada, there has been, in the last twenty-five years or so, something of a boom in writing about the game. This has created a rich ground for research.

My method in what follows is to focus on notable examples of Canadian hockey literature, from before and as part of the recent boom, with the aim of revealing how each work illustrates some aspect of the relationship between imagination and hockey. I begin, in chapter 1, by proposing that imaginative responses to the game might be usefully categorized along a continuum from those that are more “conservative” to those that are more “critical.” I try to illustrate this distinction by analyzing two of the most famous texts about hockey, Al Purdy’s 1965 poem “Hockey Players,” and Stompin’ Tom Connors’s 1973 song “The Hockey Song.”

Chapters 2 to 5 examine earlier texts that illustrate how hockey became embedded in Canadian society, as well as the constellations of meanings, called by scholars “the hockey myth,” that became attached to the game. Ralph Connor’s 1902 novel *Glengarry School Days*, the focus of chapter 2, contains the first extended description of a hockey game in Canadian literature. The novel illustrates how the emergence of hockey was accompanied not just by an evolution of rules of play but by the attachment of particular social—and spiritual—meanings to the game. Hugh MacLennan’s 1945 novel *Two Solitudes*, the focus of Chapter 3, illustrates how strongly hockey had

become associated with Canadian identity by the mid-twentieth century. The kinds of meanings attached to hockey in *Glengarry School Days* persist in *Two Solitudes* but are troubled by differences in French and English Canadian viewpoints as well as by the ascendancy of the professional game.

Chapter 4 explores Scott Young's juvenile hockey trilogy, *Scrubs on Skates*, *Boy on Defense*, and *A Boy at the Leafs Camp*, which were published between 1952 and 1963. Young's trilogy is steeped in the sensibility of the so-called Original Six era of the NHL and fleshes out key aspects of the hockey myth. Chapter 5 explores another text often associated with the hockey myth, Roch Carrier's 1979 story "The Hockey Sweater." "The Hockey Sweater" rivals "The Hockey Song" as the best-known imaginative response to hockey in Canada. At first glance, the story reinforces the hockey myth in a Québécois context. A closer examination, however, reveals historical traces in the story that cast doubt on key aspects of the myth and that suggest fissures in Canadian and Québécois society that the myth, even at its most powerful, cannot smooth over.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore two texts that form the literary gateway for the hockey writing boom that began in the 1990s. *The Last Season*, Roy McGregor's 1983 novel, is the first literary novel in Canada about hockey. It follows the career of Felix Batterinski, who begins life in a small northern Ontario town, becomes a successful NHL "goon" on the Philadelphia Flyers of the 1970s, and dies tragically as his career winds down. Tellingly, Batterinski's background has an uncanny resemblance to that of Bill Spunski, one of the protagonists in Young's trilogy, which invites some telling comparisons to that earlier ideal of a hockey player. Paul Quarrington's 1987 novel *King Leary*, the focus of Chapter 7, also subjects the hockey myth to critical treatment, but this time in a comic mode. Quarrington's novel tells the story of Percival "King" Leary, who starts out as a little Irish Canadian boy in early Ottawa and ends up as The King of the Ice (at least in his own mind). Rather than deliver the benefits that it seems to promise, however, Leary's quest to be the greatest player of all

time comes at a huge cost to his family, friends, and ultimately, himself.

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on two of the most celebrated works from the beginning of the hockey writing boom of the 1990s. Wayne Johnson's novel *The Divine Ryans*, the focus of chapter 9, appeared in 1990 and offers another take on the relationship between hockey and myth. Allusions to Homer's *Aeneid* in *The Divine Ryans* contribute to a series of jokey but serious comparisons between the hero of classical mythology and the hockey hero. Ultimately, hockey provides a gateway through which the novel's protagonist, nine-year-old Draper Doyle, makes a hero's descent into the underworld of his own unconscious to discover the terrible secret of his father's death. Richard Harrison's *Hero of the Play* is a 1994 collection of poems that plays with the idea of a hockey hero, sometimes championing mythic notions of the hero and sometimes criticizing or undermining these notions. The collection pays special attention to Bobby Hull, whose real-life troubles challenge his mythic identity as The Golden Jet.

The portrayals of hockey in *Hero of the Play* and *The Divine Ryans* reveal connections between the imaginative dimensions of the game, myth, and religion. These connections are further developed in Bill Gaston's 2000 novel *The Good Body*, the focus of Chapter 10, but with a twist: the religious aspects emerge from a set of associations between hockey and Buddhism.

The last three chapters focus on texts with strongly critical responses to the hockey myth. Cara Hedley's 2007 novel, *Twenty Miles*, the focus of Chapter 11, tells the story of a female player confronted by the gender stereotypes of hockey. Hedley's protagonist, Isabel "Iz" Norris, struggles with her motivations for playing hockey: she has played all her life in the shadow of her late father, a Junior hockey star, whose influence represents a patriarchal inheritance for her that is both personal and mythic. In the end, Iz has to find another motivation if she is to continue playing hockey.

Chapter 12 examines Randall Maggs' 2008 collection of poetry, *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems*. In *Night Work*, Maggs uses a version

of the documentary poem to explore the life of perhaps the greatest goaltender of all time, Terry Sawchuk. Sawchuk's tragic death raises a perennial question: does greatness at hockey always involve a Faustian bargain? Maggs's remarkably thoughtful and compassionate portrait explores this question without settling on an easy answer.

Finally, Chapter 13 deals with Richard Wagamese's acclaimed 2012 novel, *Indian Horse*. *Indian Horse* tells the story of an Ojibwe boy, Saul Indian Horse, who suffers great horrors at a residential school and yet appears to find solace there—and perhaps even salvation—in hockey. *Indian Horse* turns a key tenet of the hockey myth on its head. The hockey myth claims that success at hockey can be a shortcut to becoming Canadian because hockey offers an imaginative connection to the northern land that defines the nation. But what happens to this Canadianizing effect when the game is played by an Indigenous person—someone with a prior claim to the land? The answer the novel offers to this question is richly nuanced—and even, perhaps, surprising. Suffice it to say that the imaginative dimensions of hockey play a key part. These imaginative dimensions become associated not only with Saul's personal journey of healing, but with a larger process of reimagining the Canadian nation.

Two last thoughts before I turn to the literature.

The first is about my focus on literary texts. This may seem like a limited approach in a study purporting to examine the relationship between hockey and imagination. As my opening anecdote illustrates, imaginative responses to hockey are by no means restricted to the reading and writing of literary texts. Yet there is a logic to my approach that goes beyond the self-serving one of giving myself an excuse to write about some wonderful stories, novels, and poems (though this is also true). As it turns out, a recurring feature of Canadian hockey literature is that the texts themselves tend to focus on the imaginative dimensions of the game; that is, they are more about the meanings invested in hockey, and the fantasies people engage in by playing or watching it, than they are about goals and assists and penalty minutes. Just as importantly, to explore these texts properly

requires an interdisciplinary approach. To understand the intersections of hockey and imagination in the texts, I've had to draw on not just my knowledge of literary history and methods, but what I've been able to find out about such broader topics as the role of imagination in humans, the significance of play, the evolution of sport in Canada and elsewhere, the history of Canada, and, of course, the history and social significance of hockey itself. I hope my readings of the texts, then, will cast light beyond the usual boundaries of the literary.

The second is about my boyhood fantasies of hockey on the moon. My fantasies, I think, resonate with various elements in the literature I explore in the chapters ahead. It is not my intention to dwell much on these resonances; I'd like the focus of the analysis to remain on the texts. Let me offer just one big takeaway at this point, which is to say that the leap I made to fantasies of outer space hints at how vital, but also unpredictable, the imagination can be. There is something at once exciting and humbling about studying literary texts, since those texts—like all works of the imagination—inevitably exceed our attempts to understand them. John Fowles once wrote that the goal of literature is “to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is,” and that since the world itself is unpredictable—“an organism, not a machine”—a successful literary work always exceeds the plans of its creator. A fully planned-out world, Fowles writes, is “a dead world,” and it is only “when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live” (Fowles 1969, 96).

Something similar, I believe, exists in sports—including hockey. Despite all the emphasis on tradition in hockey, and the persistence of the hockey myth in Canada, there is something within the game that “disobeys” attempts to project specific meanings upon it. There is something within hockey that allows for, even gives energy to, new meanings. By the end of this study, I hope to have illustrated something of how this inner vitality works, along with the new meanings it gives energy to in Canada today.

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1

Stompin' Tom Versus Big Al Two Imaginative Versions of the Game

Oh the good old hockey game
It's the best game you could name
And the best game you could name
Is the good old hockey game.

—Stompin' Tom Connors, “The Hockey Song”

And how do they feel about it
this combination of ballet and murder?

—Al Purdy, “Hockey Players”

Imaginative responses to hockey can be usefully categorized as either more conservative or more critical. By “conservative” I want to invoke both meanings of the word: conservative responses seek to conserve aspects of the game that are understood to be of value, in order to extend or intensify those aspects; and the aspects themselves are defined conservatively—that is to say, by reference to established cultural norms, to tradition, or to what critics have come to define as the “hockey myth.” Critical responses are concerned with the limitations of conservative responses; they interrogate ideas about

hockey rooted in established cultural norms, tradition, or the hockey myth. Sometimes critical responses are negative or judgmental, in keeping with the popular meaning of “critical.” More often, they are critical in the manner of the best literary criticism, which works not so much by judging as by asking questions like “how does this work?” and “what further implications does it imply?” and “what does it leave out?” Out of this questioning emerge new possibilities of meaning, but the emergence is tentative, rooted as much in feeling and lived experience as in reason—in keeping with the nature of literature itself.

Another way to think of the conservative/critical distinction is as an expression of two impulses at the heart of human imagination. The American critic J. Hillis Miller suggests that the persistence of stories (and, by extension, other imaginative activities) can be explained by their ability to both reveal and create reality. To say that stories reveal reality is to presuppose “that the world has one kind or another of pre-existing order and that the business of fictions is in one way or another to imitate, copy or represent accurately that order,” whereas to say that stories create reality is to say that fiction can help to bring new ways of acting and knowing into being. Fiction can create reality because stories offer “a relatively safe or innocuous place in which the reigning assumptions of a given culture can be criticized” (Miller 1990, 69).

Although my conservative/critical distinction doesn’t map exactly upon Miller’s reveal/create distinction, there are strong affinities between the two. Like stories that try to reveal the way things are, conservative imaginative responses to hockey are about trying to imitate, copy or represent the pre-existing order of the game. Such responses represent received tradition (the “pre-existing order”) and work to conserve and reinforce that tradition. By contrast, like stories that try to create reality, critical imaginative responses question reigning assumptions about the game; they seek to expose the limitations of the “pre-existing order” and try to imagine new possibilities.

The concept of the hockey myth is important for a cultural study of the game. Before I talk about the hockey myth specifically, let me say a few things about “myth.” “Myth” is an unusually tricky term. It is widely used today in a pejorative sense, as in the phrase “that’s a myth” to indicate a claim that is objectively false or lacking in proof. The pejorative sense reflects competition between belief systems. An adherent of one religious system might denigrate another system, for example, by calling it a “myth,” thereby implying that the adherent’s own system is true. There is also a competition in Western culture between claims for which there is scientific proof and claims for which there is not. As part of this competition, non-scientific claims (like the myriad conspiracy theories that circulate today) are sometimes derided as “myths.”

What’s tricky is that “myth” also refers to ancient stories, often featuring supernatural beings and events, that seem to capture deep, transhistorical truths about ourselves and our world. As Gabor Maté puts it, for eons myth of this kind has been “a fount of knowledge, a portal to spirit, and one of the fundamentals of any healthy culture” (Maté 2022, 478). This kind of myth, for Maté, is “a collective expression of one of the most uniquely human qualities: imagination,” which “allows us to see beyond appearances and tap into core insights into what wholeness and wellness mean” (478–79). As Maté’s words imply, there are strong parallels between mythic thinking and religion. Karen Armstrong, in her excellent *A Short History of Myth*, explores this parallel in detail. According to Armstrong, ancient myths and religion are both rooted in the human need to come to terms with mortality by imagining a reality beyond everyday experience. “From the very beginning,” she writes, “we invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting, that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value” (2006, 2).

Complicating the matter further is the development of modern myths. Roland Barthes, in his classic study *Mythologies*, examines

how cultural phenomena as disparate as French wine, wrestling, and striptease, are imbued with mythic meaning. Two characteristics define this meaning. One has to do with how it involves a process of simplification that, in the manner of ancient myths, aims to reflect something essential or transhistorical about its subject. The other has to do with how the meaning is presented as natural and inevitable (a matter of “common sense,” self-evident, innocent, rooted in nature or “the way things are”). Modern myths represent human society as determined by a fixed set of relations that cannot be changed. Myth, according to Barthes, “transforms history into nature” (1972, 129).

The hockey myth in Canada, as it has come to be understood by various scholars, is a modern myth in the sense defined by Barthes, although some of its elements echo patterns found in classical myths (especially myths about heroes). The idea of the myth was first popularized by Richard Gruneau and David Whitson in their groundbreaking *Hockey Night in Canada*. For Gruneau and Whitson, the hockey myth indicates the set of “deeply rooted themes in Canadian popular culture” that stand at the intersection of “hockey careers, Canadian identity, and dreams” (1993, 131–32). In their introduction to *Artificial Ice*, they elaborate on these themes as follows:

Hockey is our [Canada’s] game; it expresses something distinctive about how we Canadians have come to terms with our unique northern environment and landscape; it is a graphic expression of “who we are”; the game’s rough masculinity is a testament to the distinctive passion and strength of the Canadian character; we are better at it than anyone else in the world; and the National Hockey League is the pinnacle of the game—as well as a prominent Canadian institution. (2006, 4, original italic removed)

Less important than the specific themes Whitson and Gruneau list here (different people will give slightly different takes on the specifics of the myth) is the idea of a group of beliefs about hockey that coalesced around the game in its early history and have become so

deeply associated with Canadian identity and geography that they seem natural. The association of hockey with Canada's northern geography underpins the idea that hockey embodies something essential about being Canadian. The hockey myth defines Canadian identity as embodied in the characteristics of hockey itself, in the kinds of people who play it or love it, and in the rural or small-town locales in which it has been traditionally played. The myth, as Gruneau and Whitson point out, speaks "a conservative language;" it contains elements that are "static and intransitive," and, in the manner of the modern myths analysed by Roland Barthes, it represents these elements not as products of the social world but as "natural" and "without a history" (1993, 132).

Before I turn to my analysis, let me offer a few last thoughts about my "conservative/critical" distinction. I'd like to stress at the outset that neither way of responding imaginatively to hockey—the more conservative or the more critical—is categorically better than the other. The more recent texts in this study tend to be critical of the hockey myth, and, since conservative responses tend to reproduce elements of the hockey myth in an uncritical way, it may seem that the overall trajectory of my analysis implies a rejection of conservative responses. In fact, conservative responses persist because they reflect human needs projected onto and received back from the game. The fantasy of becoming a National Hockey League (NHL) star is a good example. Why is the grip of this fantasy so strong? Quite simply, because it seems to answer some key questions of life for certain boys. How to make a name for yourself? To find love? To earn money? To become a man? To be a rich and famous hockey player, the fantasy suggests, answers all these questions. Even when you know the fantasy is only a fantasy, as I did when I was a boy, there remains an imaginary compensation to indulging in it. Like reading a novel in which we fantasize about being a hero we could never be in real life, indulging in the hockey fantasy can be an escape from life's limits. Perhaps elements from the fantasy may also inspire action in real life.

Another complication is that the distinction between what is critical and what is conservative is not always clear. What are the traditional elements of hockey and who gets to decide? There are also differences in time: what might seem like a critical response to one generation can seem like a conservative response to a later generation. A good example is Scott Young's (1952) portrayal of mixed ethnicities in *Scrubs on Skates*. This portrayal challenges the reigning assumption of whiteness in hockey—and in Canada—in the 1950s, and so it seems to be a critical response. But the portrayal itself now seems outdated for the way it reproduces ethnic stereotypes, and so it seems conservative. And, in a final complication, the relationship between the two tendencies is neither entirely complementary nor antagonistic: though there is always a degree of conflict between the two, they are also interdependent in important ways.

So—as always with terminology—it is important to be cautious. Still, I believe that the conservative/critical distinction helps to illuminate some significant patterns in imaginative responses to hockey.

For the rest of this chapter, I'd like to illustrate some features of conservative and critical responses by looking at two of the most famous imaginative responses to hockey: Stompin' Tom Connors's "The Hockey Song" and Al Purdy's "Hockey Players." "The Hockey Song" is a good example of a conservative imaginative response, whereas "Hockey Players," despite the fact that it was the first to be published, offers a revealing critical response to the view of hockey evoked by Connors's song.

Stompin' Tom and the Innocent Game

"The Hockey Song" originally appeared on Stompin' Tom Connors's 1973 album *Stompin' Tom and the Hockey Song*. It has been a staple of Canadian popular culture ever since. As Sandra Martin puts it in her 2013 *Globe and Mail* obituary of Connors, "The Hockey Song"

connected with “the quintessential Canadian audience: hockey fans” to the point where the song “became an unofficial anthem for the Ottawa Senators and, later, the Toronto Maple Leafs” (2013, 3). So iconic has “The Hockey Song” become that it is the first text in Michael Kennedy’s widely used anthology of hockey poetry, *Going Top Shelf* (from which I cite in what follows), just as it is often the lead text in university courses on hockey literature. Not everyone loves the song, of course. John MacFarlane, in his “Editor’s Note” for the special issue of *The Walrus* devoted to hockey, refers to it as “Stompin’ Tom Connors’ moronic musical paean to the sport” (MacFarlane 2010, 15). Yet the elements that make “The Hockey Song” seem moronic to MacFarlane—the simple lyrics and old-style country music—are at the root of the song’s popularity. And this popularity, in turn, illustrates the persistence of conservative imaginative responses to the game.

“The Hockey Song” seems to define something like the timeless essence of hockey. That this is the aim of the song is hinted at by the title. There is something humble about Connors’s title; this is just “The Hockey Song,” it implies, not some fancy composition worthy of a metaphoric or more literary title. Yet the definite article also carries a suggestion of “the one and only.” This is “*The Hockey Song*” not just “A Hockey Song.” Despite having a certain aw-shucks quality to it, then, the title implies that this is the definitive song about hockey—the song that encapsulates what is most valuable and worth conserving about the game.

The body of “The Hockey Song” is divided into three verses, each of which enacts one period of a hockey game. The first verse conveys the excitement of the game’s beginning, leading up to a goal scored by “Bobby.” The second describes how the home team falls behind but fights back to tie the score 1–1. The third focuses on the third period and is also described, in the spoken introduction on the recording, as “the last game of the playoffs.” In the final verse the home team scores and wins the Stanley Cup. Between the three verses there is the chorus, which I quote as the first epigraph to this chapter.

The story told by “The Hockey Song” is the one found over and over again in popular representations of sport. The three verses replicate what is typically found on highlight reels, what Iz, the protagonist of Cara Hedley’s *Twenty Miles*, calls the “Coles Notes” of a hockey game (Hedley 2007, 146). The climax in the third verse is typical of sport films and literature in North America, in which the hero makes a deciding play—the ninth inning home run (or strike out), the last second touchdown (or interception), and, of course, the over-time goal. Michael Oriard argues that this plot pattern was established by the vast juvenile sports literature in the United States of the early twentieth century: “Every juvenile sports novel concludes with a big game (traditional rivalry or championship game) or its equivalent in which the hero achieves his greatest triumph. Generally this big game is further reduced to an heroic moment. . . . The hero’s triumph makes him the premier citizen of his community—praised, admired, and immortalized” (1982, 35).

The narrative pattern in which a final sport triumph crowns a hero reflects popular ideas about sport itself. For this reason, there is often a mutually reinforcing relationship between sports literature and the heroes created by sport: “Sport exists, in a sense, to create heroes, and sports fiction can be viewed from one perspective as a genre that defines exactly who the representative . . . hero is” (Oriard 1982, 25).

“The Hockey Song” deviates from the pattern described by Oriard by not having an individual hero who is celebrated for scoring the winning goal. This is in keeping with the song’s emphasis on hockey as a ritual of communal identity. The connection between cheering for a home team and feelings of local pride, identity, and belonging can be seen in fan culture across sports. In Canada, hockey has often been celebrated as a way of building community in the face of the specific challenges of Canadian geography and climate. Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor (1989) make this explicit in their aptly titled *Home Game: Hockey and Life and Canada*, which opens with an account of hardy Saskatchewan residents braving deadly cold to get to the relative shelter of a local arena for a Junior hockey game. In

the context of the overwhelming immensity of the land, MacGregor and Dryden argue, the emotional bond between people has to come from communal rituals, and one of the most important of these is hockey: “Hockey helps us express what we feel about Canada, and ourselves. It is a giant point of contact, in a place, in a time, where we need every one we have—East and West, French and English, young and old, past and present. The winter, the land, the sound of children’s voices, a frozen river, a game—all are part of our collective imaginations. Hockey makes Canada feel more Canadian” (19).

Although the word “Canada” does not occur in “The Hockey Song,” the Canadian identity of the community described is implied. The opening words of the song—“Hello out there”—echo Foster Hewitt’s iconic opening from the original radio broadcasts of *Hockey Night in Canada*: “Hello Canada and hockey fans in the United States and Newfoundland” (Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.-a). The fact that Tom Connors was a well-known Canadian folksinger implies a Canadian context, as does the cover of the album from which the song comes, which shows a hockey game between players with uniforms recognizable, despite the whited-out logos, as those of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Montreal Canadiens. The goalie on the album cover is identifiable by his mask as Ken Dryden.

One of the fascinating things about “The Hockey Song” is the way it evokes a small town atmosphere even as the game it describes is clearly at the professional level (the game is broadcast and the prize is the Stanley Cup). A number of aspects of the song contribute to this effect. The familiarity of the references to “Bobby” and the “home team” have a part to play, as does the homey country music to which the song is set. The aura of innocence about the game portrayed also contributes: this is a professional game with no mention of money and in which the only violence is when the players “bump.” Also significant is the song’s use of the colloquial “ole” in the chorus, which evokes nostalgia, tradition, and folksy authenticity all at once—values that are traditionally associated with small towns. “The Hockey Game” champions “the good ole hockey game” in much the

same way as “The Grand Ole Opry” promotes a small town and rural version of the United States.

A sport song that performs a similar imaginative sleight of hand—describing a professional game but evoking a small town atmosphere—is “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” the 1908 Tin Pan Alley song by Jack Norworth and Albert Von Tilzer, which is the unofficial anthem of North American baseball. “The Hockey Song,” in fact, echoes “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” in key places. Though they are rarely sung, the verses of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” tell of a baseball mad young woman named Katie Casey who insists that her beau take her to a game instead of the movies so that she can root for her “home town crew” and “cheer up the boys she knew” (Norworth and Von Tilzer 1908). At the end of the second verse, the score is tied, and Katie makes the crowd sing the chorus of the song to cheer the home team to victory—a storyline reminiscent of “The Hockey Song.” There are two other important parallels between the songs. The opening of the third verse of “The Hockey Song,” “Oh take me where the hockey players,” is an echo of the chorus (and title) of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” and Connors’s “good ole hockey game” directly echoes “the old ball game” of Norworth and Tilzer.

Connors likely knew “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” when he wrote “The Hockey Song.” Whether he did or not, however, is less important than how the echoes reinforce the conservative version of the game: the action distilled to highlights; an ending that makes a hero; cheering for the home team as a ritual of communal identity; identity defined in small town terms; and an innocent aura about the game itself, perhaps best captured by how, despite the big league surroundings, the players are characterized as boys (the diminutive “Bobby” in “The Hockey Song” is a more subtle way of evoking the “boys” of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”). In this way, “The Hockey Song” hints at a spiritual affinity between the game in the song and the game played by apple-cheeked boys on frozen ponds, in much the same fashion that “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” implies a spiritual

connection between professional baseball and the game played by similarly apple-cheeked boys on small town sandlots.

There is one last point to be made about the conservative version of hockey evoked by “The Hockey Song.” What is most valuable about the game is evoked in quasi-religious terms. The ritual quality of the song, with its formal regularity and implied communal performance (it is very much a “singalong song”), is reminiscent of religious liturgy. Religious feeling becomes most explicit in the chorus, with its claim about hockey as “the best game you could name,” which not only has a highly ritual-like form but insists on an act of faith to be believed. Note that the logic of the chorus is circular. Why is hockey “the best game you could name”? Because the best game you could name “is the good ole hockey game.” Combined with the aggressive tribalism implied by this circularity (“our game is the best because it is!”) there is something in it of the “either you get it or you don’t” of religious faith. Michael Novak stresses this aspect when he writes about the parallels between sports and religion: “Why do I love sports? How can I explain it to myself, let alone to others, especially to those who are skeptical unbelievers? . . . You either see or you don’t see what the excitement is” (1988, xi).

Big Al and the Kid Who Couldn’t Skate

The aura of innocence about “The Hockey Song” is an effect not only of what is in the song but of what isn’t. Not only does the song imply a spiritual affinity with apple-cheeked children playing on a frozen pond, but it is silent about the harsher realities of the game. This is characteristic of conservative—or mythic—imaginative responses. Such responses, remember, tend to portray the virtues of the game as if they exist outside of history. One way to think of critical responses is that they aim to expose the historical conditions excluded from conservative responses. A good example of such a response is Al Purdy’s “Hockey Players.”

“Hockey Players” appeared originally in 1965 in *The Cariboo Horses*, Purdy’s first great collection, at a time when the country was nearing the heights of nationalistic fervour brought on by the flag debate and the approach of the 1967 Centennial. The poem has been often anthologized and reprinted since its original publication, probably because of how it reinforces the narrative of Purdy as the quintessentially Canadian poet—Canada’s Whitman, as it were—and because it stood virtually alone, for a number of years, as a serious poetic treatment of Canada’s national game. You could say that in a certain fashion “Hockey Players” is the text that begins “hockey literature” in Canada (though there are a few earlier texts that deal, in part, with hockey, as the next chapters will show). Even as it operates as a founding text for hockey literature, however, the poem sets in motion an intense questioning of what hockey represents.

“Hockey Players,” like “The Hockey Song,” describes a hockey game from the point of view of someone watching. Unlike “The Hockey Song,” however, “Hockey Players” does not contain a story arc in which the home team triumphs at the end. Instead, the persona describes fragments of play interspersed with observations about what is made invisible by the bright spectacle on the ice. The historical conditions exposed by the persona’s observations undermine various aspects of the mythic version of the game and lead to an anti-heroic conclusion.

The undermining of the mythic version of hockey begins in the opening lines, which, despite the poem’s title, do not evoke dominant tropes about hockey players. Instead, these lines offer a description of what the players fear:

What they worry about most is injuries
 broken arms and legs and
fractured skulls opening so doctors
can see such bloody beautiful things almost
not quite happening in the bone rooms
 as they happen outside

(Purdy 1996, 23)

To open a poem about hockey by describing the fears of the players is a subversive gesture: hockey players are not traditionally defined by fear. That the greatest worry of the players is said to be injuries is even more subversive. Injuries are, as the cliché goes, part of the game, and hockey culture tends to celebrate the battle scars acquired by players while playing. One of the enduring images of hockey players is that of the happy warrior, the smiling gap-toothed competitor captured in photographs of Bobby Clark from the 1970s or Alex Ovechkin or Brent Burns today.

“Hockey Players” suggests that there is a darker aspect to the happy warrior image. This darker aspect has to do, in the first instance, with the physical risk involved in hockey’s violent nature. The opening lines leave open whether the injuries feared are a product of regular physical contact or one of the periodic outbreaks of extreme violence that have plagued hockey from its beginnings. It could be either. The lines about “fractured skulls opening so doctors / can see such bloody beautiful things” would have resonated strongly with readers in 1965 who remembered the near fatal injury of Gordie Howe in 1950 and the stick-swinging prelude to the Richard Riot in 1955. The lines, unfortunately, were also prescient: less than three years later, Bill Masterton became the only NHL player to die of injuries suffered in a game. The Hockey Hall of Fame website has this account of what happened:

Masterton toiled patiently in the minors for six years, mostly in the USHL before getting a shot at the NHL when the league expanded to 12 teams for the 1967–68 campaign. . . . But, after just 38 games in the league, tragedy struck. During a North Stars’ game against another expansion team, the California Seals, on January 13, 1968, Masterton fell awkwardly to the ice, hitting his head. He died two days later of massive head injuries. (Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.-b)

The phrase “bloody beautiful” is particularly important for the poem’s portrayal of hockey. It anticipates the more famous line quoted as

the second epigraph to this chapter. Throughout “Hockey Players” there is a back-and-forth account of the contradictory quality of this game that is at once so beautiful and so bloody—a combination of “ballet and murder” (25).

The bloody side of hockey raises an important question for players (and, to an extent, fans). Are the rewards of the game worth the physical risks? Purdy—through his persona—seems genuinely uncertain about this. At times “Hockey Players” seems cynical about the rewards of the game. What really motivates the professional game, the poem implies, is money; and if you are a player “stretched on the rubbing table,” you are probably “thinking of money in owners’ pockets that might be yours” (25). Later, the poem undercuts the mythic version of hockey’s emphasis on victory with a heavily ironic mention of money:

sing the song of winning all together
sing the song of money all together.

(25)

Other traditional rewards are also treated ironically. The idea that success at hockey might make a man of you is mocked by a clever twist on the often-asserted link between the professional game and childhood. Instead of channeling a spiritual connection to the old corner rink, the poem suggests, professional players have simply failed to grow up; they are “Boys playing a boy’s game in a permanent childhood” (25). Fans suffer from arrested development as well, since the game is played for “passionate stockbrokers / children wearing business suits” (24). A logical consequence of this undercutting of the manhood associated with hockey is that becoming a hero through the game becomes a “self-indulgence”:

the butt-slapping camaraderie and the self-indulgence
of allowing yourself to be a hero and knowing
everything ends in a pot-belly.

(25)

The phrase “allowing yourself to be a hero” implies something phoney about the label, as if “hero” is imposed from without, a projection upon the player from fans or the league marketing apparatus. The truth, these lines imply, is that hockey is a way to avoid the reality of aging. What’s more, the players do their avoiding despite knowing full well that it is self-indulgent.

Yet “Hockey Players” does not only criticize the traditional attractions of the game. What is tricky about the poem—and what makes it so rich to study—is that, although the persona is very critical at times, there are moments in which he is genuinely moved. For example, he describes himself to be in a group “up there in the blues / bored and sleepy” until “three men / break down the ice in roaring feverish speed,” which causes the group to “stand up in our seats with such a rapid pouring / of delight exploding out of self” (24). It’s as if the spectacle on the ice is so captivating that the persona is compelled to delight. This other side of the persona—the skeptical observer transformed, seemingly against his better judgment, into a fan—adds a fascinating countercurrent to the poem’s questioning of the mythic version of the game. Take these very important lines:

On a breakaway
the centreman carrying the puck
his wings trailing a little
 on both sides why
I’ve seen the aching glory of a resurrection
 in their eyes
 if they score
but crucifixion’s agony to lose
—the game?

(24)

Read from the point of view of the persona’s skepticism, this passage seems to mock the mythic elevation of hockey into a religion

and to ridicule the players for caring so much about what is, after all, only a game. In this case, the question mark at the end of the passage lands with a heavy irony. Yet the question mark could be read quite differently. From the point of view of the persona as a fan, it could express a genuine sense of questioning or, even, wonder. “Why do players and fans have such extreme reactions to the game?” it might ask. “What powerful—even spiritual—forces are contained in hockey that it could do such a thing?” Given that the persona is himself a fan and is shown elsewhere in the poem to have his own extreme reactions, there is also a hint in the question mark of him trying to make sense of something within himself.

That the persona of “Hockey Players” is both a skeptic and a fan complicates the passage in the poem that treats the hockey myth most explicitly. This occurs about halfway through, just after the persona describes himself and other fans standing to follow the feverish rush. What follows next is surreal: the rushing players skate “thru the smoky end boards out / of sight” and into the Canadian landscape, where they continue to play against a series of rugged northern backdrops—“the appalachian highlands,” “laurentian barrens,” and “treeless tundra”—until the vision collapses (24). At the point of collapse, the focus shifts back to the persona and the other fans:

we have to
laugh because we must and
stop to look at self and one another but
our opponent’s never geography
or distant why
it’s men
—just men?

(24–5)

The question mark at the end of this passage lands with the same ambiguity as in “—the game?” From the skeptical point of view, the

mark signals ironic deflation, a debunking of the hockey myth's claims about connection to the northern landscape and the larger-than-life heroes of the game who set the standard for Canadian identity. These are not god-like figures striding across the landscape, the mark says, they are just men. Yet the mythic version of the game is not unambiguously discredited. The question mark—reinforced by the parallel use in the earlier “—the game?”—hints again at genuine questioning, as in: How is it that mere men can assume such stature? It is also important that any deflation takes place only after an extended passage in which the myth is acted out, and only after the persona and other fans (and readers of the poem) are swept up by it. The debunking, then, is accompanied by a display of the lasting allure of the myth.

“Hockey Players” does give the last word to criticism of the hockey myth. After “sing the song of money all together” (25) are these final lines:

(and out in the suburbs
there's the six-year-old kid
whose reflexes were all wrong
who always fell down and hurt himself and cried
and never learned to skate
with his friends)

(26)

This is a pretty heavy-handed ending—especially for a poem whose persona turns out to be both a skeptic and a fan. Perhaps, after treating various other aspects of the hockey myth ironically, Purdy felt a need to mar the game's most sacred shrine: the corner rink. Despite the claims of the hockey myth, the ending implies, not everyone can or will want to play hockey, not everyone will “see what the excitement is”—and if hockey is such an important part of what unifies you as a community, what then?

The Game?

The ambiguous position of the persona in “Hockey Players”—skeptical of what he is seeing but swept up in the spectacle nevertheless—anticipates the position assumed by many of the literary texts about hockey that appear after Purdy. So often these texts present a complicated mix of homage to the traditional elements of the game and critical interrogation of these elements. This is probably, in part, because the writers of the texts tend to have backgrounds like my own: they began life as lovers and players of the game and, as writers in later life, tend to be both skeptics (as writers are wont to be) and fans. The mix also hints at the interconnectedness of the two tendencies in imaginative responses to the game. For contemporary writers, the way conservative responses reflect the hockey myth—with its tendency to be static and ahistorical—calls out for critical interrogation. To interrogate conservative responses properly, however, requires an appreciation for their persistent attraction. It is not enough to simply dismiss “The Hockey Song” as a “moronic musical paean;” you have to recognize that the song is popular because it speaks to deeply rooted desires in people projected onto and reflected back by the game.

What is ultimately implied by the conservative/critical distinction, then, is a conversation. Like the question marks in Purdy’s poem, the distinction suggests the complicated co-existence of different responses to the game—responses that are antagonistic to one another but also, in important ways, intertwined. Before we can examine the intertwining of conservative and critical responses, however, we need to examine the origins and defining features of the hockey myth in more detail. This will be the focus of the next four chapters.

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The Fighting Soul of Hockey in Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*

“Can’t understand a man,” said the master, “who goes into a game and then quits it to fight. If it’s fighting, why fight, but if it’s shinny, play the game.”

—Ralph Connor, *Glengarry School Days*

There have been many debates about the origins of hockey, some more friendly than others. What can be safely said, I think, is that hockey evolved from various stick and ball games played by Indigenous people and European immigrants in North America. Early organized hockey appeared in Montreal and Halifax in the 1870s. Most historians make special note of the first indoor game organized by James Creighton on March 3, 1875, in Montreal, for the way it set in motion a refinement of rules to fit the more confined space of a rink and for how it emphasized the possibilities of hockey as a spectator sport. According to Michael McKinley, in his aptly titled *Putting a Roof on Winter: Hockey’s Rise from Sport to Spectacle*, what Creighton’s indoor game suggested was that hockey’s guiding maxim should be “If you move it inside, it will become” (2000, 11).

Hockey’s popularity grew rapidly in the 1880s. Soon it had become, as Colin Howell describes it, “Canada’s winter sport of choice” (2001, 44). The Ontario Hockey Association was formed in 1890 and by the

mid-1890s “most of the larger towns in Canada had developed intra-town and inter-city leagues” (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 45). By the time Lord Stanley donated his now famous challenge cup in 1892, there were already a number of other trophies up for grabs in various hockey leagues and tournaments (McKinley 2000, 24).

From the point of view of hockey and imagination, what is most fascinating about these years is the way certain meanings became attached to the game. Hockey evolved at a time when older sporting traditions associated with public spectacles, gambling, and violence (as in blood sports like cockfighting and dogfighting) were being regulated or banned in Western societies and replaced by what were thought to be more socially useful activities. In *Hockey Night in Canada*, Gruneau and Whitson describe the social environment like this:

[By] the end of the nineteenth century the spirit of regulation was . . . being driven by . . . the perceived threats, uncertainties, and dislocations of a society developing a modern urban and industrial culture: social unrest, psychic disorders, disease, vice, and cultural decline. In this context the regulation of leisure and popular culture became heavily influenced by an evangelistic spirit of moral entrepreneurship. (1993, 42)

With this in mind, Creighton’s introduction of the “Montreal Rules” in 1875 can be understood as part of a struggle to define hockey that was not just about rules of play but also about meanings attached to the game. As McKinley puts it: “Creighton took a wild outdoor game played by immigrants and aboriginals and elevated it to one played by gentlemen indoors, which gave it order, respectability, and a social structure” (2000, 19). It might be fairer to say that Creighton *tried* to elevate the game in this way, because much of hockey history after Creighton has to do with whether hockey *could* be given order and respectability—or even if this would be a good thing.

Hockey also came onto the scene at a time of particularly intense concern about Canadian identity. Attempts to define a distinctive

Canadian identity often took the form of comparisons between Canada, England, and the United States. Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* (1835), with its stories of the wily Yankee, Sam Slick of Slicksville, who exposes the follies of the English settlers of Halifax even as he damns himself with displays of American venality and vulgarity, is a good example. A popular way of distinguishing Canada from either England or the United States was by its northern location. According to historian Carl Berger, assertions linking the northern climate of Canada to the characteristics of the nation date back to the time of the French explorers, but these claims were particularly influential as part of an attempt to distinguish the identity of the new nation in the half-century after Confederation (1997). Basically, the argument was that Canada's northern climate helped to shape a national character that included physical hardiness, self-reliance, and personal virtue. Berger cites Robert Grant Haliburton of the Canada First Movement as making the first fully shaped claim about Canada's destiny as a northern nation. Here is Haliburton speaking to the Montreal Literary Club in 1869: "Our corn fields, rich though they are, cannot compare with the fertile prairies of the [American] West, and our long winters are a drain on the profits of business, but may not our snow and frost give us what is of more value than gold and silver, a healthy, hardy, virtuous, dominant race?" (Haliburton, quoted in Berger 1997, 86). Hockey, as it swept the nation in the 1870s and 1880s, must have seemed ready-made to support this kind of thinking.

Although there are no full literary novels devoted to hockey until Roy MacGregor's groundbreaking *The Last Season* in 1983, hockey appears in bits and pieces in various earlier texts. For the rest of this chapter, I'd like to discuss the novel with the earliest extended description of a hockey game in Canadian literature, Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days* (1902). The last third of this novel illustrates how hockey was embedded into Canadian life by the early twentieth century, thus revealing much about the formation of the hockey myth.

The Fighting Soul

Ralph Connor was the best-selling Canadian author of his time, beginning with his first novel, *Black Rock*, in 1898, and he remained one of Canada's most well-known writers at the time of his death in 1937. "Ralph Connor" was the pseudonym of Rev. Dr. Charles William Gordon, a Presbyterian and United Church minister and eventual moderator of the Presbyterian Church, who served as Chaplain to the Canadian 3rd Division in France during the First World War (though he was in his mid-fifties at the time). Connor was also, as Keith Wilson writes in his biography, a keen sportsman throughout his life (1981, 42).

Glengarry School Days is the second Connor novel set in Glengarry County, Ontario, which sits at the far southeastern extreme of Ontario bordered by the St. Lawrence River and Québec. This is an area whose European settlers were primarily of Scottish descent. The first Glengarry novel, *The Man from Glengarry*, came out in 1901 and tells the story of Ranald MacDonald, an orphan from this Scottish-descended community, who overcomes adversity and achieves great success by way of physical prowess, hard work, and moral virtue—guided along the way by the local Presbyterian minister's wife, Mrs. Murray, who becomes his surrogate mother. As Daniel Coleman has pointed out, by the end of *The Man from Glengarry*, the successful Ranald MacDonald has become the model for "the bold new Canada" that Connor hopes to see emerge (2006, 122).

Glengarry School Days takes as its protagonist Hughie Murray, the son of Mrs. Murray, who is introduced as a minor character in the earlier novel. Like its novelistic namesake, *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), *Glengarry School Days* is a coming-of-age tale featuring a boy's boy. Hughie is energetic and athletic, and, although a decent student, not at all a future intellectual. He has a gift for reading and spelling—the competition of a spelling bee appeals to "his little fighting soul"—but he prefers physical challenges: "If he could only run, and

climb, and swim, and dive, like the big boys, then he would indeed feel uplifted” (Connor 1902, 17).

Hughie, like Tom, has a series of experiences that help to shape his natural boyishness into what the novel defines as an ideal man. His first teacher, Archibald Munro, models industry, “self-mastery,” and a refusal to complain: “Archibald Munro had a steady purpose in life—to play the man, and to allow no pain of his . . . to spoil his work” (25). On examination day, the children dress up, but the boys are careful not to be “proud” of their appearances, since any boy convicted of “shoween off” was “condemned by his fellows” (48). At the end of his time with Hughie and his classmates, Munro summarizes what he has sought to impart as a teacher. “It is a good thing to have your minds trained . . .,” he explains, “but there are better things than that. To learn honor, truth, and right; to be manly and womanly; to be self-controlled and brave and gentle—these are better than all possible stores of learning” (74).

The middle part of the novel is mostly concerned with the rivalry between Hughie and Foxy, a sly, fat, red-haired boy who embodies the “unheroic” spirit of the school when it is turned over to what Hughie contemptuously calls “gurl” teachers (151). Foxy hates the old games and instead “managed to divert the energies of the boys to games less violent and dangerous,” until playtime is centred around a game of “store” with Foxy as storekeeper. Hughie, after resisting at first, is seduced by the promise of getting a real pistol from Foxy and, half from weakness and half from Foxy’s manipulation, ends up stealing fifty cents from his parents to pay for it. Immediately after, he becomes Foxy’s “slave” (173). With his conscience tormenting him, Hughie’s behaviour changes for the worse, and his mother senses something is wrong. She decides to allow him time off school to work on a farm with Thomas Finch, an older boy, and “the kindly, wholesome earth and honest hard work” help to cleanse his soul and “breathe virtue into him” (214). He confesses what he has done to the good Christian parents of Thomas, who send him home to his mother, where he admits to having sinned and vows to “restore

fourfold” (223). Afterwards, he confronts Foxy in front of the other children. Foxy attacks him with his “big fists,” but Hughie, though the smaller of the two, fights back fiercely and wins, and Foxy’s reign comes to an end (277–78).

The Foxy chapters are followed by a standalone chapter in which Hughie, his boyish manhood restored, shoots and kills a bear. Afterwards, he refuses to boast about it: “He had done a man’s deed, and for the first time in his life he felt it unnecessary to glory in his deeds.” In this way, he enters “the borderland of manhood” (252). Hughie’s full crossing into manhood is narrated in the last third of the novel in the form of a challenge hockey match.

Before I turn to the match itself, let me emphasize two points from the novel’s earlier chapters. First, as many critics have already pointed out, the ideal of manhood promoted by *Glengarry School Days* is a muscular Christian one. The allusion in the novel’s title to *Tom Brown’s School Days*—the most famous muscular Christian novel of all time—is not an accident; there may even be a homage to Thomas Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown’s School Days*, in Connor’s choice of “Hughie” as the name of his protagonist. The term “muscular Christianity” was coined by T. C. Sanders in a review of Charles Kingsley’s 1857 novel *Two Years Ago*, in which Sanders asserts that Kingsley’s hero is “a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours—who . . . breathes God’s free air on God’s rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers” (quoted in Hall 1994, 7). Though Sanders intends the description to be mocking, Kingsley’s idea about the interrelationship between a man’s physical and spiritual strength proved enormously popular in Victorian England and later Canada.

From a twenty-first-century point of view, it is easy to criticize the muscular Christian ideal. As Donald Hall has pointed out, the popularity of muscular Christianity came from the perception by many Victorians of “a world growing ever more confusing and fragmented,” in which new “technological advances,” religious doubt, and urbanization threatened the traditional social order (1994, 9). To a

significant extent, muscular Christianity was about trying to shore up a white, middle-class, and heteronormative patriarchal culture, where men were “manly” and women were “womanly,” and people generally acted with “self-restraint” and good manners. Yet it can also be said, as Hall does say, that novels like *Tom Brown’s School Days* represent “both the best and the worst aspects of Victorian society” (1994, 4). Kingsley was a genuine social reformer, a Christian socialist and critic of child labour and the Victorian treatment of the poor (as is shown by his other famous children’s book, *The Water-Babies*, which features a chimney sweep). Hughes, Connor and other writers in the mode held similar views. The idea that the ruthless tendencies of capitalism need to be tempered with a Christian sense of fairness is hard to argue against even today. In the same way, the portraits of teamwork, resilience, and hard-fought success against the odds that are so much a part of *Tom Brown’s School Days* and *Glen-garry School Days* remain inspirational despite certain glaring omissions in the muscular Christian perspective of the books.

The second thing I would stress is that muscular Christianity had a particular appeal in Canada. Daniel Coleman explains it this way: “The figure of the muscular Christian, with his untiring and virile physical body balanced by his spiritually sensitive heart, made a perfect representation of the ideal Canadian who could carry out the hard physical work of territorial expansion, as well as the equally important social work of building a new civil society” (2006, 129). The figure of the muscular Christian fit well into this pattern of Canadian self-definition. The muscular Christian man had the strength and optimism of an American but the piety and morality of an Englishman; he overcame the over-sophistication of the English with his more simple, hardy nature, but avoided the exploitive excesses of American-style capitalism with his commitment to Christian charity. That the muscular Christian was often associated with the hardy Scot, who came from the rugged *northern* region of the British Isles, was a bonus: it fit into the narrative about how a uniquely Canadian character was produced by the cold northern climate of the country.

Glengarry School Days identifies Hughie's nascent muscular Christianity with being Canadian. Although Hughie inherits his good heart from his parents, his physicality and courage come from the Canadian environment in which he has been raised. One of the most telling moments in the novel has to do with the episode in which Hughie craves the pistol. Hughie's father, who is an old school Presbyterian minister, cannot understand why a child of Hughie's age would want such a thing. This is because he doesn't realize "that young Canada was a new type" and "that already Hughie, although only twelve, was an expert with a gun." Hughie, the text goes on to explain, has already spent many a day out in the woods hunting (Connor 1902, 166)—probably pegging a few woodcocks and ministering a few horses along the way. There is a telling irony, though, in the fact that Hughie acquires his pistol from Foxy. If Hughie is a portrait of a young Canadian (or of the young Canadian nation), then Foxy, with his sly ways, crass materialism, and pasty physical appearance, is a stand in for the United States (the hint of Sam Slick in his character is not, I think, accidental). Perhaps there is a subtle warning in the pistol's origin about how the more simple Canadian male, with his healthy manly desires, has to be careful not to be taken advantage of by the unscrupulous capitalists to the south.

A Victory Worth a Leg

The identification of muscular Christianity and Canada is most explicit in the hockey match. This match takes up about the last third of the novel. In the lead up to it, the Twentieth school gets a new master named John Craven (the trustees having seen the error of having "gurl" teachers). Craven seems rather indifferent and lazy at first, until the cold weather comes, the mill-pond freezes, and he puts on a pair of skates. Then his indifference vanishes and "it turned out that he was an enthusiastic skater . . . a whirlwind on ice" (Connor 1902, 272). Before the arrival of Craven, the children had played only

a disorganized game of shinny, which included matches against a team from another school called the Front. Craven now institutes “a more scientific style . . . to make the contest a game on ice, and to limit the number of the team to eleven” (273). The result is that in the first match, Hughie and his mates dominate, despite being the smaller team. Hughie is the star and captain, and he manages to infuse “his own fierce and furious temper” into his teammates (286). Afterwards, the players return home “bearing with them victory and some broken shins, equally proud of both” (287). Tellingly, from the moment the Twentieth boys train seriously as a hockey team, the text refers to them as “men.”

Before the rematch, word comes that the Front has responded to defeat by bringing in a scientific coach of their own and by stacking their team with older boys—fully grown young men—known for rough play. This leads to a debate between Hughie and his mother over whether or not it would be permissible to fight such players. Mrs. Murray says no. “Fighting,” she points out, “is not shinny.” But what about “when a fellow doesn’t play fair,” Hughie asks, “when he trips you up or clubs you on the shins when you’re not near the ball.” “[That’s] the very time to show self-control,” Mrs. Murray replies (300). John Craven reinforces the lesson. He acknowledges that it’s hard to show self-control when another fellow “clubs you,” but self-control is better than “being a cad.” The best revenge against a team that gets to “slugging,” Craven says, is to play on and win (301). Hughie agrees to this logic, but the reluctance he shows hints that there might yet be a time and place for fighting.

The reinforced Front prove to be as formidable as predicted. Led by their new player coach, Dan Munro, they jump out to a 3–1 lead. Hughie shows his leadership by staying positive. He emphasizes to his teammates that, despite the prowess of Munro, they have the advantage of better team play (312). By this point, Hughie is focused not on scoring himself but on shadowing Munro, since the Front “had learned to depend unduly upon him” (309), and in the second half, this helps to turn the tide. The Front send one of their new

ringer-goons to bully Hughie away from Dan: “when Hughie followed up his plan of sticking closely to Dan Munro, he found Jimmie Ben upon him, swiping furiously with his club at his shins, with evident intention of intimidating him” (317). Hughie is neither intimidated nor goaded into retaliation. The Twentieth tie the score, 3–3; then Hughie channels his fury into a brilliant defensive play that turns into what looks like it could be the deciding rush. Just as Hughie is about to score, however, Jimmie Ben “reached him and struck a hard, swinging blow upon his ankle. There was a sharp crack and Hughie fell to the ice” (327). Hughie’s ankle is broken. He insists on playing on, however, and trades places with the Twentieth’s goalie. The Twentieth are inspired to one last rush and score the winning goal just as the umpire calls time (329).

In the aftermath of the victory, three important events occur. First, John Craven drops the gloves with Jimmy Ben. “You cowardly blackguard,” he calls out, “you weren’t afraid to hit a boy, now stand up to a man, if you dare” (329). Ben steps forward to fight but Craven strikes him “fair in the face” and then, with a second blow, lays him out flat on the ice, “where he lay with his toes quivering” (330). Secondly, people rush to help the injured Hughie. Mrs. Murray tells him she is proud of him, but then, with “sudden tears,” she says, “I fear the game cost too much.” Hughie, now a real man as well as a real hockey player, replies, “Oh, pshaw, mother, . . . it’s only one leg bone, and I tell you that final round was worth a leg” (330). And, finally, the boys of the Twentieth experience a spiritual uplift. So profound is this uplift that ten of the newly minted “Glengarry men” head off “for the ministry” (333).

The recruiting of almost a cricket-team’s worth of Presbyterian ministers aside, the hockey match in *Glengarry School Days* illustrates how well-trained hockey players can become muscular Christian men and vice versa, and how muscular Christianity and hockey both contain the elements of ideal Canadian manhood from Connor’s point of view. Overall, the novel suggests that the ideal Canadian man is intelligent but not an intellectual, is physically strong, and is

someone who thrives in the outdoors—especially the cold snowy outdoors of winter. Such a man is not afraid of violence and will deploy it if necessary to defend himself or to right a wrong against someone weaker than him. In deploying violence, however, he will maintain an appropriate self-restraint. This ideal Canadian man will also be willing to sacrifice his own ego—and to experience pain or violence himself—for the betterment of his community (or team). And, finally, his personal manner will be governed by something like Christian humility: he will neither complain about his suffering nor boast about his achievements.

Glengarry School Days connects hockey and Canada in more subtle ways as well. The rules of the hockey match are an interesting blend of old world and new. John Craven's decision to limit the sides to eleven players is reminiscent of the old-world English games of football and cricket, likewise played eleven-a-side. There is even a resonance between the climactic hockey game in *Glengarry School Days* and the climactic cricket match in *Tom Brown's School Days*. Indeed, the master's lesson to Tom Brown about cricket could easily have come from John Craven about hockey: "The discipline and reliance on one another which it teaches is so valuable, I think,' went on the master, 'it ought to be such an unselfish game. It merges the individual in the eleven; he doesn't play that he may win, but that his side may win'" (Hughes 1895, 343).

The actual play of the *Glengarry School Days* match is akin to rugby and the fact that the players use "clubs" to hit a ball is out of field hockey—more old-world elements. That Craven uses his knowledge of lacrosse to develop strategy, however, introduces something new. Lacrosse was an adaptation of the First Nations game baggataway (Robidoux 2001, 39). Craven's use of a "scientific" method, intended to "banish any remaining relics of the ancient style of play" and to get rid of such "foolishness" as the old "off-side" rule (presumably as inherited from rugby), is also of the new world (Connor 1902, 296, 304). The overall mix of old and new elements positions hockey as a more modern contest in keeping with

the emerging character of Canada, a game that resists the old imperial ways of doing things even as it incorporates the best elements from the old ways within it.

It's hard to say how conscious Connor was of the symbolic quality of Craven's reshaping of the game. Conscious or not, however, the reshaping reflects the nationalist agenda that hockey served in early twentieth-century Canada. John Craven's more "scientific" game is a good example of how "the development of sport in Canada has been shaped largely by the desire to resist the imperial influence that continued to define Canada, and the need to formulate an identity of its own" (Robidoux 2001, 32).

A Game Becoming "The Game"

Stephen Hardy and Andrew Holman describe the 1877 to 1920 period of hockey history as the one in which "A Game Becomes The Game" (2009, 23). During this period there was a gradual consolidation of the rules of play, with the Montreal Rules as a benchmark, but, just as importantly, the beliefs today associated with the hockey myth began to take hold. What began the period as only a game evolved by the 1920s into what has become known in Canada as "the game."

Glengarry School Days offers a fictional glimpse at a moment in this evolution. Did Connor recognize an opportunity to promote his muscular Christian beliefs by co-opting the new craze for hockey? Or did he see already in the game the kinds of values he wanted to promote? Probably a combination of the two. Whether *Glengarry School Days* reflects a hockey reality already present or brings a new reality into being (whether it "reveals" or "creates" that reality, in J. Hillis Miller's [1990] terms), Connor's combining of hockey, muscular Christian values, and Canadian identity reflects a strand of the hockey myth that persists into the present.

It should be stressed, however, that just as "the innocent game" projected by "The Hockey Song" was created as much by what was

left out of the song as by what was put into it, the joining of hockey and Canadian identity in *Glengarry School Days* contains some important omissions. Let me end by pointing out three of these.

The first has to do with gender. As you might expect in a novel published by a man in 1902, the roles of women in *Glengarry School Days* are very limited. Mrs. Murray is a classic Victorian angel of the house. In the world of the novel, girls and women might be fans of hockey and moral cheerleaders, but they cannot be players. Hughie's disdain for "gurl" teachers is not entirely ironic: the overall trajectory of the narrative reinforces the idea that schoolteachers need to be good male role models, since the most important work of schools is to prepare young men to go on to university (and, in the best-case scenario, to the ministry). The devaluation of the feminine is accompanied by a narrow definition of the masculine. What makes Foxy a villain is not only his American-style materialism but his lack of interest in the "violent and dangerous games" beloved by the other (real) boys. The novel does not go so far as to suggest that Foxy is gay (the horror of this would probably be too much for Connor to contemplate), but it does hint that there is something not quite right about his sexuality: Hughie, the novel says, "sympathized with Betsy Dan in her creepy feeling whenever [Foxy] approached" (Connor 1902, 158–59).

The second has to do with class. Class issues are resolved somewhat by the social environment of Glengarry County: everybody, the novel suggests, shares equally in the economic challenges of the settler community, except perhaps Foxy's father and the stock underclass character, Alan Gorrach, who has a "gypsy" face and kills dogs for a living (28). Yet, as I mentioned above, muscular Christianity does project an identity that is elevated in class terms. John Craven is a gentleman, and the ideal hockey player/Canadian man he helps to train has a gentlemanly quality to him. When Craven warns about being a "cad" or a "blackguard," he is using language that marks not only bad behaviour but behaviour unbecoming of a gentleman. Though the novel implies that this ideal of behaviour is available to

everybody within the community, the definition of a gentleman is always, to some degree, exclusionary.

Which leads me to the third omission. In both *The Man from Glengarry* and *Glengarry School Days*, First Nations individuals are notable by their absence. The absence is particularly ironic given that Glengarry County is described as resting on “a strip of country . . . known as the Indian lands—once an Indian reservation” (Connor 1901, 14). Could an Indigenous person assume the role of hockey player/muscular Christian/ideal Canadian man posited by *Glengarry School Days*? The absence of First Nations characters is a strong answer in itself. The relationship of Indigenous people to Connor’s imagined modern Canada, as well as to the hockey game that embodies the values of this Canada, is hinted at by the novel’s references to lacrosse. Remember that John Craven uses his knowledge of lacrosse to develop a strategy for the Twentieth hockey team. His knowledge is a result of his having “captained the champion lacrosse team of the province of Quebec” (285).

In the Canada of 1902, references to lacrosse would be heavy with ideological significance. Lacrosse, as Robidoux and others have pointed out, was not only very popular in Canada at the time of hockey’s arrival, but until the end of the nineteenth century, it was widely touted “as Canada’s national game” (Robidoux 2001, 40). Promoters of lacrosse saw it as “the perfect metaphor for the tenuous existence of living in Canada’s hinterland” (40). That the game was appropriated from the First Nations made it only more useful ideologically: the appropriation meant that lacrosse represented something distinctive from England (it supplanted cricket in the 1860s as the Canadian elite’s game of choice) but also that it symbolized the claims of the settler community to the land. As George Beers put it in the *Montreal Gazette* in 1867: “Just as we [Canadian colonists] claim as Canadian the rivers and lakes and land once owned exclusively by Indians, so we now claim their field game as the national field game of our dominion” (quoted in Robidoux 2001, 41).

The process of adaptation of lacrosse from baggataway bears uncannily resemblance to the adaptation of hockey from shinny. Both began as wide-open games played outdoors and were adapted to be played on smaller, more controlled surfaces, with rules designed to make play more “respectable.” Control of both adapted games was claimed by elite organizations who used the ideology of amateurism to exclude players who were deemed undesirable. Don Morrow cites the definition of amateur from the Montreal Pedestrian Club as an example: “[An amateur is someone] who has never competed in any open competition or for public money, or for admission money, or with professionals for a prize, public money or admission money, nor has ever, at any period of his life taught or assisted in the pursuit of Athletic exercises as a means of livelihood, or is a laborer or Indian” (1989, 203). First Nations players were barred from lacrosse and other sports with the baldly racist claim that an “Indian” could not, by definition, be a “gentleman.” There was also, as Colin Howell points out, a fear that Indigenous players, because of their culture and history, might be “too good.” To allow First Nations players into these competitions, then, might force the white gentlemen players out of the game (Howell 2001, 39).

The blind spots in *Glengarry School Days* anticipate areas of focus for later, more critical, representations of hockey. Before these critical responses occur, however, there is a period of decades in which the hockey myth, with its conservative language about the game and Canadian identity, is refined and consolidated. A glimpse of this consolidation is offered by the text that is the focus of the next chapter.

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3

Hugh MacLennan and the Two Solitudes of Hockey

She touched the scar on his chest and then took her finger away quickly. “How did you happen to do it—play hockey like that, I mean?”

“Because I needed the money.”

—Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*

The violence of hockey . . . is part of the game itself.

—Hugh MacLennan, “Fury on Ice”

A second novel that illustrates the rooting of hockey in Canadian life is Hugh MacLennan’s *Two Solitudes*. Hockey occupies an even smaller portion of *Two Solitudes* than *Glengarry School Days*; indeed, hockey appears on only five pages of the novel scattered over four passages. Yet these few pages offer a telling glimpse into hockey’s presence in Canada in the first three decades of the twentieth century—decades in which hockey consolidated its hold on the imagination of the country.

Two Solitudes occupies a unique place in Canadian literary history. When it appeared on January 17, 1945, it was an immediate sensation, selling out the entire first printing of 4,500 copies by noon of that day (Leith 1990, 17). It received numerous rave reviews and went on to win the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1946, the first of a remarkable five Governor General's Awards for MacLennan. At the same time, some critics were less than impressed. A review in the Winter 1945 issue of the *Queen's Quarterly*, for example, panned the novel's stilted writing and its "glaring and irritating absurdities" ("I.M.S." 1945, 494). Criticism of the novel has remained divided ever since. In 1990, Linda Leith summarized the division like this: "The critical consensus is that MacLennan's novel is important but didactic. The importance is associated with MacLennan's exploration of Canadian identity. . . . The didacticism . . . is associated with his failings as a stylist" (1990, 19).

That MacLennan's novel offers an overt—and at times didactic—treatment of Canadian identity is anticipated by its title, which has passed into popular usage to denote the two main settler cultures of Canada. As part of its exploration, the novel offers glimpses into the hockey that existed from about 1905 to 1930. Different versions of the game operate as shorthands for the historical and social forces shaping the country. They also mirror the divisions that MacLennan hopes to bridge. Hockey, in MacLennan's version, is a potential national unifier, in keeping with a key tenet of the hockey myth; but like the myth itself, hockey in *Two Solitudes* reveals as much about fractures in Canadian society as it does about what holds the country together.

The French Game

The first part of *Two Solitudes* takes place in 1917–18 and focuses on the struggles of Athanase Tallard, a wealthy, aristocratic francophone from the town of Saint-Marc on the St. Lawrence River. Tallard

wishes to bring greater economic opportunity and the benefits of modern life to his region. He is proud of his French heritage but is also a Canadian patriot and, as a member of parliament, supports the Canadian effort in the First World War, a position that puts him at odds with most leaders in his community. Foremost among the opposition is a conservative priest, Father Beaubien. Beaubien opposes French-Canadian participation in the war and also the building of a factory in Saint-Marc by an investor named Huntley McQueen promoted by Tallard. For Beaubien, the war and the factory both are synonymous with exploitation by the English bosses and will lead to moral decline (MacLennan 1945, 147).

It turns out that Athanase, for a time, is part owner of a professional hockey team. This is revealed in a passage, less than a page long, about a third of the way into part one. This passage reinforces aspects of Athanase's character. The fact that the team Athanase supports is professional subtly reinforces his commitment to creating greater economic opportunity. That he enjoys hanging out with the players, drinking beer from a barrel "they broached . . . together" suggests that he is a man of the people as well as an aristocrat (64). The passage also reveals that Athanase enjoys "the French style of hockey, a team with small, stickhandling forwards and defensemen built like beer barrels" (64), which reinforces the fact that Athanase is proud of his heritage. That Athanase's investment in a francophone professional hockey team ultimately fails hints at complexities below the surface.

In the background of Athanase's investment is the early history of modern hockey. As Michel Vigneault explains, modern hockey "was invented in the late nineteenth century by a group of Montreal anglophone friends" and remained a preserve of the anglophone elite until francophones joined through a "long and arduous" process (2017, 60). Not only were francophones often excluded from early organized hockey, but the anglophone origins of the game created a certain amount of resistance. As Jason Blake and Andrew Holman explain, "In much of Quebec until the 1940s, hockey was rejected by

some francophone Catholic clergy. . . . In their eyes, a sport created by anglo elite Protestant Montrealers and wildly embraced by English Canadians threatened to assimilate and contaminate francophone youth.” Only near the end of the Second World War did the clergy reverse their stand and champion the game “as an antidote to sloth and a way to develop useful skills and to honour God” (2017, 7).

For these reasons, there were few francophone players on Montreal teams even into the early twentieth century (Vigneault 2017, 39). Two primarily francophone teams, the Nationals and the Montagnards, played in the fledgling professional leagues, but economic pressures forced both to fold by the time the National Hockey League (NHL) formed in 1917, leaving the Montreal Canadiens as the sole team with a francophone emphasis. Athanase would have been part owner of his team during the era of the Nationals and the Montagnards.

Quite a few readers in 1945, when *Two Solitudes* was published, would have known this early hockey history. They would have known that Athanase’s team folding because of the “complication” represented by the First World War (MacLennan 1945, 64) was code language not only for broader social tensions between the English and the French but for how these tensions were embodied in professional hockey. The hockey business, like other businesses at the time, was dominated by the English-speaking elite. The economic retrenchment required by the war only made this more apparent. With the formation of the NHL in the middle of the war, a league dominated by anglophones began the process of acquiring monopoly control of the highest level of the game.

Old Boy Hockey

Athanase’s hockey investment points to a divide that opened in the early twentieth century between amateur and professional versions

of the game. The first hockey organizations—like the Ontario Hockey Association—were fiercely amateur. The ideal of the amateur, as McKinley summarizes it, was that “gentlemen engaged in sport for the honour of competition, for the chance to do one’s best for one’s club or society, and for the love of the game” (2000, 57). The professional game, by contrast, emerged in response to the commercial potential of hockey, recognized by promoters, as well as to certain qualities in the game itself. “Fast, exciting, and vital, hockey was a dynamic game that lent itself particularly well to partisanship,” Holman writes. “Winning felt good, and to win consistently, teams needed to have the best players” (2018, 29). One of the most interesting aspects of the environment of early professional hockey was how wide open it was. Around the time Athanase owned his team, there were four professional leagues in North America competing to pay for the best players. Players went from team to team, and league to league, seeking the best money. From 1910 until the 1925 collapse of the Western Hockey League, after which the NHL became supreme, the Stanley Cup went to winners from a number of different leagues. Only in 1926 did the trustees of the Stanley Cup turn over exclusive control of the trophy to the NHL—an act that some people still consider a betrayal of Lord Stanley’s original wishes.

The uneasy relationship between amateur and professional versions of the game is illustrated in the second half of *Two Solitudes*. The hockey references in this half relate to Paul Tallard, the son of Athanase. Athanase invests his hopes for the future in Paul and decides that he will go to an elite English-language boarding school to learn “to mix naturally with English boys” and hence to feel that “the whole of Canada” is his land (MacLennan 1945, 127). Father Beaubien is predictably scandalized, not just that Paul should mix with English speakers but that he should go live in the wider world where “infidelity awaits.” Saint-Marc, he tells Athanase, has everything “a Christian farmer could hope to have” and reminds him of “the trivial, futile kind of life materialism has produced in the

States” (127). Eventually, after much conflict, Athanase sends Paul to a school named Frobisher.

Frobisher is described in the novel as “an English-style school run for the sons of prosperous Canadians” (205). Graduates are referred to as “old boys” and are destined for posts in Canadian business, government, or the military. Ninety-two of them were killed in the First World War (187). The education is a mix of traditional subjects and sports, very much like Rugby School as described in *Tom Brown’s School Days*, and the masters are all Englishmen, some of them ex-military. Sergeant-Major Croucher, for example, teaches boxing and tells Paul that “he was a natural at it” (204). Though the school is overtly English, its culture is altered by the character of the young Canadian students. New masters, for example, “discover that Canadian boys mistook their exquisite English accents for a proof of softness” and end up having to prove how tough they are (205). In the matter of games, the school teaches the classic English public-school games, but the boys have their own preferences. In early summer, they “played cricket very badly” and “threw baseballs about behind the school at recess” (204).

In the winter, the boys play hockey. Games take place on “an open-air rink behind the school with the snow piled ten feet high back of the boards” (204). In 1921, at the age of eleven or twelve, Paul plays “for his house in a junior inter-house league.” He is a “centre-forward” and his game is a model mix of team play and individual ability: “He was a natural play-maker and fed his wings generously, but he also had a quick low shot of his own” (204).

Though the text doesn’t state it explicitly, the environment at Frobisher makes clear that hockey, like other sports, is part of an English public school-like emphasis on character building among the students, an emphasis that comes straight out of the pedagogical ideals of Thomas Arnold, the historical master at Rugby upon whose philosophy Hughes based *Tom Brown’s School Days*. Colin Howell points out that all private schools in Canada of this era emulated the English public school ideal of character building, mostly by having

their boys participate in “manly” games, and for this reason “endurance and toughness fashioned on the field of play . . . were prized as much as literary and mathematical skills” (2001, 32). This environment, in turn, was governed by the amateur ideal of competition between gentlemen. The class-based character of this philosophy is laid bare at Frobisher, where sport is explicitly associated with the education of the sons of the Canadian elite. The environment of Frobisher would exclude, by definition, those “undesirables” excluded by the amateur ideal. Though *Two Solitudes* does not say so explicitly, you can be sure that, like the Montreal Pedestrian Club whose charter I cited in the last chapter, there are no “laborers or Indians” at Frobisher.

The class-based character of Frobisher hockey is illustrated in a brutal way for Paul when his father dies and leaves him penniless (Huntley McQueen should not have been trusted after all). Afterward, Paul must leave the private school and enroll in public school in Montreal. At such schools, the novel explains, “[no] games were provided” (MacLennan 1945, 221).

Playing for Money

One aspect of *Two Solitudes* often noted—and mocked—by critics, is the way the novel’s second half makes Paul Tallard into an impossibly idealized figure. It is as if MacLennan, having decided on the didactic purpose of having Paul become a model of modern Canadian manhood, felt the need to elevate Paul’s status. To this end, he piles on heroic and romantic qualities. In the second half of the novel, Paul is portrayed as a brilliant student of classical literature, a labourer, a sailor and world traveler (he delivers guns during the Spanish civil war and spends time in Greece), an Oxford scholar, and—by the last part of the novel, set in 1939—a published author of short stories who is working on a novel. The Hemingway-like aura is not, I think, an accident. All that’s missing is a scene in which Paul and Ernest don

the gloves outside a Paris café, so that Paul can school the American with a little of what Sergeant-Major Croucher taught him.

Paul is also a professional hockey player. Early in part three, we learn that he has put himself through the University of Montreal by playing professional hockey. The nature of this hockey is fleshed out during Paul's courtship of Heather Methuen. Before the courtship, Heather learns that Paul had played varsity hockey and had then become a "semi-professional," playing on a "tough outfit" made up of "garage hands and factory workers," who played "for the money they could make" (MacLennan 1945, 237). Paul was so good that there was talk of his making "a club in one of the major leagues" (238). When Heather is told that Paul was "a big-time hockey player," she looks at him with "shyness" (266). Paul claims to have only been "medium" good, but Heather tells him she has heard differently, and Paul responds, "Well, I ought to be [good]. I played sixty-four games a season for four years. Besides, I was paid to be good" (266).

The subject returns during a long courtship scene in which Heather sees Paul in a bathing suit. It turns out that he has scars on his thigh, chest, and lower back. Heather asks how he got them, and he tells her "hockey" (285). From there, Heather asks if he "loves" the game, and he replies, "I used to," after which he waxes nostalgic about playing at the Montreal Forum and how he knew "every scratch on the paint along the boards" (285). Then he explains that he fell in love with the game at age sixteen when he saw "Joliat, Morenz and Boucher" play, but now he was "an old man" and his playing days were over. He stresses, in the passage that is the second epigraph of this chapter, that he played professional hockey because he "needed the money" (285).

A first step in analyzing Paul's professional career might be to try to find a historical parallel for the team he plays on. This is tricky. The details about the team in the novel are ambiguous—probably deliberately so on MacLennan's part. The team, as noted above, is "semi-professional" but Paul is said to play "sixty-four games a year," as many, or more, than the NHL at the time, and also to have a deep

intimacy with the Montreal Forum. Perhaps MacLennan realized that there would be believability problems to have Paul playing in the NHL in the later 1920s while also attending university, but the NHL, by this period, was the most recognizably professional game in town. So he created a fictional team that isn't the Montreal Canadiens, but that, like the Canadiens, plays at the Forum, in order to confer on Paul a similar kind of status.

What qualities are conferred on Paul by professional hockey? There are two main ones, I think. The first is that hockey gives him the *bona fides* to be a model of Canadian identity. This is straight out of the hockey myth, of course. MacLennan's choice to add hockey to Paul's list of heroic activities suggests how the hockey myth has taken hold in Canadian society. That this choice was a conscious decision is hinted at by how MacLennan adopted his own history to create Paul. Various critics have noted the parallels between the two. Robert Cockburn, for example, suggests that Paul is "mainly a projection of [MacLennan] himself" (1969, 65). Both Paul and the historical MacLennan are/were classicists, star athletes, Oxford students, and, of course, writers. What MacLennan changes from his own background, however, is more telling than what he keeps. Paul, for example, attends the University of Montreal, a French language school, instead of Dalhousie, in the heart of Anglo-Scottish Nova Scotia—a way for MacLennan to stress Paul's French roots. Paul also pays his own way to Oxford rather than attending, as MacLennan did, as a Rhodes scholar. This emphasizes Paul's self-reliance and affinity with the working class, which, combined with his elite upbringing, suggests that his character is intended to bridge class as well as cultural differences. Most significantly for this analysis, however, MacLennan's main sport was tennis: he played for Dalhousie as an undergraduate, won the Maritimes singles championship in 1929, and the university singles championship at Oxford in 1930 (Leith 1990, 10; Cockburn 1969, 13). MacLennan probably understood that making Paul a tennis player would have conflicted with his goal of having Paul represent Canadian identity; to represent an ideal of

Canadian identity during this time in Canadian history, Paul needs to be adept at what has become Canada's defining game.

Hockey itself is characterized in *Two Solitudes* as a possible national unifier. The game is portrayed as something that distinguishes Canada from both America and England, consistent with the pattern of national self-identification evident in the early history of the country. At Frobisher, for example, hockey—like other hardy outdoor activities—is how the Canadian boys modify the English school environment to reflect their own characters. Athanase's francophone professional team and Paul's team of "garage hands and factory workers" suggest economic models opposed to the rapacious capitalism of America. Hockey is also portrayed as creating social bonds, be it the bond between Athanase and his players, Paul and the other boys at Frobisher, or Paul and his working-class fellows on the semi-professional team. The fact that Paul plays hockey in an English setting at Frobisher and a French setting at the University of Montreal, as well as on amateur and professional teams, hints that these different environments can be brought together in him. The power of hockey to bridge the two solitudes is hinted at when Paul talks about his professional heroes. His first list combines the English and French superstars of the 1920s Montreal Canadiens, Howie Morenz and Aurèle Joliat (MacLennan 1945, 285). Paul's second list, of the artists of the game, displays a similar cultural diversity (286).

The second quality Paul acquires through hockey is an association with an aggressive version of masculinity. *Two Solitudes*, remember, emphasizes that his team is a "tough outfit" and that his body has a number of scars. These details hint at what Gruneau and Whitson call the "John Wayne" model so often associated with hockey: the man of "few words . . . with a powerful sense of his own abilities and toughness" who "respects the rules that govern social life, but knows how to work outside them if necessary" (1993, 191).

That Paul is associated with aggressive masculinity is especially important, I think, because his true vocation is to become a writer of Canadian stories—perhaps, ultimately, to write a novel like *Two*

Solitudes. At the best of times, proposing a writer as a model of Canadian identity would be problematical. A recurring theme of mid-twentieth-century Canadian literature is that Canada is an inhospitable place for literature. E. K. Brown goes on at length about this in his 1943 essay “The Problem of a Canadian Literature.” Brown identifies a number of obstacles for Canadian literature, including Canada’s colonial mentality, its sparse population, and the division in the country between the English and French. The most powerful obstacle, however, is that the “standards [of] the frontier-life” still define the country:

Books are a luxury on the frontier; and writers are an anomaly. On the frontier a man is mainly judged by what he can do to bring his immediate environment quickly and visibly under the control of society. . . . No nation is more practical than ours; admiration is readily stirred . . . by the man who can run a factory, or invent a gadget or save a life by surgical means.
(Brown 1961, 48–49)

MacLennan seems to have shared Brown’s sense that a Canadian hero at this time—even an educated one with writing as his destiny—had to be able to revert to a hard man of action when necessary, like a hockey player who fights if he can’t help it. True to form, Paul puts his writing dreams on hold at the end of *Two Solitudes* in order to enlist in the Second World War (MacLennan 1945, 368).

Solitudes Bridged/Not Bridged

Two Solitudes shares with *Glengarry School Days* the quality of being powerfully stirring at times while also containing important blind spots. One blind spot is hinted at by the title. The novel’s concentration on English and French subcultures hints at the novel’s failure to acknowledge the multicultural nature of Canadian society, especially the society of Montreal at the time of the novel’s setting and

publication. The absence of First Nations people, of course, is another blind spot, and common in Canadian novels of this time. The lack of First Nations people is particular troubling in *Two Solitudes* because of the novel's explicit aim to establish a model of identity for Canada.

The novel's blind spots about gender are particularly evident in its treatment of Heather Methuen. The last name of Paul Tallard's love interest suggests her symbolic role as the English half of the Canadian power couple that she and Paul are to form at the novel's end. MacLennan also tries to portray her as a modern, independent woman, an equal partner in the ideal modern Canadian relationship: she resists her overbearing mother, persists in being an artist, and takes care of herself when Paul is off symbolically outdoing Hemingway. Yet the novel's affirmation of Paul's hockey player-like masculinity undermines Heather's character. The fact that she reacts to the news that Paul is "a big-time hockey player" with "shyness," as well as her swooning over the scars on Paul's body, suggests that Heather's independence dissolves in the presence of a hockey player's masculine display (266). She never asks Paul about any of his goals, assists, or championships but only dwells on whether he "[got] into fights and [got] penalties" (MacLennan 1945, 286). The novel, then, promotes the idea that the most attractive quality of a hockey player, and the most seductive from the point of view of even a modern woman like Heather, is the rough masculinity earned in the most violent aspects of the game.

Heather's response to Paul's hockey career magnifies the gender stereotyping already evident in both of their characters. This stereotyping—like the absence of First Nations characters—makes *Two Solitudes* feel dated today, but it is instructive of where Canada was at in 1945. Heather's responses are consistent with the limited roles available to women in traditional hockey culture. Like Mrs. Murray and the "gurls" who cheer on the boys in *Glengarry School Days*, females in hockey have more often than not been consigned to "supportive roles" (Blake 2010, 208).

The Persistence of History

The hockey myth stresses how the game brings people in Canada together. Building community requires shared rituals and traditions. These rituals and traditions, in turn, become more powerful as they are repeated, as they reproduce values more widely shared, and as their historical origins, inevitably more messy and complicated than what remains in the repetition of them, are forgotten. Sometimes the past is deliberately elided or falsified in order to give rituals greater authority. Whether history falls away by accident or design, once a ritual or tradition seems “natural” or “timeless” it has taken on the characteristic of myth.

What is so fascinating about earlier representations of hockey like those found in *Glengarry School Days* and *Two Solitudes* is that you can see how the hockey myth is becoming embedded in Canadian society, while at the same time—like the steam trailing behind a Zamboni as it creates a glassy sheet of near perfect ice—there remain traces of the history out of which the myth was formed.

Two Solitudes enlists aspects of the myth to bolster its larger project of creating a model for Canadian identity. Yet traces of the history out of which the myth emerges can still be seen in the novel. Despite the portrayals of hockey’s ability to build community, Athanase’s failed investment hints at a division between English and French that is not easily bridged. Despite the characterization of hockey as a Canadian-specific activity, Frobisher’s use of hockey suggests the exclusive, class-based nature of the amateur ideal that influenced the definition of “Canadian” ascribed to hockey.

The novel does express skepticism about certain aspects of the myth. Once the hockey myth takes hold in Canada, professional hockey becomes a “field of dreams” for young Canadian boys and men (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 133). *Two Solitudes* downplays this elevation of the professional game in the 1930s and 1940s. Paul’s professional career is portrayed not as a great achievement or the fulfillment of a personal quest, but as a pragmatic, perhaps even cynical,

attempt to make money at a sport he was good at. The fact that he professes to be an “old man” at twenty-four also hints at the physical cost of his having made this decision. Paul’s lost love for hockey suggests that his experience as a professional has dulled his earlier, more spontaneous and joyful, experience of the game.

Even with its ambivalence towards the professional game, *Two Solitudes* is not a critical response to hockey in the manner of Al Purdy’s “Hockey Players” or the later texts in this study. The novel’s largely conservative view of the game is in keeping with MacLennan’s 1954 essay “Fury on Ice,” which reproduces the key themes of the hockey myth, from a celebration of hockey’s violence and the toughness of the players who play it to the role of small towns and the northern climate in making hockey “the game it is today” to the game’s specifically Canadian nation-building potential (MacLennan 1978, 79). Nevertheless, the disquieting history hinted at by the hockey in *Two Solitudes* points to fractures in Canadian society that the hockey myth, even at its most powerful, cannot smooth over. History, like the scars on Paul Tallard’s body, will leave its traces, and later writers, as we shall see, will read these traces in a way that exposes some of the history obscured by the formation of the hockey myth.

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Boys on the Defensive

The Hockey Myth in Scott Young

This is the case of a high-school land,
 dead-set in adolescence;
 loud treble laughs and sudden fists,
 bright cheeks, the gangling presence.
 This boy is wonderful at sports
 and physically quite healthy;

 will he learn to grow up before it's too late?

—Earle Birney, “Canada: Case Study: 1945”

As the references to hockey in *Two Solitudes* suggest, the middle decades of the twentieth century saw an intense consolidation of the hockey myth in Canada. The broader environment of the time, as Michael J. Buma points out, involved a “concerted national ‘imagining’ which sought to justify the Canadian polity by establishing and recovering a distinctly Canadian history, tradition, and cultural identity” (2012, 9). Hockey was ready-made to assist in this project. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, various government programs promoted Canadian identity, and alongside these, a range of media, led by the television broadcasts of Hockey Night in Canada beginning

in 1952, promoted hockey as the ultimate Canadian signifier. According to Whitson and Gruneau, the promotion of hockey in this period created “a near national consensus in which the core assumptions of Canadian hockey mythology were felt viscerally and rarely questioned” (2006, 4).

One of the most influential expressions of the hockey myth—and of the conservative responses to hockey that the myth embodies—can be found in this era. I refer to Scott Young’s trilogy of juvenile hockey novels, *Scrubs on Skates*, *Boy on Defense*, and *A Boy at the Leafs’ Camp*, which were published in 1952, 1953, and 1963. The success of Young’s trilogy in dramatizing the myth is reflected in its enduring popularity. In his 1994 autobiography, *A Writer’s Life*, Young says that the trilogy was still selling a steady 5,000 copies a year into the 1990s (Young 1994, 151). Assisting in sales was an updated version of the trilogy published in 1985. The update is clumsily done (the 1980s setting clashes with the 1950s ethos), and I will not be discussing it in what follows. The existence of the updated version, however, reinforces how popular the trilogy has been. This popularity led Jason Blake to claim, as recently as 2010, that the Young books remain “the best-known hockey novels” in Canada (2010, 24).

An additional virtue of the novels, from the point of view of illustrating conservative responses, is that they are *juvenile* fiction. James Smith, in his *A Critical Approach to Children’s Literature*, suggests that children’s literature is defined by a group of interrelated elements: its use of less complex language; its treatment of characters of interest to young people; its emphasis on plot and, ultimately, plot closure (generally of the happy kind); and—most importantly for my purposes here—its tendency to have a didactic purpose (1967, 6). Children’s literature often contains explicit statements and/or dramatic illustrations about what a given culture believes are its most important values. This is very much the case with Young.

Young himself was well-positioned to tap into the cultural meanings that coalesced around hockey in the mid-twentieth century. From the end of the Second World War until the 1980s, he was a

member of sports journalism royalty, as his reception of the Elmer Ferguson Award in 1988 suggests (Professional Hockey Writers' Association n.d.). In his work he occupied the classically ambiguous position of a sports journalist, trying to maintain critical freedom while yet sustaining the connections necessary for access to insider information. His position as insider/outsider brought him close to a number of key hockey figures of the era and led to books like *The Leafs I Knew* (insider tales of the Leafs in the 1950s and 60s) and three sets of as-told-to memoirs, two for Punch Imlach, the coach of the Leafs from 1958 to 1969 and winner of four Stanley Cups (Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.-a), and one for Conn Smythe, the principle owner of the Leafs from 1927 to 1961 (Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.-b).

The Young trilogy fleshes out four key aspects of the hockey myth in Canada: the link between hockey and Canadian identity; the rooting of Canadian identity in small towns and the North; the association of hockey with conservative ideas about family and gender; and a normalization of violence, tempered by something like “the code,” as necessary to the game. Let me take each of these in turn.

Old School and Immigrant Canadian Identities

As Whitson and Gruneau have suggested, the core element in the hockey myth is its assertion that hockey is Canada's game, and that, as a consequence, hockey offers a “graphic expression of ‘who we are’” (Whitson and Gruneau 2006, 4). Hockey, according to the myth, embodies what it means to be truly Canadian. But what defines the truly Canadian? Young's trilogy offers two different—though interdependent—answers in the stories of Pete Gordon and Bill Spunnska. Indeed, the stories of Bill and Pete can be read as national allegories: two portraits of the Canadian nation as adolescent, but maturing, hockey players.

Scrubs on Skates, the first novel of the trilogy, introduces Pete Gordon, “the best schoolboy centre in Manitoba,” who has to attend a

new high school when it is built in his hometown of Winnipeg (Young 1952, 11). The novel follows Pete's struggles to adjust to this new school—Northwest High—and to play on a team of novice hockey players (“scrubs”) instead of the seasoned championship team he had been on at his old school, Daniel Mac. Counterpointed with Pete's story is that of the most scrub-like player on the Northwest team, Bill Spunski. Bill is a recent immigrant from Poland who, although a natural athlete, has never skated or played hockey before. After spending most of the season practicing hard, being a supportive teammate, and waiting for his opportunity, Bill is rewarded by the chance to fill in for a suspended teammate in the crucial last game of the season and ends up assisting on the winning goal (by Pete).

Pete begins with all the natural advantages of an established (or establishment) Canadian boy. His family is middle class, his father a lawyer, his mother a stay-at-home mom. The name “Gordon” suggests a Scots-Presbyterian ancestry, which aligns the family with the “enterprising Scot” type that, as Daniel Coleman has argued in *White Civility*, has played an important role in defining Canadian settler identity (2006, 32–56). The name may also be a subtle homage to the novelist Ralph Connor, whose real name was Charles Gordon. The moral ethos of Young's trilogy—especially the emphasis on competing hard but fairly—is reminiscent of *Glengarry School Days*, a book, given his age and background, that Young was likely familiar with.

One of the reasons Pete is upset about having to leave Daniel Mac is that his father had been a star athlete there (Young 1952, 38). His bedroom, decorated with pennants, crests, and photographs, is a miniature of the halls at Daniel Mac, which are filled with the evidence of all the championship sports teams the school has had over the years (5). Daniel Mac works metaphorically to represent established Canadian identity, and, with its subtle hint of an English public school, it links that identity to an even more established (and establishment) British identity.

From the point of view of his hockey career, Pete, born and raised in Canada, has the advantage described by Coach Turner: “Every boy in this country can play hockey, because we all start young and play all winter on corner rinks and vacant lots and on the streets” (13). As the best schoolboy centre in the province, Pete is obviously a skilled player: he scored the winning goal in the championship game the year before and was in line to become captain at Daniel Mac (89). Pete’s challenge, with all these advantages, is to learn how to become a good teammate on a seemingly lesser team.

Two lessons for Pete stand out in particular. The first has to do with how important it is for him to try his hardest. His failure to try in practice has a demoralizing effect on his teammates (30). And during Northwest High’s first game, he learns by painful experience that a bad attitude will lead to a terrible on-ice performance, despite all his natural gifts (64). The second lesson has to do with sacrifice. A key moment in bonding Pete with his teammates occurs when he skates back to save a goal even though his leg has been badly injured (111). His self-sacrifice impresses his teammates—especially the hardnosed captain, Vic DeGruchy—and his rehab of the injury gives him the opportunity to mentor Bill during early morning workouts (123). In combination, these lessons add up to a kind of “noblesse oblige”: Pete learns that the advantages he has come with an equally high level of responsibility.

Bill’s situation is different. His family has been in the country only fifteen months (77). His father was in the Polish underground during the war while he and his mother lived as refugees in England. Bill has an English accent that marks him as a foreigner (12). Once the family had emigrated to Canada, Mr. Spunska, though a professor in Poland, “worked cutting pulpwood in the North,” while Mrs. Spunska worked as a maid (77). Now Mr. Spunska is an instructor of German at the university in Winnipeg and Mrs. Spunska is ill from exhaustion or depression (77).

Bill and his family, then, are new Canadians, and Bill’s story works metaphorically as a portrait of Canada as a nation of immigrants.

Interestingly, Northwest High itself metaphorically stands in for Canada as a new nation just as Daniel Mac embodied a more established Canada. Northwest lacks the tradition of Daniel Mac but it has greater resources, better sports equipment, and lots of human energy (36). Because the school is so new, the feeling about the hockey team turns out to be “even greater than it had been at Daniel Mac” because all of the students had felt the place “was empty, too new” and now “they had something to hold on to” (164). Hockey at Northwest mirrors the hypothesis Gruneau and Whitson advance about the importance of hockey in Canada more generally. Given the famously unsettled nature of Canadian identity, they argue, hockey has taken on “even greater symbolic currency” as one of those institutions, along with “our system of national government, our public health-care system, and the CBC,” that Canadians cling to as “truly Canadian” (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 277).

The Northwest hockey team is multicultural. The names of the players are a mix of traditional Scots-Irish-English (Paterson, Lawrence, Jamieson, Gordon), French (Duplessis), First Nations (Big Canoe), Asian (Wong), and European (DeGruchy, Kryschuk, Spun-ska). Young idealistically portrays the hockey team as a model for how “people of all races could get along when they had something in common” (1952, 23). In this he echoes the post-Second World War shift in Canada away from national definitions stressing Britishness to those stressing multicultural pluralism. Official government policy of the time reflected this shift. As Eva Mackey illustrates in *The House of Difference*, “cultural policies that centred on maintaining British cultural hegemony” (often to define the nation against the United States) were replaced by the ideas of the “pluralist ‘cultural mosaic’” (2002, 50). The Canadian government passed its official policy of “Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework” in 1971.

As a new hockey player, the first thing Bill must do is learn the game. In some ways, this is the easier of his tasks: *Scrubs on Skates* emphasizes his natural athletic ability and competitive drive. He is first described as “a big dark boy . . . wide in the shoulders and thick

through the rest of his body” (Young 1952, 12) who “tries hard” (16). Coach Turner in *Boy on Defense* notes that Bill was good at “cricket, soccer, [and] tennis” from his years of growing up and that he had a “terrific competitive spirit” (Young 1953, 10, 42). Bill’s second task is more difficult: he has to remain patient and positive as he waits for his chance. This is a test of character, and the novel stresses that character, as much as hard work and competitiveness, is required for success. As it turns out, Bill has a sterling character. He is polite and has an old-world dignity (Young 1953, 16, 80). He also has a strong sense of responsibility to his family. Because of his character, Bill doesn’t become discouraged by his inability to make the team on his first try; rather, he is the model of a good teammate, working hard on his own, attending all the games, and cheering the other players on.

Ultimately Bill’s success conveys the message that hockey can be a shortcut to acceptance for an immigrant boy in Canada. Mrs. Spun-ska makes the lesson explicit near the end of *Scrubs on Skates*: “I know that usually a family must live in a country one generation, or sometimes two or three, before the children are accepted for everything. But it seems to me that sport is different. It is what you are, not what you have been or what your parents have been” (Young 1952, 179). As the trilogy continues, Young emphasizes how Bill becomes Canadian through hockey. *Boy on Defense* and *A Boy at the Leafs’ Camp* illustrate the stages of Bill’s development as a player and a Canadian. *Boy on Defense* tells how Bill becomes an Assistant Captain on the Northwest team and leads the team to the championship. He is then rewarded by a contract to play for the Toronto Maple Leafs (Young 1953, 240). Along the way he loses his accent and learns to speak Canadian slang like the rest of the teammates (Young 1953, 18); he helps his family deal with the financial difficulties of being new Canadians (first with a part-time job, then with a signing bonus from the Leafs); and, with the tacit approval of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, he begins to date Pete’s sister Sarah. In *A Boy at the Leafs’ Camp*, he learns about becoming a professional player. He impresses his coaches, who

proclaim that he has a bright future. Then—in a bit of heavy-handed symbolism, even for Young—he is sent off for further seasoning in the Canadian National Team program (Young 1963, 241).

Interestingly, there is an adult sequel to the juvenile trilogy, *That Old Gang of Mine*, which came out in 1982. It's a pretty awful novel in a lot of ways, but it is interesting for the glimpses it gives of how Young imagines his characters in later life. In the case of Bill and Pete, they both end up representing their nation. Not only do they play in the Olympics together (the main plot of the novel), but Bill joins the Canadian diplomatic corps afterwards and Pete gets elected to the House of Commons.

That Old Gang of Mine aside, the way Bill eclipses Pete in *Boy on Defense* and *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* raises some interesting questions. Bill, it turns out, is the only one of the two with real professional potential; Pete is hampered by his lack of size, his "slightly built five feet eight inches" (Young 1952, 9). Does this mean that Bill is actually the better Canadian? From the point of view of national allegory, the overall message of the trilogy is not that Bill is better, I think. Rather it is that the future of the nation requires the combined efforts of characters like Pete and Bill both, just as a hockey team requires the co-operative play of different players in different roles. Still, it is hard not to avoid the implication that Bill represents an especially important aspect of the future of the nation from Young's point of view. Bill seems to be the new blood needed to revitalize the Canadian body politic, a body politic that, at this point in its history, is understood to possess a lot of skill as well as the remnants of a noble tradition, but that, like Pete Gordon, lacks the raw physical power to reach the highest level.

Snowy Winters and Small Town Rinks

Scrubs on Skates and *A Boy on Defense* take place in Winnipeg. Winnipeg, on the edge of the prairies, has the kind of cold winter that

reinforces the mythic connection between hockey and Canada's northern environment. It is no accident that the novels are not set in, say, Vancouver; in Vancouver, boys are not going to "play all winter on corner rinks."

The Winnipeg winter is an important backdrop in the novels. After his first, disastrous game for Northwest in *Scrubs on Skates*, Pete wakes up to "snow swirling fiercely around his dormer windows" and his room feeling "like thirty below zero" (Young 1952, 63). This is the first mention of weather in the novel, and it sets a pattern; after this, there are numerous references to snow, wind, and cold, but no mention of weather of any other kind. *A Boy on Defense* takes place against a backdrop of equally snowy conditions. The novel opens on the night before the first game of the hockey season, and when Bill heads out the door, "snow was falling, muffling the noises of the trains in the yards two blocks away" (Young 1953, 32). Clearly, at a basic level, the winter weather reinforces the association between hockey and the northern climate. It's as if, once the high school hockey season starts in mid to late November (by the timeline in the novels), the weather must, by definition, be snowy. There is also an implied comparison between the harshness of the external environment and the sheltered ice of the hockey rink. One of the longstanding mythic ideas about hockey is that in developing the game Canadians took a bit of winter, domesticated it, and turned it into a source of pleasure. This idea is captured nicely in the title of Michael McKinley's popular history of the game, *Putting a Roof on Winter*. In *Scrubs on Skates*, the long description of the "city's biggest rink" on high school hockey nights evokes the enclosed, communal, celebratory space in the arena compared to the wildness of the wintery night outside.

The wintery backdrop reinforces the different starting points of Pete and Bill when it comes to Canadian identity. Pete is shown from the outset to be adept at dealing with the winter. When he wakes up to the snow after his disastrous first game, he decides to work off his frustration by going out to shovel the walk and driveway. After

breakfast, he dresses appropriately for the job: “[Pete put] on a heavy woolen shirt that he sometimes used for skiing; over it went a thick sweater; his parka jacket and hood were downstairs” (Young 1952, 68). Then he works in a methodical way, clearing snow first away from the garage doors, getting those doors open, and helping his father back the car out of the driveway (70). Pete’s competence in dealing with the snow marks him as a native of Canada and reinforces his association with established Canadian identity.

Bill, by contrast, does not even have a proper winter coat. In *Scrubs on Skates*, he has only a “cheap, stiff raincoat, the only coat he owned” (53). His lack of proper winter wear is in part a sign of his family’s poverty, but it also signals that he comes from a foreign land. One indicator of Bill’s increasing Canadianness in *Boy on Defense* is that his parents buy him a coat for Christmas. The coat is “three-quarter-length dark blue wool with a thick quilted wool lining and a big fur collar” and Bill knows “half a dozen boys in school who had coats exactly like this” (Young 1953, 124).

The Young trilogy is uncritical about how the northern climate has been used to define Canadian identity. Instead, the trilogy stresses the character-building qualities of the climate and combines these with the characteristics of a successful hockey player. As we saw in chapter 2, however, when Thomas Chandler Haliburton spoke about the climate creating a “hearty, healthy, virtuous, dominant race,” he had a very specific race in mind (Haliburton in Berger 1997, 86). Canada’s climate, it was thought by people like Haliburton, made it unsuitable for immigration from the weaker “southern” races and prime for immigration from other “Aryan” or “northern” races. Also excluded, of course, were the First Nations. The “white” in “Great White North” is painfully telling when viewed through the lens of Canada’s settler-colonial history.

By the time of the Young juvenile trilogy, the racism in arguments like those of Haliburton had been exposed by history. It was hard to maintain a Canadian identification with the Aryan races after two wars against Germany. Still, residual racism remained. Young’s

novels are explicitly anti-racist. The Northwest team, as I mentioned above, is multicultural, and in fact, what leads to Jamieson's suspension at the end of *Scrubs on Skates* (thus giving Bill a chance to get in the lineup) is a fight he has in order to defend Benny Wong from being called "a yellow Chink" (Young 1952, 185). The liberal idealism of the novels' anti-racism is, however, undermined by the stereotypical nature of the "ethnic" characters. Benny is a stereotypically feminized Asian man, a quiet kid who "wouldn't say boo to a goose" (183). Rosario Duplessis talks in French dialect and has a stereotypical temper. Horatio Big Canoe is a large, mysterious First Nations boy who says virtually nothing and stickhandles in an otherworldly fashion, as if "the puck was taped to the end of his stick" (23). Just as importantly, the identities of all the ethnic characters, including Bill, are defined against the "norm" of Pete's established (Scots British) Canadian identity. And Bill himself conforms to the right type of immigrant as dictated by people like Haliburton. Though he is described as having dark hair and dark eyes, he comes from Poland, decidedly in the northern part of Europe. He does not come from, say, Nigeria; neither the myth of hockey nor the definition of Canada by its northern climate could envision such a player in 1952.

Another aspect of the setting is also important. This is the fact that Winnipeg is a small city—not a small town, exactly, but with many small town attributes. Young's evocation of corner rinks, train whistles, and an overall cozy sense of community are all small town-like, not to mention the fact that high school hockey is what is played at "the city's biggest rink" (44). The identification of Canadian values with the small town is so long-standing that it was already ripe for lampooning when, in 1912, Stephen Leacock published his famous *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. For Leacock, the small town retains a powerful hold on the Canadian imagination precisely because it evokes a simpler, more innocent time, a time that involves a romanticized version of our own childhoods. The parallel to the hockey myth's evocation of "apple-cheeked boys on frozen ponds" is not an

accident. Literary interrogations of the small town since Leacock (Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, and Margaret Laurence come immediately to mind) have focused on how the surface idyll of the small town hides a darker reality of class struggle, religious intolerance, violence, and loss. Yet the romantic version of the small town, and the association of Canadian values with the virtues of small town folk, retain powerful holds on the popular Canadian imagination, not least because of the small town's association with hockey.

The setting of the trilogy shifts in *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp*. To attend his first professional training camp, Bill must travel east and—more crucial from a symbolic point of view—south to Peterborough. Peterborough in the early 1960s was only about one-fifth the size of Winnipeg, with a population of 47,185, compared to Winnipeg's 265,429 (Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1962, Table 9, 9–17 and 9–26). The description of what Bill encounters when he steps off the bus, however, has a big city feel: “There was the smell of diesel fumes and a dusty hurried atmosphere, full of people—sitting, standing, walking, reading, talking” (Young 1963, 7). When he walks into town to find the hotel he will be staying at he discovers that “[the] streets were crowded with full cars—weekenders coming here, or heading for Toronto or other cities” (9). It is September; the weather is sunny and clear and remains that way throughout Bill's stay. Just before the inter-squad game that contains the climax of the novel, Bill reflects on the strangeness of playing hockey in such a place and in such weather: “It seemed strange to be going to play hockey on Tuesday night. The temperature had gone into the eighties during the day” (180).

Young's choice of location for his fictional training camp was dictated by the fact that the Toronto Maple Leafs held their training camps in Peterborough in the early 1960s. The selection of details Young uses to create the Peterborough setting, however, are straight out of the myth of hockey. The setting works to reinforce the differences between this place and Winnipeg, just as the focus of the novel

is about Bill learning the differences between the hockey here and at home. Literally and metaphorically, Peterborough is only one stop away from Toronto, and the hockey here is only one stop away from the big time, big city hockey played at Maple Leafs Gardens.

The Peterborough setting of *Boy at the Leafs' Camp* emphasizes how moving up through the hockey ranks involves a journey away from the small town rink and what it stands for. At the same time, Bill's story stresses the importance of maintaining a connection to this rink. Pete, as a born and raised Canadian, knows this instinctively: when things go badly for him in *Scrubs on Skates*, he wishes "that he were five years younger and could go out to the corner rink and work [it] off" (Young 1952, 71). By the time of *Boy on Defense*, Bill has embraced the corner rink himself, and the novel offers a long romantic evocation of him skating there—an indication of his increasing Canadianness (Young 1953, 157–58). The implication is that, although the quest for hockey success involves a journey into strange and challenging new places, the corner rink remains, in a sense, the source, and it is essential for players on the quest to go back now and then to be spiritually renewed.

Overall, the settings of Young's trilogy reflect assumptions about small towns, the northern climate, and Canadian identity that are embodied in the hockey myth. Small towns and the northern climate stand in metonymically for Canada, just as hockey stands in for Canada and at the same time is evoked as a product of small towns and the northern climate. As I discussed in chapter 2, the northern climate in Canada has been promoted historically as a training ground for muscular Christian manliness. The physical hardiness, humility, and personal virtue of the muscular Christian man has been promoted, in turn, as an ideal of Canadian manhood, which in turn has been projected as an ideal onto the Canadian hockey player (and vice versa). Much the same could be said about small town virtues, with an added emphasis on community spirit and that ultimate Canadian characteristic, being "nice."

Benevolent Patriarchs and Moral Cheerleaders

As you might expect, Young's trilogy is rich with mid-century clichés about gender. Girls and women have no direct role in the hockey. When Red Turner ponders the mysteries of the competitive spirit, only boys and men are part of his pondering: "what is it that makes us, men and boys, want so much to win a game?" (Young 1953, 42). Females, on the other hand, are restricted to traditional feminine roles. Sarah Gordon, for example, plays the roles of moral cheerleader and love interest. She attends all the hockey games and cheers passionately for the Northwest team. When things go badly for Pete, she calls him out for not trying, but also insists, on his behalf, that he will not abandon the team. When Mr. Gordon asks Pete if he would like to "quit hockey, altogether," she jumps in and cries, "That's our school now and Pete wants to play for it. And he'll get used to Buchanan and Bell pretty soon and try just as hard as . . . as . . ." (Young 1952, 62, ellipses in original). At this point Sarah is described as having a "brightness in her eyes that meant that with one more word, if she couldn't stop herself, she'd bounce out of the room crying" (62). Her defense of the Northwest team contributes to Pete's recognition of the advantages of attending a new school.

As a love interest, Sarah has conventional physical virtues: she is blond and attractive, with "her mother's lissome figure and father's fair hair and complexion" (Young 1952, 4). She is the kind of teenaged girl teenaged boys develop crushes on. Pete's friend Ron Maclean comes around the Gordon house a lot, but "sometimes lately Pete hadn't been sure whether Ron would come quite so often if it wasn't for the coincidence that Sarah was usually around, too" (40). Sarah also has conventional feminine interests. One of her passions is acting, and she plans to major in "home economics" at university. When Mr. Spunski jokes that majoring in home economics will help her "be a good wife," he is not joking (126). Sarah and Bill are attracted to one another. They sit together during games before Bill starts to play, and eventually, part way through *Boy on Defense*, they go on a date. Before

the date, Bill puts on his new (Canadian) coat, and it fits “perfectly” (Young 1953, 130). The date is a success. Sarah compliments Bill on what a gentleman he is: “You seem to know exactly what you’re doing all the time. You don’t get flustered. It must be that Continental poise” (131). Thus the text advances Bill’s old-world politeness as a model for how a good Canadian girl should be treated, while at the same time presenting the role of love interest to an up and coming hockey player as a desirable occupation for a good Canadian girl.

The mothers in the trilogy, Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Spunska, also have very limited roles. Mrs. Gordon is a Victorian domestic angel. Her role in *Scrubs on Skates* is to be quietly supportive of Pete and the rest of the family and to make sandwiches. The most significant words she speaks in the novel are: “Some parcels in the car, dear. . . . Would you mind getting them in?” (Young 1952, 42).

Mrs. Spunska is more complicated—though not by much. The backstory of the Spunska family suggests that she had the strength and resourcefulness to care for herself and Bill, first for eight years in England when Mr. Spunska was in the Polish underground, then for another year in Canada when Mr. Spunska was assigned by the government to cut pulpwood up north (Young 1952, 77). By the time of the novel, however, she has become a damsel-in-distress. The first description of her suggests that she has suffered nervous exhaustion or depression as a result of overexerting herself when her husband was away (124). Over the course of the novel, Sarah and Pete and other members of the Northwest hockey team go to visit her. This cheers her because it suggests that Bill is making friends. The biggest improvement in her health, however, occurs when Bill gets into a hockey game. As Bill jokes afterwards, “The doctor said I should have got into the game before, it was better than his medicine!” (217).

The limited female characters occupy one side of the benevolent patriarchy that characterizes the mid-twentieth century nuclear family idealized by Young in the novels. The other side is occupied by male heads of household. True to type, both of the Gordon and Spunska families are led by cigar/pipe-smoking, gently authoritative

patriarchs. Mr. Gordon, a former star athlete who went on to become a lawyer, husband, father, and pillar of the community, is studiously not overbearing with his son, in keeping with a man who is comfortable with his own authority and who is teaching his son to be his own man. At a couple of key moments in the text, however, he intervenes to give Pete sage advice. After Pete is hurt by the bad press he receives after his unsuccessful first game, Mr. Gordon explains “dryly” that an athlete is “really a sort of public servant” and “the public feels cheated” when he doesn’t measure up, an observation that Pete finds has “a wisdom to it that was almost cynical, but . . . [also] sharp and clear” (Young 1952, 68–69). When Pete admits, after he achieves his first successes at Northwest, that he had wondered earlier if he would ever feel good about hockey again, Mr. Gordon responds “dryly” again: “Young people feel that way quite often before they get enough sense to know that every trouble passes eventually” (145). To round off the picture of the learned but not overly didactic elder, Mr. Gordon quotes Shakespeare: “To thine own self be true” (81). Mr. Gordon, the text makes clear, leads by word and example, but mostly by example, in keeping with the traditional model of masculinity he represents (a man of few, but well-chosen, words, who mainly lets his deeds do the talking for him).

Like Mr. Gordon, Mr. Spunski is a benevolent patriarch, whose “rule wasn’t hard, but it was law” (Young 1953, 9). Mr. Spunski, unlike his wife, has been made only stronger by his experiences during the war. When Pete asks Bill if it was tough for him to cut wood when he first came to Canada, Bill shrugs and replies: “[My father] has done harder things than chopping down trees” (Young 1952, 77). Mr. Spunski’s sense of duty to his family is reproduced in Bill’s sense of duty to both team and family; and, indeed, much of the drama of *Boy on Defense* is a result of Bill trying to deal properly with all his responsibilities. Finally, Mr. Spunski sets an example to Bill of appropriate national integration. Once he is settled into his new job at the university, the professor begins to read up on Canadian history. At one point he recalls a date from Canadian history that

other—Canadian—professors couldn't, which occasions "great laughter at a Pole's telling Canadians their history!" (Young 1953, 165).

The maturation of Bill and Pete is described explicitly as them becoming more like their role model fathers. On the ice, Pete learns about leading by example and the team first attitude of a successful leader. Bill, on the other hand, applies the same sense of duty, humility, and commitment as his father. Interestingly, Bill, like Pete, is shown to value academics as well as sports—a direct product of the professional stature of their fathers. On this point the role model fathers embody a message worthy of one of Don Cherry's more sensible refrains: play the game you love kids, but also stay in school!

One last point about family in the trilogy. Clearly, the trilogy idealizes the traditional nuclear family that is a stereotype of fifties popular culture. At the same time, it suggests that players with character issues are more likely to come from bad family situations. The villain/rival characters in the second and third novels, Cliff Armstrong and Benny Moore, both come from dysfunctional families. Cliff's selfishness on the ice is attributed to his pushy parents (Young 1953, 21); Benny's goonish violence is linked to the fact that his father is a violent drunk, and that he was raised "partly by grandparents and partly in foster homes" (Young 1963, 21).

A Man's Game

The place of violence in hockey has been a subject of debate since the earliest days of the game. As Colin Howell explains, early newspaper accounts often reported on "the serious injuries and even deaths that occurred in hotly contested matches" (2001, 45). Stacey Lorenz and Geraint Osborne offer a case study in this early reporting in "'Talk About Strenuous Hockey': Violence, Manhood, and the 1907 Ottawa Silver Seven-Montreal Wanderer Rivalry," which gives ample evidence of the extremely violent nature of some early hockey games, as well as the public fascination with this violence. The violent

quality of hockey has given rise to perennial questions. What level of violence is appropriate to preserve the essential nature of the game? What level of violence is justifiable in pursuit of winning? And perhaps most crucially: how to distinguish the manly athlete from the violent brute?

Bill Spunnska, in many ways, is the archetype of the aggressive masculinity celebrated in the myth of hockey. His game combines dynamic offensive rushes with hard-hitting defense. Coach Turner in *Boy On Defense* says that Bill's game is similar to that of "Eddie Shore" (Young 1953, 73). The first two novels each contain key scenes in which Bill lays some other player out with a violent body check. In *Scrubs on Skates*, Bill flattens Pete in practice even before he has learned to skate—a wake up call for Pete and a hint of Bill's potential (Young 1952, 26). In *Boy on Defense*, Bill lays out Cliff Armstrong, the selfish prima donna forward, and immediately doubts his own motives: "he hadn't wanted to hit him so hard . . . or had he?" (Young 1953, 97).

A Boy at the Leafs' Camp further explores the questions about violence raised in the first two novels. In this novel, as I suggested above, Bill is challenged to learn what it takes to be successful at the highest level of hockey. The biggest issue he faces is how to deal with the more intense quality of the competition, which includes a higher risk of violence and injury.

Much of what Bill has to learn in *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* is embodied in his interactions with Benny Moore. Benny is, in many ways, a more aggressive version of Bill himself (if the novel didn't take place in 1962, you'd want to say that Benny was Bill on steroids). Both are big, dark-haired, square-jawed boys, though Benny, tellingly, is said to be the bigger (Young 1963, 15). Like Bill, Benny is an up-and-coming defenseman. Unlike Bill, however, he is willing to go to any length to succeed. This includes a willingness to push the limits of violence. Benny's reputation for goon-like behaviour is emphasized at the beginning of the novel; among other things, he is suspended from

Junior hockey at the time training camp opens because of an assault on a referee (Young 1963, 20).

A significant part of *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* is devoted to the rivalry that develops between Benny and Bill. Before they even get on the ice, they exchange words: “[Keep] your head up,” says Benny, “I hit pretty hard.” “I hit pretty hard myself,” Bill replies (Young 1963, 19). Then, in practice, they battle. At one point Bill makes one of his headlong rushes and pinballs into Benny, flattening him (69). Benny retaliates by taking a run at Bill (74). The rivalry culminates in two violent incidents during a split-squad exhibition game. In the first incident, Benny charges at Bill, but Bill stops hard to avoid him—and Benny crashes headlong into the boards (191). Then, as the last meaningless seconds of the game run down, Benny tries to run Bill again. This time Bill lowers his shoulder, and Benny is caught by surprise; he is thrown back, hits his head on the ice, and collapses (192). In this second incident, Benny suffers a near-fatal brain injury. He ends up in the hospital, in a coma, for days.

Benny’s injury causes Bill to question his own motives as a player. Though people reassure him that his check was clean, he wonders if he had actually tried to hurt Benny (199). He had similar thoughts after his hit on Cliff Armstrong. This time, however, the thoughts go beyond the recognition that his competitive drive means he has a “lower boiling point” than other players (Young 1953, 101) to the idea that, if he played as hard as he needed to succeed, even if he played a clean game, he could truly hurt someone. As a result, he becomes tentative on the ice and his play suffers (Young 1963, 242–43).

The self-doubt Bill suffers becomes, for Young, a teaching opportunity. In the pages that follow Benny’s injury, Young uses the voices of the wise old defenseman Otto Tihane and the Punch Imlach-like coach Pokesy Ware to offer Bill (and his wider juvenile audience) the classic defenses for hockey’s violence. Ware takes Bill aside to give him this pep talk:

I'll tell you, kid. You can't afford to think about things like [the incident with Benny Moore] and play this game. A guy goes by you with his head down some night, carrying the puck, your job is to hit him as hard as you can. You want to do it cleanly, but checking is part of the game. . . . If you're going to be afraid every time you hit somebody you're going to hurt him, you're not going to be the kind of a hockey player . . . you might become. (Young 1963, 228–29)

Even more telling is Otto Tihane's story about a real-life incident involving Gordie Howe and Ted Kennedy. As Tihane tells it, Kennedy checked Howe and Howe "wound up with a fractured skull," which led to outrage among the Detroit faithful (205). After he had recovered, however, Howe was asked about "the rough aspects of the game" and gave what Tihane considers to be the "definitive comment" about professional hockey. "I like [hockey] the way it is," said Howe (according to Tihane and the historical record). "Sure, it's sometimes tough, but why not? It's a man's game" (206).

The allusion to the Kennedy-Howe incident would have had a strong effect on Young's English-speaking readers in 1963. The historical incident, which happened during the first game of the playoffs in 1950, was likely the most famous example of hockey violence for these readers, comparable to the events associated with the Richard Riot for French-speaking Canadians. So important was the incident in hockey history that seventeen years later *Sports Illustrated* devoted a long article by Stan Fischler to it. Fischler's article, called "The Greatly Exaggerated Death of Mr. Howe," describes the events of 1950 in minute detail. Interestingly, the description suggests that Young modeled the climactic confrontation between Bill and Benny on what happened between Kennedy and Howe. As Fischler describes it, the historical incident occurred in the dying seconds of a 4-0 game, when it seemed that Toronto, in the lead, was just running out the clock. Kennedy came out across the Leaf blue line about six feet from the boards and Howe swept in from the right and "attempted to crash Kennedy amidships" (Fischler 1967). From there, two conflicting accounts evolved

that are much like the two incidents between Bill and Benny. One version, favoured by Toronto fans, had Kennedy stopping short as Howe tried to hit him and Howe flying past to crash into the boards; the other version, favoured by Detroit fans, had Kennedy somehow surprising Howe, either with his shoulder or stick, maybe with an outright spear, and sending him down (Fischler 1967). Afterward, Howe's injuries were so severe that he required brain surgery. So grave was his condition that a call was put through to Saskatchewan urging his mother to get to her son's bedside (Fischler 1967).

By invoking the real-life incident between Howe and Kennedy, followed by Howe's historical defense of "the rough aspects" of the game, *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* reinforces its justification of hockey violence by reference to real world authority. Who is going to gainsay Mr. Hockey himself about what hockey is? The lesson is accompanied by an explicit articulation, on the part of Bill, of the right balance to strike between the "rough aspects" of the game and the possibility of injuring someone. Bill recognizes that part of what has troubled him about the Benny Moore hit is that he couldn't be absolutely sure of his own motives. Now, he vows that he will know himself and that "*From now on . . . I not only won't hurt anybody on purpose in this game—but I'll try, on purpose, not to hurt them*" (Young 1963, 246; italics original). He decides that he will model his game after Tim Merrill, who plays "hard, strong, forceful, but never dirty" and that, for as long as he plays, he wants people to think of him "as a clean player" (246).

Despite its defense of hockey violence, *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* leaves certain issues unresolved. The professional game, the novel makes clear, is defined by an intensification of violence even in "clean" play. Benny's recovery defers the issue about hockey's violence potentially leading to a fatal accident, but it does not address the wider issue. Similarly, although Benny's admission that he had intended "to knock Bill right through the boards" absolves Bill of wrongdoing on the original hit, it doesn't address the issue of Bill's temper. Is a short temper a necessary part of the competitive drive needed to succeed in hockey?

The unresolved issues, I think, suggest a lingering anxiety on the part of Young about the nature of the professional game. *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp*, just as *Scrubs on Skates* and *Boy on Defense*, idealizes junior and high school amateur hockey as, in many ways, the best of the game—with just the right balance of competitiveness and lack of corruption by the more violent and sordid aspects of professional hockey. Lee Vincent, the sportswriter stand-in for Young, makes this preference explicit in *Scrubs on Skates*:

[Lee Vincent] enjoyed a good professional game, or a good senior amateur game, but the feeling of these kids always got him hardest. A couple of times in his life, when he had been offered advancement on his own paper or more money from another paper, the thought of leaving junior and high school sports had been the one obstacle he couldn't overcome. (Young 1952, 47)

Such a preference fits in well with the intended audience of a juvenile novel, of course, but it also hints at some of the underlying tensions in the myth of hockey that even Young, in his didactic treatment, cannot simply paper over.

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Belief and Doubt in Roch Carrier's “The Hockey Sweater”

[We] were five Maurice Richards taking it away from five other Maurice Richards.

—Roch Carrier, “The Hockey Sweater”

At a press conference in December, 1976 . . . Claude Charron, Québec Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation commented, “I have the impression that Maurice Richard was one of the original men responsible for giving a special meaning to Québécois life and to have encouraged the élan of the Québec people.”

And Richard? At the same press conference he said, “I was just a hockey player. Just a hockey player.”

—Ken Dryden, Preface to *Les Canadiens*

Roch Carrier's story “The Hockey Sweater” is perhaps the most well-known text about hockey in Canada. The story tells of how Carrier as a boy idolized Maurice Richard of the Montreal Canadiens and

how he—like all his friends—wore Richard’s famous No. 9 sweater. Young Roch’s sweater gets too small, so his mother orders a new one for him, but when the new sweater arrives, it turns out to be a sweater of the rival Toronto Maple Leafs. Mrs. Carrier refuses to return this sweater, so young Roch must wear it. When he goes to the rink, however, he is ostracized. The other boys laugh at him and contrive to not let him into the game. When he finally gets on the ice, the priest who is the referee calls a penalty on him, and when he protests the priest accuses him of acting entitled. “[Just] because you’re wearing a new Toronto Maple Leafs sweater,” the priest says, “doesn’t mean you’re going to make the laws around here” (Carrier 1979b, 80–81). The priest orders him to go pray for forgiveness. The story ends with young Roch praying not for forgiveness but for God to send “moths that would eat up” the Toronto Maple Leafs sweater.

This story has had enormous success in Canada since it was first published in 1979. In 1980 an extended version appeared as a ten-minute National Film Board animation by Sheldon Cohen. The popularity of the animation led to the release in 1984 of a picture book version, with new illustrations by Cohen, which has gone on to sell over 300,000 copies (Lowrie 2016). Since this early success, the story has made many further appearances in Canadian culture. It has been anthologized, taken to space, adapted for orchestra, and its first lines quoted (in both official languages) on the back of the 2001 edition of the Canadian five-dollar bill. Most recently, the story inspired a musical version, which was performed at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, December 5–23, 2018 (Saxberg 2018).

There are a number of possible reasons for this popularity: the story works well as a children’s story, it is funny, and Carrier was already a popular writer by the time of its appearance. Much of the popularity, however, stems from the portrait of hockey. People love this story, I think, because it reinforces a nostalgic and traditional view of hockey’s place in Canada—a conservative view, with elements similar to Scott Young’s trilogy and Tom Connors’s “The Hockey Song.” The hockey myth is here again: the northern climate, the small

town, the corner rink, and boys who combine fantasies of success in life with dreams of becoming a National Hockey League (NHL) star.

What's different about "The Hockey Sweater" from Young and Connor is that the story takes place in Québec. Hockey in the story is associated not with generic Canadian but with French Canadian—Québécois—identity. This aligns the story with the French Canadian version of the hockey myth summarized by Jason Blake and Andrew Holman:

[That] hockey among French Canadians is and always has been a fanatically followed social unifier—a vehicle onto which a society under siege has heaped its hopes and through which it has forged its collective sense of self. . . . [And that] French Canadian teams (and especially the Maurice Richard–led Montreal Canadiens of the 1940s and 1950s and Jean Béliveau's "firewagon" Canadiens teams of the 1960s) were the "porte-étendards" of the embattled Québécois nation and a lightning rod for national expression. (2017, 5–6)

That "The Hockey Sweater" reproduces a Québécois version of the hockey myth presents rich opportunities for further study. In what follows, I'd like to look in more detail at how the story creates its mythic version of hockey and then to explore what this mythic version leaves out. One of the things that is so fascinating about "The Hockey Sweater" is that, even as it evokes the Québécois version of the hockey myth, it contains within it clues about what this version leaves out. To decipher the clues, however, requires connecting them to histories only lightly touched on in the story. When you do this, a somewhat different story emerges—one that does not simply celebrate the Québécois version of the myth but that also offers reasons to doubt it.

The French Style

"The Hockey Sweater" is set in Ste. Justine, Québec, in the winter of 1946. The date is made explicit in the English children's book version,

but is implicit in the original, in which Mrs. Carrier refers to her son as being “ten years old”—Carrier was born in 1937 (Carrier 1979b, 78). Despite the hockey myth’s assertion about the timelessness of hockey, the passion for the game in Québec in 1946 was still a relatively recent phenomenon.

Let me explain. As I wrote during the analysis of *Two Solitudes*, modern hockey started out as the preserve of Montreal anglophones. A key date was the first indoor game organized by James Creighton in 1875. Though hockey quickly took hold in Canada after that, the English dominance of Montreal’s main sports organizations, combined with the resistance of the Catholic Church, meant that francophones came later to the game. By the turn of the twentieth century, there were still relatively few francophones in the leagues that had sprung up in and around Montreal.

The Montreal Canadiens were founded by an anglophone businessman, J. Ambrose O’Brien, in 1909, with the idea of using French Canadian players (and, ultimately, French Canadian ownership) to attract French-speaking fans to the new National Hockey Association (Harvey 2006, 35). In the early years, the Canadiens had an anglophone rival in Montreal, the Montreal Wanderers, who joined the National Hockey League with the Canadiens in 1917. When the Wanderers’ arena burned down four games into its first NHL season, the team was disbanded, and a few years later a new anglophone team, the Montreal Maroons, was formed. From 1924 to 1938 the Maroons were the main rival to the Canadiens. The Maroons, like a number of other NHL teams, went out of business during the Depression as the league contracted from the ten teams it had in the 1920s to the so-called Original Six in 1942 (McKinley 2000, 170–71).

A Toronto team was organized as part of the NHL in 1917. After a couple of name changes, the team was renamed the Maple Leafs by its owner, Conn Smythe, in 1927. The logo Smythe chose for his team was modeled on the maple leaf shoulder patch worn by Canadian soldiers during the First World War (McKinley 2000, 198). This branding was designed to position the Maple Leafs as Canada’s Team, a

branding that was helped by the popularity of *Hockey Night in Canada* radio broadcasts during the 1930s. By 1931, Smythe had contracted with Foster Hewitt for regular Saturday night broadcasts of Maple Leafs games, and by 1933, these broadcasts could be heard on a patchwork of stations from coast to coast (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 100). A comparable set of broadcasts were established in Québec by 1934, in English for the Maroons and French for the Canadiens, and by the end of the 1930s *Hockey Night in Canada* attracted two million listeners a week (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 101). To put this in context: the Canadian census of 1941 put the total population of the country at the time at only slightly over eleven-and-a-half million people (Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1950, 6, and see also Table 2).

Within Québec, hockey became associated at this time with the expression of a specifically *French* Canadian identity, embodied on the ice by the so-called “French style” of play, in which the players were smaller but also faster and more skilled than their anglo counterparts (McKinley 2000, 171). The elevation of Maurice Richard to mythic status was not only because of his success but because he was a relatively small player (about five-ten and 180 pounds) who overcame his physical disadvantages with his uncanny strength, speed, and determination. Richard’s overcoming became a metaphor for the small but determined Québécois people. That Richard was doubted early in his career for being too “fragile” only added to his mystique. Richard played his first full season in the NHL in 1943–44, a season in which the Montreal Canadiens made a remarkable turnaround after more than a decade of bad results (their last Stanley Cup was in 1931), which supercharged the hold of the team on the French Canadian imagination.

Hockey, in this environment, became a symbolic acting out of the English-French conflict that was such an important feature of Canadian life in the mid-twentieth century (as evidenced by *Two Solitudes*). This is the environment in which “The Hockey Sweater” takes places. Young Roch ends up having to wear the Toronto Maple Leafs

sweater because of a botched order sent to Eaton's, a bastion of anglophone dominance, and because his mother will not return it for fear of Mr. Eaton's retaliation. "Monsieur Eaton's an *Anglais*; he'll be insulted because he likes the Maple Leafs," Mrs. Carrier explains (Carrier 1979b, 80). The priest's accusation about young Roch assuming anglophone privilege at the end also evokes English-French conflict; it makes clear that, within the world of the story, allegiance to the Canadiens is a way of championing francophone and Catholic identity against the anglophone and Protestant identity associated with the Maple Leafs.

Le jeu innocent

Although "The Hockey Sweater" relates the sweater mix up to English-French conflict, the form of the story tends to limit consideration of this issue. It is significant, for example, that the conflict is introduced by Mrs. Carrier. Roch's mother is a Québécois version of a Victorian angel in the house—a comic version of Mrs. Gordon in *Scrubs on Skates*. She is the guardian of the domestic sphere but ignorant about the world outside. The story exaggerates her stereotypically feminine ignorance about male domains. When she writes her order letter to Mr. Eaton, she overshares, explaining that her son is "ten years old and a little too tall for his age and Docteur Robitaille thinks he's a little too thin" (Carrier 1979b, 78). Mrs. Carrier's ignorance extends to the male domain at the centre of the story: hockey. Notice how the bungled sweater order only has the effect it does because the order is managed by Mrs. Carrier. Mrs. Carrier, because she is a stereotypical mother, doesn't appreciate the importance of her son's allegiance to the Montreal Canadiens. To her mind, since the blue sweater fits "like a glove," he should just wear it; when young Roch replies that Maurice Richard would never put such a sweater on his back, she replies—realistically and also missing the point—that he

is not Maurice Richard (78). A father, within the traditional gender norms implied by the story, would not make this mistake.

Mrs. Carrier's typecasting undermines her authority to speak about issues outside the home. This mutes her introduction of the English-French conflict. Because the conflict is introduced by Mrs. Carrier, readers are invited to be more amused by her naïve political analysis than motivated to explore the real issues behind it.

In a similar way, the story (at least in the way it is usually read) doesn't invite much consideration of the priest's actions at the end. The priest's accusation that young Roch is acting superior is a classic ironic reversal: the boy who hates the Toronto Maple Leafs, and who is mortified at having to wear a Maple Leafs sweater, is accused of acting superior because he is wearing that same hated sweater. This reversal arrives like the punchline of a joke, and, indeed, the story is structured like an extended joke. After the first reversal there is a second. The priest sends young Roch to church to ask God for forgiveness. Instead of doing so, however, the boy prays to God "to send, as quickly as possible, moths that would eat up my Toronto Maple Leafs sweater" (Carrier 1979b, 81). The comic reversals tend to deflect attention from the serious issues raised by the ending.

The limiting of issues in "The Hockey Sweater" contributes to a portrait of hockey that is innocent. There is an interesting echo and reversal of Connors's "The Hockey Song" in this. In Connors, the foreground portrayal is a professional game that seems to channel the innocence of children on a corner rink; in Carrier, the foreground portrayal is of a children's game that seems to embody something essential about professional hockey (the Québécois version of the hockey myth).

Various other elements in "The Hockey Sweater" reinforce its innocent version of hockey. The small town setting creates a picture of a simpler and more innocent time. Take the famous opening lines: "The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church and the skating-rink—but our

real life was on the skating-rink” (Carrier 1979b, 77). The mention of long winters situates the story in a northern climate. The description of Ste. Justine implies not only its smallness but the tight-knit quality of life there. The listing of the church emphasizes how this is a traditional, morally conservative community. The time of the story—1946—reinforces the nostalgia evoked by this setting. So does the evocation of the Original Six era of the NHL. The rivalry between the Canadiens and the Maple Leafs was a defining feature of this era, which ran from 1942 to 1967, with one or the other winning the Stanley Cup seventeen times over the twenty-five years. The nostalgic effect of this evocation would have been particularly strong when the “The Hockey Sweater” first appeared, since the 1970s was a decade of rapid and—for many people—unsettling change not only in hockey but in the Canadian nation more generally.

The child-centred quality of the story also reinforces the innocent portrayal of hockey. I mentioned James Smith’s (1967) definition of children’s literature in the last chapter. The key element is that such literature should be “suitable for children”—a recurring phrase in criticism of the genre. What makes stories suitable is the limiting and shaping of content to protect the child reader from being too shocked or scared. As Hamida Bosmajian puts it in her remarkable study of holocaust children’s literature, serious matters in children’s literature are conveyed without “the critical gaze of the adult reader.” Instead, a “protective censoring and intentional limiting” of material is used in order to “spare the child” (Bosmajian 2002, xiv).

The point of view of “The Hockey Sweater” fits the children’s literature model very well. A common device in coming-of-age stories is retrospective narration, with a doubled point of view, so that the narrator sometimes recounts events as the child he or she once was but at other times as the adult looking back. The result is a dramatic irony in which the older self knows more than the younger self, with the reader sharing in the older self’s greater understanding. In adult coming-of-age stories, this irony tends to be quite harsh, as the voice of the older self indicates the bitter lessons he or she has had to learn

in growing up. Children's literature, however, as Bosmajian points out in the quote above, minimizes the critical gaze of the adult. Consistent with this idea, the dramatic irony in "The Hockey Sweater" is gentle. The opening lines are a good example. These lines are told in the voice of the older Carrier, but the obsession with hockey is clearly childlike. Was Carrier's "real life" as a boy really on the skating-rink? The older Carrier, looking back from 1979, knows that real life is more complicated than a child's love for hockey. Yet the voice of the older Carrier does not make critical judgments about the boy's obsession with hockey.

All of these elements limit consideration of potentially disturbing issues, and contribute to an innocent portrait of hockey that, read in the way "The Hockey Sweater" is usually read, remains largely unchallenged.

Lost in Translation

How is the story usually read? In isolation. Often in the children's book version. And, more often than not, in English. If you read the story in French, in its original context, a different story emerges.

Let me start with the title. *Le chandail de hockey* was not the story's original title. This title, used on the French version of the children's book and elsewhere, is a French translation of Sheila Fischman's English translation of the original title. The story's original title was "Une abominable feuille d'érable sur la glace." A literal translation of this would be "An Abominable Maple Leaf on the Ice." Fischman's translation has a universal—even mythic—quality to it that no doubt contributed to the success of the story in English Canada. Lost, however, is historical context implied by the original title.

Fischman also changed the title of the collection in which the story came. Her title is *The Hockey Sweater and Other Stories* even though the original collection was titled *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* (*The Children of the Man in the Moon*). The effect of this

change is to exaggerate the importance of “The Hockey Sweater” within the collection and to lose more context. The English edition of the collection also has a photograph of an old Toronto Maple Leafs sweater on the cover. Without the original title, most English-speaking readers, I suspect, would pick up this edition of the book with no idea that the sweater on the cover is supposed to be “abominable.” Talk about appealing to an anglophone audience!

Lost in Fischman’s English book title is the imaginative framework Carrier intended for the collection. The 1983 second French edition contains an afterword, “Comment j’ai écrit *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*,” in which Carrier explains the significance of the title. He chose the title, he explains, because the book is about his childhood, and he was of the generation of children who still believed in a man in the moon: “j’appartenais à la génération de ceux qui avaient cru à un bonhomme dans la lune” (Carrier 1983, 167). He laments the loss of such beliefs for their imaginative power, but also recognizes something inevitable, even necessary, in their passing. After he points out the man in the moon to his daughters, for example, they laugh at him, which demonstrates how children inevitably demolish (“démolissent”) the myths of their parents (166).

Carrier’s attitude towards the myth of the man in the moon sets the pattern for the book as a whole. Indeed, each of the twenty stories in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* explores some naïve belief, superstition, or prejudice that Carrier held as a child. There is a nostalgic tone to these explorations, but also a recurring sense that the beliefs had to be overcome for Carrier to grow into the adult he now is. Young Roch believes in ghosts, in the magic of Catholic saints’ medals, and in the demonic otherness of Protestants, Communists, Blacks, and Jews. All of these have to be overcome. Though not explicitly criticized within the story itself, Young Roch’s identification with Maurice Richard and the Montreal Canadiens in “Une abominable feuille d’érable sur la glace” appears within the sequence of other naïve beliefs needing to be overcome, which implies, by context, the need for skepticism towards it.

Les maudits Anglais sur la glace

The harsher edge of the original French story title implies that there is more to English-French conflict than the limited mention of it within the story might suggest. This will not be a surprise to those familiar with Québec history—or with Carrier’s other writings. French-English conflict—or, rather, the oppression of French Canadians by *les maudits Anglais*—is a constant theme in Carrier’s work. *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* is no exception. Though the seriousness of the conflict tends to be downplayed within “Une abominable feuille d’érable sur la glace” itself, this is not the case elsewhere in the collection.

Let me give just a few examples. “Grand-père n’avait peur de rien ni de personne” (“Grandfather wasn’t afraid of anything or anyone”—“Grandfather’s Fear” in Fischman’s translation) tells of how Carrier’s grandfather was so afraid of Protestants that he took detours to avoid a Protestant village during the courtship of his wife. “La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain” (“The Machine for Detecting Everything That’s American”) and “Une cheminée d’usine à la place de chaque arbre” (literally “A Factory Chimney in Place of Each Tree,” but translated as “Industry in our Village”) stress the economic vulnerability of Ste. Justine, in which natural resources have been bought up by anglophone outsiders and there is a lack of capital for economic development. And “Il se pourrait bien que les arbres voyagent” (“Perhaps the Trees do Travel”) tells of an old man who has never left the village and whose son insists on driving him to see the Plains of Abraham. The son is a young Québécois nationalist; he has returned to Ste. Justine from the city to show his father that he has made good and to challenge his father to broaden his nationalist awareness.

The portrayal of French-English conflict in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* directly echoes Carrier’s 1977 novel *Il n’y a pas de pays sans grand-père*. This novel, published just before the story collection, features a larger-than-life, seventy-plus-year-old protagonist,

Vieux-Thomas, who, despite his physical strength, has a superstitious fear of the *Anglais*. As a young man, Thomas avoided an *Anglais* village just as the grandfather does in “Grand-père n’avait peur de rien ni de personne” (Carrier 1977, 74). Vieux-Thomas’s story dramatizes how the English-speaking elites have used the Québécois as labourers while claiming ownership of the resources of Québec (50). For a long time, Thomas worked as a lumberjack, suffering the abuse of English-speaking bosses, until one winter he showed up and was informed that the company had enough workers—after which he and his family almost starved (81). His son, Dieudonné, performs a quixotic act of resistance, dumping a load of logs in a boss’s swimming pool, only to lose everything (59–60).

A recurring theme in Carrier has to do with how the irrational fear of the *Anglais* among French Canadians has led to irrational—and ineffective—acts of resistance. Real hope for a better future requires a more educated response. In *Il n’y a pas de pays sans grand-père*, this is embodied in the grandson, Jean-Thomas, who, in the present of the novel, is imprisoned for participating in a demonstration during a visit of Queen Elizabeth. Though the novel does not specify the date of the demonstration, Gilles Dorion writes that it was the “samedi de la matraque”—the Saturday of the batons—of October 10, 1964, in which a nationalist protest march was violently put down by the police (2004, 109). The relationship of Vieux-Thomas and Jean-Thomas is reminiscent of the father and son in “Il se pourrait bien que les arbres voyagent.” Jean-Thomas is always reading—especially about the history of Québec—and his searing account of the horrors inflicted by the English from the time of the Plains of Abraham is obviously intended not just for Vieux-Thomas but for the reader of the novel. Vieux-Thomas realizes at the end that educated young people like Jean-Thomas, who seem weak because they have “les bras de petites filles,” are in fact the inheritors of “la force des Ancêtres” (111). From such young people, the text argues, a more effective national resistance might emerge.

Is young Roch's emotional attachment to hockey in "The Hockey Sweater" an irrational response to English-French conflict? Two other famous portrayals of hockey in Carrier's work suggest that this might be so.

The first occurs in Carrier's first and best known novel, *La guerre, yes sir!*, which was published in 1968. *La guerre, yes sir!* is a dark comedy about the divide between Québec and the rest of Canada over participation in the Second World War. The novel opens with a lumberjack named Joseph who is so terrified that the *Anglais* will drag him off to "their goddamn war" that he chops off his own hand with an axe to render himself unfit for service. Later, his wife makes her way through the Ste. Justine-like village, where she encounters a group of boys playing street hockey. The boys block her way and try to look up her skirts. In her fury, Madame Joseph grabs a hockey stick and chases them away. She is about to continue her journey when she sees the puck the boys had been using. She picks it up. It turns out to be her husband's frozen, chopped-off hand (Carrier 1970, 25–26).

The hockey game in *La guerre, yes sir!* should serve as a warning that Carrier's view of hockey is not as simple and innocent as an isolated reading of "The Hockey Sweater" might suggest. Joseph's self-mutilation fits the pattern in Carrier in which francophone characters have irrational fears of the *Anglais* and react to these fears in irrational ways. That the response of the boys in the town to Joseph's self-mutilation is to play hockey with his chopped-off hand raises many questions. Is the game a product of the boys' innocence? Of their ignorance? Or is it an act of resistance? Could the game be an example of the resilience of the Québécois people—who are capable of turning even such a macabre act as Joseph's self-mutilation into a source of play? Or does the game point to a disconnect between hockey and the real-world political issues that the village cannot escape? It seems to me that there is a little bit of each of these possibilities in the game.

An even more telling example occurs in the second sequel to *La guerre, yes sir!, Il est par là, le soleil* (*Is it the Sun, Philibert?*), which was published in 1970. *Il est par là, le soleil* follows a young character, Philibert, from the community described in the first novel, as he tries to escape his narrow provincial upbringing and abusive father. Philibert goes to Montreal where, among other things, he attends a Canadiens game at the Montreal Forum and sees “the great Maurice Richard” in action. The description that follows is surreal. As Philibert watches, Richard crosses into the territory of the “*maudits Anglais* from Toronto.” Richard has superhuman strength and no Toronto player can stop him, until a Leafs player savagely trips him from behind, because the *Anglais* “couldn’t take it when a little French Canadian like Richard was better than them.” The referees do nothing; so Philibert jumps the boards and punches the offending Toronto player himself, knocking him out cold on the ice, and then returns to his seat to the applause of the crowd. Philibert feels a great camaraderie from his fellow French Canadians. Back on the ice, however, an injured Maurice Richard is in tears and moving “with unbearable awkwardness” (Carrier 1979a, 137–38).

Philibert is a tragic figure. His small town upbringing has not equipped him to succeed in a large modern city like Montreal. Instead, he lurches from one disaster to another, until, in the last scene of the novel, he crashes his car and bleeds to death. In his final moments, Philibert thinks he sees the sun, but what he sees is only a hallucination or the lights of an approaching vehicle coming too late to rescue him. This harshly ironic ending emphasizes the limitations of Philibert’s attempt to better his life. A similar limitation is evident in the portrayal of the hockey game. Philibert’s spontaneous act of resistance on behalf of Maurice Richard has no effect on his real life or the lives of anyone else (including Richard). The act—like hockey itself—simply disappears from his life afterwards. In this way, the hockey game in *Il est par là, le soleil* becomes a parable for the limitations of using hockey allegiance as a form of political action. Philibert’s punching of the Toronto Maple Leafs player is emotionally

satisfying for him and his fellow Montreal Canadiens fans, but it is, in the end, an empty gesture.

A key lesson in Carrier's work is that history dwarfs the seemingly nationalistic gesture of identifying with, or cheering for, a hockey team. This is made explicit in Carrier's 2001 memoir, *Le Rocket (Our Life with the Rocket)*, which, among other things, illustrates how Carrier's growth from childhood to adulthood happened in tandem with a lessening of his identification with Maurice Richard. After the so-called Richard Riot in 1955, for example, Carrier portrays himself as less interested in local news than "the French novels that are on the list of books forbidden by the church" (Carrier 2001, 219). When he and his compatriots graduate from boarding school, he writes: "We've become men. There's not one of us who still believes he's Maurice Richard" (251). In Montreal in the late-1950s, he has a chance, like his character Philibert, to see Richard play live, but, unlike Philibert, he declines to go. Instead, he goes to see Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, in Swedish without subtitles, with a girl named Marie (269).

Confess and Repent

A particularly troubling aspect of "The Hockey Sweater" has to do with the role of the priest. Think again about how the priest appears in the story. Why is the priest refereeing a pickup hockey game between children? Why does he not intervene to protect young Roch from the bullying of the other boys? When young Roch tries to get into the game, why is he so mean to him? And perhaps most disturbing of all: How does he get away with his behaviour?

Like the portrayal of French-English conflict, the implications of the priest's role tend to be downplayed when "The Hockey Sweater" is read in isolation. Read in the context of *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*, however, the story takes on a different character. Almost every story in the collection has some reference to the Catholic church, and the stories make clear that the church dominated every

aspect of life in Ste. Justine during Carrier's childhood. More tellingly, the church was the source of most of the naïve beliefs that Carrier needed to overcome.

According to *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*, Carrier's childhood was deeply marked by church-related supernatural beliefs. "La bombe atomique m'est-elle tombée sur la tête" ("The Shoemaker"), for example, tells of how Carrier as an eight-year-old was so obsessed with the idea that his home was haunted by the spirit of its former occupant, a shoemaker, that he has no memory of the end of the Second World War. Similarly, "Les fantômes du temps des feuilles mortes" ("The Month of the Dead") describes how every November 2nd the nun-teacher would lead the children through the graveyard to remind them of death. Every night of November the townspeople would go to the church to pray "to keep the souls of the dead from getting out of their coffins" (Carrier 1979b, 49). So intense was the focus on death that every gust of wind seemed "caused by the souls of the dead" and the village seemed taken over at night by wandering ghosts (50). Finally, most comically, "Le jour où je devins un apostat" ("The Day I Became an Apostate") tells of how young Roch, in a fit of devotion, decided he wanted to go to Rome to see the Pope. He learns that no bells ring in the parish over Easter because the bells fly to Rome on Good Friday and only return when the Pope has blessed them and sent them back on Easter Morning to mark Christ's resurrection. With this knowledge, Roch and his friend sneak into the church on Good Friday and tie themselves to the bells for a free trip to Rome to meet the Pope (43).

Each of these stories ends with Carrier overcoming his childhood naïveté. In the first, he reflects, as an adult, on the true horror of war. In the second, he reveals himself to be now living in Montreal where the November ghosts "no longer come to frighten children" (50). And in the third, when the bells stay in place, his youthful self is forced to return home, humiliated, where he renounces his Catholic faith—a precursor to Carrier's more skeptical attitude in adult life.

More sinister are the political beliefs promoted by the church. Never far below the surface in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* is the alliance between Maurice Duplessis, the premier of Québec, and the Catholic church. Duplessis was first elected in 1936 and remained premier, except for one term at the beginning of the Second World War, until his death in 1959. This era was later labeled *La Grande Noirceur* (*The Great Darkness*) because of the social conservatism, repression, and corruption that defined the Duplessis government. Duplessis was a strict Catholic and supported Catholic education and social services in the province, and in return, the church offered its support for him. Like the church, Duplessis held himself up as a protector of the traditional way of life of French Canadians, which meant French Canadians should remain farmers, working the land, and having lots of children (what the church called “la revanche des berceaux”—the revenge of the cradles). Charles Foran, in his 2011 biography of Maurice Richard, sums up the era like this: “Fiercely anti-Communist and sympathetic to fascism, the premier envisioned a French Canada for *les habitants*—knowing their place, and happy with it” (Foran 2011, 31).

The effect on young Roch of the Duplessis-Catholic church alliance is most evident in the story “Les bons and les méchants” (“The Good People and the Bad People”). In this story, Carrier, who is now twelve, idolizes Duplessis as the protector of the French Canadian people. This leads him to adopt the anti-Communism promoted by the premier and further promoted by the church. It also leads him, through other church-sponsored writings, to antisemitism. Because there are no Communists in Ste. Justine for young Roch to vanquish, he and a friend go looking for a Jew. They find one in a Jewish tailor in town. The story ends with Carrier and his friend going into the tailor’s shop to “contemplate the enemy” (Carrier 1979b, 134). They buy and return a jacket as an act of resistance. The ridiculousness of this act works, by comic inversion, to expose one of the most sinister beliefs from the church that Carrier had to overcome.

Skepticism about the Catholic church's use of hockey, as well as of the alliance between Duplessis and the church, is hinted at in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* but is made explicit in *Our Life with the Rocket*. Certain passages in this book directly revisit the imaginative terrain of "The Hockey Sweater." For example, the book reveals that the rink in the story is in fact the second rink constructed in Ste. Justine. The first was shut down by the local curate because he determined that it was encouraging lascivious behaviour between boys and girls. The girls would watch the boys play hockey. Sometimes boys and girls would skate around the ice together! (Carrier 2001, 6).

A key chapter in *Our Life with the Rocket* for Carrier's mature view of hockey is entitled "Can hockey remain the same when the landscape is changing?" This chapter describes the tensions in Québec during the postwar period culminating in the Asbestos Strike of 1949. This strike—often cited as a key inspiration for the Quiet Revolution in Québec in the 1960s—takes place at the same time as the events of "Les bons and les méchants" in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*; the details echoed in the memoir suggest that the strike was probably the trigger for Carrier's boyish anti-communism. As reported in *Our Life with the Rocket*, when news of the strike arrived at the boarding school Carrier was attending, his teacher, a priest, explained to the class that the strike "is inspired by Communist agitators in the pay of Moscow who are sabotaging the religion of the French Canadians," but, fortunately, "Duplessis will protect us" (Carrier 2001, 150). A key insight Carrier has at this point is that all the parties to the strike—the workers, Duplessis, and the priests of the church who controlled Carrier's education and supported Duplessis—were Montreal Canadiens fans. Duplessis even had season tickets and paraded Maurice Richard around with him at election time. Hockey, he learns, is not the social unifier it might at first glance appear to be, but rather a passionate recreation that can be mobilized for various ends by various social factions.

When read in context, then, the priest's involvement with the boys' game in "The Hockey Sweater" becomes an episode in a larger narrative about the dominance of the Catholic church in Québec when Carrier was a child. This narrative reveals that the church's concern for French culture was also (perhaps mainly) about maintaining its own power. So too was the church's involvement in hockey. In the story, the priest's cruel treatment of young Roch appears, on the surface, to be about protecting French Canadian identity. By enforcing allegiance to the Montreal Canadiens over the Toronto Maple Leafs, the priest seems to champion an identity that is French and Catholic over one that is English and Protestant. But there is a darker side to this. When the priest punishes young Roch for assuming the traditional privileges of an anglophone, the implication is that the boy has failed to know his place and to be happy with it. This, however, raises a question: Why is it wrong for a young French Canadian boy to seek to be the one who "makes the laws" rather than the one who must obey?

Just a Hockey Player?

The myth of the Rocket is a good example of how fantasy and reality combine in sports. Rocket Richard, the mythic hero who redresses the historical suffering of French Canadians, is an obvious fantasy projection. Yet the myth of the Rocket was not just conjured out of thin air; it required certain historical realities. If Richard had been a great athlete in another sport, he would not have attained the same status. Hockey was ripe for nationalist projection because of the identification French Canadians already had with the game. Richard's style of play was also important. It wasn't only that Richard had great success, but that his success was achieved with characteristics that French Canadians liked to see in themselves. The fact that Richard burst onto the hockey scene in the middle of the Second World War

also contributed. As Benoît Melançon points out, not only were French Canadians at that time struggling with increased feelings of threat caused by the war, but the Montreal Canadiens were at a low point in their history and in need of a saviour, preferably a franco-phone one, after the death of Howie Morenz in 1937 (2006, 186).

Carrier himself tends to downplay any larger social or political significance to “The Hockey Sweater.” His interview at St. Andrew’s College in 2012 is a good example:

I just tried to tell . . . a true little story that happened to a little boy in his little limited world dreaming of being in a bigger world than he knew at the time—and hockey was the vehicle to be bigger than he was. I wanted to be Superman, it didn’t work. I wanted to be Brit Bradford, it didn’t work. But hockey player, yes I could play hockey on the ice, so I was bigger than I was. I was feeling bigger than I was. (Carrier 2012, 3:45)

In downplaying the larger significance, Carrier follows the lead of Maurice Richard himself, who—despite being paraded about by Duplessis and having Union Nationale sympathies in the 1950s—tended to downplay any political intentions on his part. Richard’s comment, reported by Ken Dryden in his preface to Rick Salutin’s *Les Canadiens*, and quoted as the second epigraph to this chapter, is a characteristic disavowal.

Les Canadiens is worth a brief discussion here. Salutin’s play was commissioned for the 1976–77 season of the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. The idea was to write about how the Canadiens were “more than just a team”—that they were, in fact, the “virtual embodiment of Quebec” (Salutin 1977, 11). Salutin originally thought to write about the long line of great Canadiens players, but, as he researched, he realized that “the Rocket was *sui generis*. He was the Canadiens in some unique way” (18). The play, then, became about how French Canadians had used hockey—and especially the figure of Rocket Richard—as a way of dealing with their sense of being a conquered people. A key inspiration was a comment made to Salutin by a woman

in a Québec City bar: “The Canadiens—they’re *us*. Every winter they go south and in the spring they come home conquerors!” (14).

Then came November 15, 1976. On this day the first Parti Québécois government was elected in Québec, with a mandate to hold a referendum about separating Québec from Canada. Such a direct nationalist expression made Salutin rethink how the Canadiens did or did not embody the aspirations of French Canadians. He was also stunned by what happened in the Montreal Forum that same night, as reported to him by Ken Dryden. “The crowd,” Dryden reported, “was dead. . . . They seemed uninterested in the game. So, for that matter, did most of the Canadiens” (Salutin 1977, 18). When election results were flashed on the message board, however, “the crowd awoke,” and “[the] surer the success of the PQ . . . the less they cared about the game taking place before them” (19). What Salutin found that night (besides the ending of his play, which is based on this event) was that the Canadiens had become “just another hockey team” (20).

Did the Canadiens become “just another hockey team” with the election of the PQ in 1976? Or were they just one all along? Both are true, I think. Dramatic changes occurred in Québec between the death of Maurice Duplessis in 1959 and the election of René Lévesque. The French Canadian version of the hockey myth was fueled, in part, by the limited options for political action and nationalist expression in Québec before the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. As times changed, so did the place of hockey. As Salutin puts it, “the more Quebec expressed its national feelings [in other ways], the less it had to channel so much of its feeling through its hockey team” (1977, 20). Yet it is also true that the mythic status of the Canadiens, like the myth of the Rocket, was always an imaginary projection, and never really “real.”

Much of this chapter—and this book so far—has attempted to show how mythic responses to hockey depend upon a downplaying or elision of history. The nostalgic evocation of the Original Six era is a case in point. There is an irony in this nostalgia, since the “Golden

Age” of hockey was anything but a golden age from the point of view of the players. In the early days, professional hockey players had some freedom of movement and were sometimes the beneficiaries of bidding wars for their services. By the time of the Original Six, however, the NHL had monopoly control of the highest level of the game, and the owners used this monopoly to their own advantage. Whole books have been written about the NHL’s exploitation of players during this era—most famously, David Cruise and Alison Griffiths’ *Net Worth*. The response to the attempt by Ted Lindsay and Doug Harvey to organize a players’ association in 1957 is a telling example. Despite introducing their association with an announcement so uncontentious that “it could have been Lord Baden-Powell outlining the formation of the Boy Scouts,” Lindsay and Harvey were vilified (Cruise and Griffiths 1991, 92). Conn Smythe called the organizers traitors and communists and lamented “the intrusion of ‘New York lawyers’ and ‘Jews’” into the game (Cruise and Griffiths 1991, 95). Eventually, the association was crushed, setting back the quest for a more balanced relationship between owners and players for decades. The crushing of the association reflected the owners’ attitude to players. According to Michael McKinley, the owners during this time treated the players “like idiot servants, who should know enough to be grateful for their bounty” (2000, 228). The echo of Maurice Duplessis’s view that French Canadians should “know their place and be happy with it” is not an accident: the paternalistic attitude is the same.

Two aspects of the internal organization of the league have particular relevance for the Québécois version of the hockey myth. This first is that, by the time the league shrank to six teams in 1942, the league “had granted each franchise the right to own all players who lived within a 50-mile radius of the team’s home rink” (McKinley 2000, 148). This rule allowed the Montreal Canadiens first dibs on most of the best young French Canadian players—which contributed, in a big way, to both the team’s excellence and its francophone identity. The second aspect is that once a player was signed by a team

(often as a junior), he remained the property of the team for life. As a result, the only leverage a player could exercise in contract negotiations was to withhold services.

These aspects of the NHL organization reveal a painful irony: the mythic status of Maurice Richard and the Montreal Canadiens, as “the ‘porte-étendards’ of the embattled Québécois nation,” was a product, in part, of structures that severely limited the rights and opportunities of the players. Despite the nationalist aspirations projected upon the team, the Montreal Canadiens was (also) a business that exploited its players to profit its owners; and Maurice Richard, despite the aura of invincibility projected upon him by people like ten-year-old Roch Carrier, was (also) a worker with almost no workers’ rights, who was paid much less than his work was worth. As Richard’s body gave out and his career wound down, you have to wonder if he didn’t have a moment like the player in Al Purdy’s “Hockey Players,” in which he “stretched on the rubbing table / thinking of money in owners’ pockets” (Purdy 1996, 25).

Saint Maurice and the Pencil

By the time he published “The Hockey Sweater,” Roch Carrier knew the full arc of Maurice Richard’s career. He had also lived through the transformation of Québec after the election of Jean Lesage in 1960, the reduction of influence by the Catholic church, and the steps taken by his compatriots to become “maîtres chez nous.” He witnessed the election of the PQ in 1976. None of this knowledge, though, intrudes on the story. This is not a criticism of a story. Excluding this knowledge is how the story produces its nostalgic and traditional (conservative) portrait of hockey.

In *Our Life with the Rocket*, Carrier shows himself to be self-aware about the act of imagination involved in creating such a portrait. There is a telling passage in *Our Life with the Rocket* when Carrier admits that, despite what he believed about the invincibility of

Maurice Richard and the Montreal Canadiens when he was a boy, the dominant team of his childhood was, objectively, the Toronto Maple Leafs. The Leafs, in fact, were a dynasty team in the late 1940s; they won five Stanley Cups in the seven years between 1945 and 1951. The Canadiens, by contrast, went through the six consecutive years from 1947 to 1952 without winning a single championship. Despite this, Carrier wrote in “The Hockey Sweater” that “the Toronto team was regularly trounced by the triumphant Canadiens” (Carrier 1979b, 79). In *Our Life with the Rocket*, he says that when he wrote the story, he believed this claim to be true, so much so that he “didn’t even think of checking the facts.” Even now, he writes, as an old man who knows the historical record, it “hurts” to accept the facts (Carrier 2001, 156).

The significance of this historical discrepancy is spelled out in an important passage: “Such was the power of the Rocket: he captivated our childhood. We invented that Rocket, our dauntless and irreproachable hero. That’s what all the peoples of the earth do when they feel small in the face of a world that’s too big” (Carrier 2001, 156). In other words, the Rocket is an imaginary creation. Carrier the adult, as opposed to Carrier the child, understands the difference between the truths of imagination and the truths of history. Both have their uses. Which is why, for Carrier, overcoming his childhood identification with Maurice Richard does not diminish the inspirational value of the Rocket as myth. The Rocket is akin to a mortal who stormed Olympus, he writes, and his strength is “in the same category as that which drove Icarus to fly [and] Jules Verne to invent his moon rocket” (258). For that reason, despite having to recognize ultimately that Richard was only a man, Carrier ends his book by saying that he and his friends “will be better men because the Rocket crossed through our childhood” (292).

One last point about “The Hockey Sweater” and imagination. *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* is not just the portrait of a Québécois childhood but the portrait of a future writer—Roch

Carrier. Indeed, the book reveals the imaginative source material for many of Carrier's later works. The afterword to the second French edition makes the connection between writing and the collection's original title explicit. How Carrier learned to write, he recalls, is that his teacher wrote "i" on the blackboard and explained the sound the letter made like this: "c'est le bruit que fait la souris grise qui rit en voyant la scie du bonhomme dans la lune qui scie du bois: i-i-i-i-i." That night from his window, young Roch examined the moon. He saw the face and was sure he could hear the sound of the laughing mouse as the man up there sawed away: i-i-i-i-i (Carrier 1983, 166).

The final stories in *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune* emphasize Carrier's later vocation as a writer. A good example is "Les médailles flottent-elles sur la mer?" ("Do Medals Float on the Ocean?"). In this story, Carrier is now a young adult heading to France to go to school. For protection his mother sews saints' medals into the lining of his coat. This makes him remember a debate he had overheard once about religion and education. Which was more important for the Québécois? One of Carrier's father's friends gives the example of two men, one with "a load of medals around his neck," and the other with "a pencil." The two men fall down a well. The man with the medals sinks to the bottom and is lost. The pencil, however, floats. When people see it, they think, "Arthur fell down the well"—and rescue him. This helps Carrier decide his future: "If all the saints on the medals my mother had sewn inside my jacket were powerless," he writes, "from now on I could count on my pencil" (Carrier 1979b, 140).

Carrier's childhood belief in Maurice Richard is akin to his childhood belief in the magic of saints' medals. Both have to be left behind for him to grow into the man he becomes. But because Carrier is a writer, he doesn't entirely leave such beliefs behind, just as he never entirely leaves behind his childhood. Years later, Carrier picks up his pencil and writes the story "The Hockey Sweater."

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6

Haunted by Bill Spunski Roy MacGregor's *The Last Season*

I . . . was experiencing a hostile form of ecstasy that I wanted to savor as long as possible.

—Dave Schultz, *The Hammer*

The 1970s were years of dramatic change in hockey. The National Hockey League (NHL) expansion from six teams to twelve in 1967 transformed the balance of Canadian and American teams and led to a much lamented “watering down” of talent from the Original Six. The difference between established and expansion franchises led to many lopsided games. Rough play—epitomized by the teams from Boston and Philadelphia, the so-called Big Bad Bruins (winners of the Stanley Cup in 1970 and 1972) and the Broad Street Bullies (winners in 1974 and 1975)—led to anguish about the direction of the game. The founding of a rival league, the World Hockey Association, in 1972, further transformed the landscape, and led to yet a further dilution of talent.

The decade’s pivotal hockey event was the 1972 Summit Series between the Soviet Union and Canada. Team Canada’s comeback victory in this series has become perhaps the most celebrated event in

Canadian hockey history, yet, until Paul Henderson's golden goal in Game Eight, the series was widely perceived in Canada to be a disaster. With the golden goal, depression turned to elation, and Canadians went into a frenzy of "self-congratulation" about the triumph of the "Canadian virtues" of "individualism, flair, and most of all, character" over the machine-like Soviets (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 263). All this self-congratulation, however, could not erase the doubts about the "superiority" of Canadian hockey the series created. There was also anguish about the manner in which Team Canada achieved its victory. Faced with an unexpectedly strong opponent and the possibility of a humiliating defeat, the Canadians resorted to physical intimidation in order to win. More than once, their behaviour crossed the line into goonery. A number of commentators decried these tactics. The *Globe and Mail's* editorial pointed out that "the spectacle came to involve Canada's honour, often in unpleasant ways" and that there were "ruthless tactics" because "Canada's superiority had to be asserted at all costs" (cited in Hoppener 1972, 93). John Robertson in *The Montreal Star* summarized the message of the series as "anything goes in word, gesture or antics as long as we score more goals than the other guy" (cited in Hoppener 1972, 95–96).

The ugly side of winning was perhaps best illustrated by Bobby Clarke's slash on Valeri Kharlamov in Game Six. At the time, Team Canada was in a do-or-die situation, needing to win three games in a row to salvage the series. Kharlamov was the most skilled Soviet player. In the video of the slash, you can see that Clarke trails Kharlamov into the Team Canada zone and, after Kharlamov has passed off the puck, takes a two-handed swing with his stick. The stick hits Kharlamov on the outside of the skate, shattering from the force, and breaks Kharlamov's ankle. After the play is called, other Canadian players go after Kharlamov, as if he had been the one at fault, and Foster Hewitt, in his play-by-play, seems surprised that Clarke has been assessed a penalty. It's as if the penalty call is just one more of many made against the Canadians by the biased referees. Kharlamov,

after the slash, tried to play on in the game and series but was not the same—and this contributed to Canada’s comeback victory.

Over the years, for those who have tried to advance the counter-narrative to the celebration of the Summit Series, Bobby Clarke’s slash has become emblematic of the darker side of Team Canada’s play. Jason Blake calls the slash an “on-ice nadir” of the series and the embodiment of “winning ugly” (2010, 156). Michael Buma sees the slash as “the ultimate expression” of the myth of Canadian manhood acquired through hockey violence (2012, 186). That Clarke went on to become the Captain of the Philadelphia Flyers, and to lead them to their Stanley Cups in 1974 and 1975, reinforced the perception that violence in hockey had reached new heights and that extreme violence was becoming normalized.

This is the environment responded to by the first literary hockey novel, Roy MacGregor’s *The Last Season*, which was published in 1983. MacGregor, over the years, has established himself as one of Canada’s most distinguished and versatile writers about hockey. A prolific journalist, he is also the co-author of *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*, with Ken Dryden, in 1989, *Home Team: Fathers, Sons and Hockey* (shortlisted for the Governor General’s Literary Award for Non-Fiction in 1996), and the Screech Owls young adult novel series (1995–2015), with their distinctive blend of youth hockey and mystery, which have sold approximately two million copies (Smythe 2015).

MacGregor grew up in Huntsville, Ontario, which he describes as “one of those typical, somewhat isolated small towns in Canada” (Jenkinson 1998, 1). As a boy growing up, he was more-or-less forced to play sports or else be taken for “suspect.” As a result, he played “hockey all winter” and “lacrosse and baseball and a little bit of football” at other times and was good enough to play on the Huntsville All Stars in most sports (Jenkinson 1998, 1–2). By coincidence, he was also born in 1948, the same year as Bobby Orr, and since Orr’s home town of Parry Sound was just down the highway from Huntsville, MacGregor played a few times against the young phenom—an

experience he draws on in *The Last Season* (Jenkinson 1998, 7; Smith 2013). Despite all the sports in his life, MacGregor's main love from early on was writing, and he fell into writing about hockey rather by accident. As he put it in Jenkinson's profile of him for CM Magazine:

A lot of sports don't interest me, and I'm not a jock. . . . I like to play lots of sports, but to be a fan, no. I'm not much interested. I love hockey in an entirely different way than as a sport. . . . It's a cultural phenomenon rather than an athletic phenomenon, and, to me, studying the number one game of a country is every bit as valid as studying the politics of a country. (Jenkinson 1998, 4)

The Last Season began as a book about the Polish immigrants who worked in the lumber industry in the area where MacGregor was born. He thought to write the book originally as a "political novel" but scrapped that idea partway through the first draft and turned his protagonist into a hockey player (Jenkinson 1998, 4). That player is Felix Batterinski, an NHL "goon" in the 1970s. Batterinski grows up in the small northern Ontario town of Pomerania and ends up winning two Stanley Cups with the Philadelphia Flyers during their Broad Street Bullies heydays. As his career winds down in the early 1980s, he goes to Finland to work as a player-coach. The novel portrays Batterinski's last year of hockey and life, intercut with the story of his formative years and his time in the NHL. Between the seven sections of the novel are excerpts from a fictional article by a journalist named Matt Keening. These excerpts comment on various aspects of the story and illustrate the role of journalists in mythologizing sports figures like Batterinski.

Overall, *The Last Season* offers a strongly critical response to the hockey myth in Canada, inspired by, and responding to, the changes of the 1970s. This response is sharpened by parallels between Felix Batterinski and Scott Young's Bill Spunski, as well as parallels to the real-life story of Dave Schultz, the most famously violent of the Broad Street Bullies. In a private correspondence, MacGregor told me that he was not aware of the parallels to Bill Spunski when he wrote *The*

Last Season, nor had he read Schultz's autobiography, *The Hammer*. He did follow the exploits of the Bullies, however, as hockey fans did at the time, and attended the famous January 11, 1976 game (recounted in the middle of *The Last Season*) as a journalist. In some ways, I think, MacGregor's lack of direct intention to echo Schultz and Young makes the echoes even more powerful. The echoes show how deeply engrained in hockey culture is the ideal of a hockey player represented by Bill Spunaska. The echoes of Schultz point to MacGregor's deep knowledge of the psychology of violence—as well as of the more sordid aspects of the professional game.

Small Town Gothic

Felix Batterinski and Bill Spunaska are both big hard-hitting defensemen from Polish-immigrant families. They both start playing in small northern towns and achieve success greater than their more skilled peers because of their competitive drive. Bill's hockey success, as we saw in chapter 4, is equated with his acquiring Canadian identity. Felix, too, has a brief moment as a Canadian hero—but the briefness of the moment points to the ironic way in which the echoes between Bill and Felix occur throughout *The Last Season*.

Take the novel's portrayal of Felix's small town roots. The small towns that figure in the hockey myth tend to descend from the one depicted (and gently made fun of) by Stephen Leacock. "Mariposa," he writes in the Preface to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, is based on real towns all across Canada, where there are "the same square streets and the same maple trees and the same churches and hotels, and everywhere the sunshine of the land of hope" (1994, x). Combined with the northern environment, such towns provide the spiritual heart of hockey—the corner rink—as well as the set of values popularly attributed to both hockey players and Canadians, that "healthy, hearty, virtuous" race described by Robert Grant Haliburton in 1869 and further defined in 1902 by Ralph Connor, with

his portrayal of muscular Christian hockey players in *Glengarry School Days*. Roch Carrier's Ste. Justine, as we saw in the last chapter, evokes similar characteristics in a Québec context.

The small northern town from which Felix Batterinski comes, however, is far from a "land of hope." Pomerania, as Matt Keening puts it in the excerpt that begins *The Last Season*, is "where a couple of hundred beaten Poles came following their failed revolution of 1863. And here they remained defeated. The local economy is simple and double-edged, lumbering or welfare, each compensating the other. Opportunity is equally simple: it lies elsewhere" (MacGregor 2012, 9). Beyond its poverty and lack of economic opportunities, Pomerania is described as plagued by ethnic division (Irish versus Polish), violence, drinking, sexism, and superstition. At the beginning of the novel, Felix has already had to move to a larger town, Vernon, to play midget hockey. When he returns to Pomerania he is shocked by the difference: "Vernon had a covered arena with artificial ice; Pomerania had an outdoor rink, ice pebbles and spring muck" (18). Felix feels no nostalgia for the old outdoor rink. Instead, the lack of amenities reinforces for him how impoverished and backwards Pomerania is. "Here it was dark and lonely and threatening," he says, "like a wolf might burst out of the bush at any corner. In Vernon, coming home from a late practice, it was like moving in perpetual daylight. . . . But here, here there was nothing" (38).

The Last Season paints a particularly grim portrait of the northern climate of Pomerania. Rather than being associated with a healthy and virtue-inspiring outdoor life, the climate is associated with isolation and lack of opportunity. When Felix returns at age eighteen, for example, he has a particularly stark impression of the place: "I looked around Pomerania and saw water to haul and wood to chop, freezing all winter, slapping flies all summer, rotting turnips and soft carrots and wizened-up potatoes from February on, disaster when you missed your moose" (141). He goes on to observe that the summer economy is mainly about "American tourists and camper

trailers” and “rich, blond-haired kids” passing through on their way to summer camps in Algonquin Park (141). He does build muscle that summer helping his father work in the bush, but this means enduring mosquitoes that were “like a second shirt” (142). He tries to help his father with the live bait business that provides him with “four out of every five dollars” each year, but even that is thwarted by his father’s self-sabotaging attachment to Batcha, the second wife of Batterinski’s late grandfather, who objects to the sound of customers’ cars coming down the Batterinski road (142–45). Batcha, as we’ll see, is something like the tutelary spirit of the place.

McGregor seems particularly attuned to the class divisions in a small town. As I pointed out in my analyses of Ralph Connor and Scott Young, poverty in the small towns of the hockey myth tends to be genteel; the emphasis, instead, is on social unity and how every boy can become a Canadian man through hockey. Pomerania, however, is akin to the impoverished neighbourhoods from which the protagonists in Margaret Laurence or Alice Munro tend to come. Like a protagonist in Munro or Laurence, Felix is driven to succeed by his family’s poverty, and his choice of hockey is dictated by what seems available (he doesn’t show any special love for the game). An early episode has Tom Powers, the captain of the midget team (for players aged sixteen and seventeen), making fun of Batterinski’s ragged underwear. As a result, at the first team practice, in a scene reminiscent of Bill Spuniska and many other sport literature heroes, Batterinski devastates the prima donna captain with a body check—thus hinting, among other things, at the source of his intense drive to succeed.

The Violent Drive to Succeed

The poverty of the Batterinski family is one source for Felix’s determination to succeed as a hockey player. Yet, as the description above

suggests, everybody in Pomerania is poor—including Felix’s equally talented friend Danny Shannon. What distinguishes Felix from Danny?

The Last Season doesn’t answer the question definitively. It does, however, offer evocative clues. One has to do with Felix’s embarrassment about his father’s backcountry, Polish-inflected speech—how he says “dem” for “them” and “tink” for “think” (13). Felix associates hockey success with erasing these marks of difference from his identity. Another hint has to do with his self-consciousness about his pimples. The novel’s first section emphasizes Felix’s feelings of sexual inadequacy and ends with an episode in which he, Danny, and two other teammates sneak into the Vernon arena to have sex with a girl named Maureen. Maureen receives the other boys favourably but rejects Felix (68). Felix responds with fury. He stalks off alone and, still in a rage, trashes a parked car, after which he feels “quiet and calm” (70).

The difference between Danny and Felix is summed up by their coach, Sugar Bowles. Both Danny and Felix have talent, he explains, but only Felix “want[s] it” enough to make it (58). Ironically, Danny’s lack of desire is connected to how well he succeeds in the limited world of Pomerania. Danny has what Felix’s father calls “the damn sneaky Irish charm” (18). He is a popular teenager, a partier and self-styled lady’s man, who “became the centre, no matter where he was” (19). He succeeds at courting a girl named Lucy Dumbrowski, quits school at sixteen, and gets married. While Felix is rising through the hockey ranks, Danny has two children with Lucy, works at the local mill, and rises to the position of foreman. By this point he has become the classic big fish in a little pond—literally big, in the case of his weight, which balloons from his drinking and overeating.

In later years Felix believes that Danny peaked too soon, at thirteen instead of thirty: “All that curly hair, nice clear skin, all that charm, the big smile, the great walk . . . what happened to it?” (107). Sugar believes that the root of Danny’s behaviour is fear. The text suggests that each of these explanations has some truth in it. Because

Danny gets attention, status, and sex so easily from his “Irish charm,” he doesn’t need to strive for other success. Yet Danny’s claim to “care less” about anything beyond Pomerania is clearly a defense mechanism (141). There is a telling moment when Felix returns in 1976, at the height of his career, and Danny has reverted to using the word “dem.” By this point, Felix understands, Danny is in a state that is “[as] bad as Poppa” (261).

The Last Season gives both negative and positive explanations for Felix’s competitive drive. Partly, the text suggests, he is driven by his sense of being on “the edge” of an already marginal community. Partly, though, he is egged on by the positive reinforcement he receives. After he crushes a small Parry Sound winger, then pummels the larger player who tries to come to the winger’s defense, he is aware of the spectators who become “[silent] with admiration” (29). Later, Sugar Bowles says that his actions “turned [the game] around for us” (31). Sugar tells Felix he could make the NHL if he maximized his talent for rough play. If he does this, Sugar says, “you won’t have kids dreaming about you . . . but you sure as shit’ll have the general managers” (58).

A similar combination of negative and positive explanation is described by one of the NHL’s most famous enforcers, Dave “The Hammer” Schultz, who is mentioned in *The Last Season* as a teammate of Batterinski’s on the Philadelphia Flyers. Schultz describes how he grew up in rural Saskatchewan “on the thin edge of poverty,” a timid boy, not good at school, who was too shy as a teenager to date girls (Schultz 1981, 23, 28). Hockey provided “a sense of accomplishment” (29). Because he had talent, he was channeled into the junior system. By the time he got to Major Junior, he thought of himself as a fast-skating winger who could score goals. He had never, until this point, had a fight. Then one night a brawl broke out and before he could get out of the way an opposing player knocked him out with a punch. Both he and the opposing player got five minutes for fighting. This taught him “the jungle law of hockey,” which was that he would not be able to survive as a “pacifist” (31).

After his introduction to hockey's "law of the jungle," Schultz became a fighter step by step. First, he began to initiate fights in junior. The reaction he received made him realize "that goal-scorers weren't the only ones to get recognition" (35). Then he was drafted in the fifth round by the Philadelphia Flyers. As a low draft pick, he needed a way to distinguish himself from other aspiring players to make the NHL. Fighting and intimidation turned out to be his ticket. While in the ECHL, he began "to develop a rational frame of reference for such activity," partly based on the fact that his coaches approved and partly based on the attention it brought him (36). Almost overnight, fighting made him "a celebrity" (37). The adulation he received encouraged him to fight more; and as fans, media, and coaches began to expect him to fight, he felt he had "no choice but to oblige them" (38). He moved up to the AHL in 1970–71, where "my coaches encouraged the bad guy image I was projecting because they felt it was good for the team—I protected the small players—and it was good box office" (39). He set the AHL single season penalty record, and was rewarded with a promotion to the NHL, where, in 1974–75, he set the NHL single season penalty record that still stands today (472 penalty minutes).

The real-life Schultz and the fictional Batterinski, then, have similar outward motivations: both want to escape impoverished environments, and both receive positive reinforcement for their behaviour. More than outward motivation is required to become a goon, however. The mystery of characters like Batterinski and Schultz is not just about what drives them to compete so hard—Bill Spun-ska, after all, competes hard—but what drives them to employ extreme violence. *The Last Season* implies that Felix has inner urges that can't be accounted for by the outward circumstances of his life. Take, for example, his need to arrive at the rink first: "It was not a matter of trying to be first. I *had* to be first" (21). The italicized "*had*" suggests a compulsion in Felix. Contrast this with how *Scrubs on Skates* associates Bill Spun-ska's getting to the rink first with his sterling personal character. Bill "tries hard" but Felix "has to."

Felix's inner urges respond to hard physical contact—especially fighting. The first Parry Sound incident is preceded by him being embarrassed by Bobby Orr. Sugar Bowles benches him until his need to hit something becomes “[bad]” and, when he gets back on the ice, he immediately crushes the smaller player, after which he feels “fine” (MacGregor 2012, 15). The parallels with sexual frustration and release are, I think, pretty obvious. The text also implies that when he fights, Felix enters a state of relaxed alertness akin to the athlete's Holy Grail, The Zone:

In a fight, I relaxed. I could sit in the dressing room in the hours before a game and twitch so bad sometimes a foot would jump right off the floor. But when my defenseman charged I was aware even of my own breathing. He came in flailing, but to me it was like watching someone swim toward me doing the crawl. (30)

Even late in his career, in Finland, when he is filled with doubts about many aspects of his career, Batterinski experiences calmness and a heightened sense of being alive during hits and fights (see 111 and 183).

Felix's psychological response implies that a deep, largely unconscious need is satisfied by the violence. This suggests that violence, for him, has a purpose beyond having a career and winning hockey games. Is that purpose a sinister one?

Interestingly, Dave Schultz reports a psychological response to fighting that is similar to the one experienced by Felix. In the run up to his first real fight, he describes feeling “a hostile form of ecstasy” which continues during the fight itself. “To be honest,” he writes, “the sensation of my knuckles colliding with his cheek made me want to jump for joy” (Schultz 1981, 34). Later he describes how the adrenaline rush of hard physical contact leads to a desire to fight, which in turn makes the adrenaline rush even stronger:

By the time we collided my juices were flowing very fast. As we parted from the original collision I realized that I wanted to pick this guy apart and I started swinging. . . . I was on a terrific high,

psychologically, and felt just as strong physically. Once I started landing the punches to his head my nervousness dissipated. (36)

Though Schultz goes on to characterize the mental state he gets in during a fight as “craziness,” the overall features of what he describes are similar to MacGregor’s descriptions of Batterinski. In both cases, fighting creates a sense of power that is connected to unconscious forces over which the players have only partial control. Schultz makes this explicit when he writes that the feeling he got made him feel like “the Incredible Hulk” (36).

The psychological responses of Schultz and Batterinski hint at an important aspect of the debate about violence in hockey. The literature about the evolution of combat sports tends to contain two quite distinct theories. One theory, perhaps most influentially articulated by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process*, sees in the evolution of sports like hockey, football, and boxing a gradual development of rules that reflected the imperatives of a more civil society. Early combat sports like jousting were extremely violent, often leading to fatalities, but, as sports developed, codes of conduct were introduced to “restrain” the competition, so that victory became less dependent on “direct physical force.” In this evolutionary process, Elias sees a parallel to the evolution of a social order less dependent on raw violence for its maintenance and more dependent on “civilizing” structures like the rule of law (Elias 2000, 157–58).

In opposition to this theory is the claim made by theorists like Jean-Marie Brohm that sports are a way of perpetuating, by other means, the violent underpinnings of Western society. According to Brohm, sports are training grounds in the core values of patriarchal capitalism, in which players and spectators both are conditioned to be consumers and capitalists, with the emphases on virility, symbolic and physical violence, chauvinism, racism, and sexism that go along with this (Brohm 1978, 15). Michael Novak (1988) clearly encountered versions of this critique as he wrote *The Joy of Sports*, because at one point he feels the need to defend his love of violent sports. “Say, if

you like, that men *ought* to be less primitive, less violent, less mesmerized by pain and injury,” he writes. “Say, if you like, that football dramatizes what is worst in the human breast and ought, like pornography, to be refused public benediction. Football makes conscious to me part of what I am. And what football says about me, and about millions of others like me, is not half so ugly as it is beautiful” (xv).

Does hockey nurture a violent streak in Felix that might otherwise have remained unexpressed? Or does hockey allow him to vent his violent urges within the relatively safe space of the hockey rink? Is goon-like behaviour a violation of the code that governs violence in hockey? Or is it only an expression of the violence inherent in the kind of intense competition that is a necessary part of the game?

The Last Season does not offer simple answers to these questions. What it does do, however, is demonstrate how difficult it is to separate the “beauty” of hockey from its “ugliness.” Hockey—like other physical sports—has a built-in tension between the thrill of a combat-like activity and the risk of real injury or death, just as it has a tension between the desire to win and the requirement to restrain that desire within certain rules. How to maintain the thrill while keeping the risk of ugliness at an acceptable level is a perennial issue. The desire to win inevitably creates moments of ugliness. In a physical sport like hockey, as Felix Batterinski’s story illustrates, these ugly moments sometimes take the form of extreme violence.

A Man’s Game Revisited

The hockey myth posits a mutually reinforcing relationship between manhood and the game. Not only does it take a man to play hockey, the myth suggests, but playing hockey makes a man. Both senses are implied by Gordie Howe’s 1950 definition of hockey as “a man’s game.” Bill Spunski, as chapter 4 argues, embodies the masculinity celebrated by the myth. Gruneau and Whitson summarize what the myth promises as follows:

At its best [the myth's] model of masculinity defines the real man as a decent person of few words, but with a powerful sense of his own abilities and the toughness and physical competence to handle any difficulties that might arise; a man that people respect and look up to but don't dare cross; a man who generally respects the rules that govern social life, but knows how to work outside them if necessary. (1993, 191)

Because Bill tends towards a muscular Christian-like version of hockey's manhood, he doesn't work outside the rules. Felix, on the other hand, is more like real life enforcers such as Dave Schultz—an explicit rule breaker. In this he has affinities with Benny Moore, the goon figure in *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp*. Still, Felix's overall identity conforms to the traditional masculinity described by Gruneau and Whitson. He even echoes, with approval, Gordie Howe's assessment of hockey: "A long time ago I decided that hockey was *the* masculine game" (MacGregor 2012, 80).

Much of *The Last Season* is devoted to exploring the limits of the masculine identity promised by this "man's game." For example, the novel emphasizes that Felix eventually becomes a prisoner of his own reputation. At first, establishing a "rep" is an important part of his success. A key moment is a gruesome fight in Junior A which turns him into the anti-Bobby Orr: "Bobby Orr would get the cover of *MacLean's*. I almost got the cover of *Police Gazette*" (130). From this point on, he understands that his role is to "appear superhuman to the rest of the team." He aims to appear so beyond human weakness that he becomes the "ultimate equipment" (131). A subtle but significant effect of this mentality is that Felix begins to address himself as "Batterinski," a third person character outside of himself. This signals what the price of such a reputation is: the alienation of yourself from yourself.

Sure enough, once Batterinski's rep is made, it takes on a life of its own. At one point during a fight in the NHL, he sees fans pounding the glass and realizes that he "was not Batterinski. *They* were"

(234). Around this time, he understands that his reputation has put demands on him that are out of his control: “Batterinski had created the rep and the rep was destroying him” (248). The demands spill out into the rest of his life. During a visit to Pomerania, he is goaded into fighting by an obnoxious drunk in a bar. He pummels the guy, and Danny calls him “a fuckin’ hero.” But Felix knows “otherwise” (273).

A reputation dependent on a superhuman appearance is, of necessity, fragile. The first sign of weakness undoes the appearance. This happens to Felix when “a goddamn college punk” decks him with a sucker punch during an exhibition game (284). After this his reputation and career rapidly fall apart.

Dave Schultz reports a similar real-life trajectory in *The Hammer*. At first, he writes, his coaches encouraged his “bad guy image” because it protected the smaller players (Schultz 1981, 39). Once his reputation was established, however, it meant that he had “a reputation to *uphold*”—which meant increased expectations that he would fight: “I became the anti-hero of hockey, the barroom brawler who rarely failed to satisfy the fans’ insatiable lust for violence” (80). At the height of his powers, he lived in dread that he might lose the aura of invincibility he needed to succeed. This happened in an incident similar to the fictional one described in *The Last Season*, when an unknown rookie from the Atlanta Flames, aided by the clumsiness of a linesman, got in an unexpected punch and broke his cheekbone (148–49). The injury wasn’t the problem, Schultz writes; the problem was the damage to his reputation, which encouraged players “who had once feared me . . . [to] think it appropriate to exploit my potential weakness” (150). His career spiraled downward quickly thereafter.

The stories of Batterinski and Schultz demonstrate an uncomfortable truth: because it depends so much on the denial of weakness—a denial, even, of the male body itself (which becomes just “equipment”)—the manhood promised by the man’s game, while appearing powerful, is, in fact, fragile.

Not a Ladies' Man—or a Father

Another uncomfortable truth illustrated by *The Last Season* is that the identity associated with hockey does not travel well outside the rink. The hockey myth implies that the game makes a boy into a man not only on the ice but off. The roles of boyfriend, husband, and father are fundamental to traditional masculinity. There is, then, a painful irony in the fact that the pursuit of hockey success can turn young men into lousy boyfriends, husbands, and fathers. Even if players manage to resist the more character-damaging temptations of the hockey world, there is still the basic problem of the lifestyle. In *The Hammer*, Schultz writes plaintively about the male-centred nature of the Philadelphia Flyers during the heyday of the Bullies, led by captain Bobby Clarke. “Fighting the battle was the be-all and end-all of [Clarke’s] existence. He wanted our team to be a *team*. As far as we were concerned, the wives were a fact of life, but they were to be segregated into the under-class section” (Schultz 1981, 50). Ken Dryden describes a more enlightened culture around the 1970s Montreal Canadiens, but he still recognizes that even the most committed players in hockey end up isolated from their families during the season. The demands of the season, Dryden writes, are such that no matter how hard you try to stay connected, ultimately, “your family learns to cope . . . without you” (Dryden 1989, 113).

One of the most heart-breaking aspects of *The Last Season* has to do with Felix’s attempt to parlay his hockey success into success in everyday life. Remember that part of what fuels Felix’s competitiveness is his awkwardness around the opposite sex. By the time he arrives in Finland as a player/coach, he is a thirty-six-year-old man, a winner of two Stanley Cups, with the extensive sexual experience you might expect in an unmarried professional hockey player. As he puts it, “There are names and faces and rear ends I no longer recall in all twenty-one National Hockey League cities” (MacGregor 2012, 81). Yet when he meets Kristiina, a contemporary Finnish woman, he reverts to the pimply-faced small town boy he once was. He is

“bashful” about Kristiina’s casual nudity (116) and prudish about sex itself. In Helsinki, he reverts to the old-fashioned, male protector stereotype, arguing that the kind of pornography they encounter should be banned to protect “women” and “kids.” Kristiina retorts that she doesn’t need protecting (89). Felix’s limited repertoire when it comes to relationships leads him to express his attraction to Kristiina by blurting out that he “loves her” and asking her to marry him. Her refusal to take his proposal seriously contributes to his angst at the novel’s end.

For Felix, as for the players in Al Purdy’s “Hockey Players,” hockey is less a preparation for life than an escape from life. At a number of points the novel contrasts the simplicity of the game with the complexity of life. Felix is most comfortable in his hockey uniform, because the uniform implies the ability to resolve events simply and directly through action. Just before his teenaged sexual humiliation with Maureen, for example, he wishes that he had his uniform on (68). When Kristiina talks about the complexities of her love life, he thinks “If she were only in hockey uniform I would hit. But I am helpless here. Talk—always goddamn *talk*” (196). The game itself is an opportunity to not think: “what I need to be thinking about [on the ice] is absolutely nothing—my mind as clear as the next play” (297). Though there can be psychological benefits to this kind of clearing of the mind (which writers like Bill Gaston have associated with the Buddhist state of enlightenment), it has to be part of something more than the narrow hockey world experienced by Felix Batterinski for it to help someone fulfil traditional masculine roles away from the rink.

Canada’s Hero?

One of the most fascinating passages in *The Last Season* takes place at the beginning of the fifth section. This section is dated January 11, 1976, and it tells of events during and after the Super Series ’76 game

between the Philadelphia Flyers and the touring Soviet Red Army team. Super Series '76 was the first exhibition series in which teams from the Soviet Championship League toured North America to play against teams from the NHL. By the game of January 11, 1976, the two touring teams had won most of the time, with the Red Army team being undefeated in three previous games. Since the Flyers were the reigning Stanley Cup champions, considerable pride was at stake in the final contest. As it turns out, the Flyers dominated, outshot the Red Army team 38-13, and won the game 4-1.

The account in *The Last Season* makes reference to some famous elements from the historical game: the hit by Eddie Van Impe on Valeri Kharlamov, the temporary walkout by the Soviets, and so on. The primary focus, however, is on how the game temporarily transformed the Flyers from the most hated team in hockey into national heroes: "Schultz, Kelly, Dupont, Saleski and Batterinski were suddenly white knights riding out to meet the forces of evil" (MacGregor 2012, 229). Felix's father, who previously has been ashamed of Felix's on-ice violence, phones from Pomerania to cheer him on (230). And Felix himself sees his derogatory nickname, Canucklehead, which opposing fans had previously used to taunt him, turned into a term of endearment: "CANUCKLEHEAD JA, SOVIETS NYET!" reads a sign in the arena (229).

Nationalist sentiments in 1976 were heightened by awareness of parallels between the Super Series and the Summit Series of 1972, when, as Felix puts it, Paul Henderson "salvaged Canada's pride . . . with a lousy 34 seconds left" (229). The manhandling of the Red Army team, then, was taken as a vindication of Canadian hockey. Tim Burke, writing in the *Montreal Gazette*, summarized this point of view: "The Flyers salvaged Canada's pride in her national sport with a near perfect hockey masterpiece" (quoted in Flyers History n.d.).

Two weeks later, as Felix notes, all is forgotten (MacGregor 2012, 234). Felix himself has an uneasy feeling about change in the air, which turns out to be prophetic: he is traded to the Los Angeles Kings on January 29. This trade—which parallels the trade of Dave Schultz

to the Kings after his contribution to the two Stanley Cups in Philadelphia—highlights the ephemeral nature of heroic status, as well as the sordid side of the business of hockey (Felix also has his money stolen by an agent). Felix contrasts the cold-blooded nature of the trade with the band of brothers rhetoric advanced by the Flyers' coach, Fred (the Fog) Shero. Before the Stanley Cup winning game of 1974, Shero wrote on the dressing room blackboard: "*Win today and we will walk together forever*" (235). A year and a half later, Felix is traded. As he puts it: "On January 29, 1976, the Fog decided he was tired of walking with me. He didn't even have the guts to tell me himself" (236).

A key part of the hockey myth is the idea that hockey can be a shortcut to Canadian identity, especially for immigrant boys, as well as a means of achieving fortune and fame. The ideal trajectory of a career as defined by the myth is embodied in Bill Spunaska, who goes from uncertain small town Polish immigrant to a standard bearer for the nation over the course of Young's trilogy. The ending of *A Boy at the Leafs' Camp* leaves the clear impression that playing in the NHL—and the fame and fortune that will come with this—are in Bill's future (Young 1963).

The Last Season troubles this trajectory. The depiction of January 11, 1976 emphasizes the complexity and fragility of being a national hero. As a Philadelphia Flyer, Felix is hated in Canada, where, for many fans, the hockey played by the Bullies embodied all that was wrong with the game. Then, with one game against Red Army, he becomes a national hero. Then, two weeks later, he becomes an also ran, discarded to the hockey outpost of Los Angeles.

One other key aspect of the Bill Spunaska story is troubled by *The Last Season*. Remember that Bill, like Felix, comes from a family of Polish immigrants. The Spunskas, however, leave their Polish history behind when they come to Canada. The only effect on Mr. Spunaska of his time in the Polish underground is to allow him to bear the lesser challenges of a life in Canada with ease. Soon he is so versed in Canadian history that he is informing his Canadian colleagues of

their own history (Young 1953, 165). Bill's ascension through the hockey ranks not only makes him more Canadian; it also erases the trauma of his family's past. There is never a hint, at any point in Young's trilogy, of him being hobbled or haunted by his Polish heritage.

Much of *The Last Season*, however, is about the heavy burden of history upon Felix. One way the novel illustrates this burden is by having Felix receive translations of his grandfather's memoir about the family's Polish roots. The translations stress the horrible suffering of the Polish people over the years. They are accompanied by commentary from Felix's father about the racism that Polish immigrants suffered in Canada. Felix claims not to care about any of it. He is embarrassed by his poor, Polish background and by his father's accent, and quite chauvinistically asserts his Canadianness when, in response to the lessons in family history, he says things like "*Bor-ring!* . . . I'm sorry, Poppa, but that's just the simple truth" (MacGregor 2012, 104). The only history he is concerned about, he claims, is the history he has himself made: the one recorded in the NHL record books, especially his "stunning, remarkable, atrocious, magnificent 2,038 minutes in penalties" (95).

Disavow it though he might, the larger trajectory of the novel makes clear that Felix's identity is intertwined with his Polish immigrant history. A strong part of what drives him is a need for respect—and this need is clearly a product of his familial and cultural background. These backgrounds come together in a powerful way in the strange relationship Felix has with Batcha, the second wife of his dead grandfather, who lives with his father. Batcha is like a revenant of the old country—a superstitious witch-like figure who constantly judges Felix and blames him for family tragedies (especially the death of Felix's mother when she gave birth to him). Again, Felix disavows her influence; for a long time, he dismisses her calling him a "monster" in Polish. But the last tragic scene of the novel, when Felix accidentally eats rat poison thinking it is the caul that he had been born in (he eats the caul to break the spell his birth seems to have cast on

him), makes it clear that he has also been driven, in significant part, by a need to make his own life right in the face of family history (382).

A Telling Omission

The Last Season, then, explores a number of issues related to the changes in hockey in the 1970s—especially the seeming intensification of violence in the professional game. The echoes of Bill Spunski in Felix Batterinski's character highlight the distance between the idealistic portrayal of Young's famous books and the reality of the post-expansion NHL. Dave Schultz's *The Hammer* offers a real-life glimpse into many of the same issues explored in the novel. The overall trajectory of Felix Batterinski's story is tragic, with Felix's death at the end putting an exclamation point on how his life has not lived up to the promises of the hockey myth.

The tragic trajectory of the novel is reinforced by a telling omission. Felix, remember, wins two Stanley Cups as a member of the Philadelphia Flyers. Yet the novel contains almost nothing about this part of his life. There are only the briefest descriptions of the games he played, the camaraderie, the elation of being a champion. Implicit in the omission is the idea that NHL success does not mitigate the cost of Felix's hockey quest, nor does it comfort him when he is faced with the transition to life after hockey. Michael Oriard suggests that the athlete-hero of American culture tends to be trapped in adolescence, so that even with success he does not achieve the maturity characteristic of a classical hero, returning home to find love, to assume a place of leadership, and to use the wisdom (and treasure) he has acquired on behalf of the community (Oriard 1982, 138–39). Although Felix experiences some personal growth during his journey, he remains largely trapped in the way Oriard describes. Without personal maturation, *The Last Season* makes clear, a hero's triumphs are ephemeral.

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Blarney's Version

The Comic Spirit of Hockey in Paul Quarrington's *King Leary*

Take this down. "Leary Says No. En-Oh. No." I put the
kibosh on that deal, Blue-boy.

—Percival "The King" Leary

Kent. But who is with him?

Gentleman. None but the fool, who labours to outjest
His heart-struck injuries.

—*King Lear*, 3.1.15–17

Paul Quarrington's *King Leary* is critical of many of the same aspects of hockey as *The Last Season*. The novel, published in 1987, offers an account of the life of Percival "King" Leary, an early hockey superstar, told in the blarney-laden voice of Leary himself. The novel contains a host of allusions to historical characters and incidents associated with hockey, which Quarrington uses to satirize various aspects of the hockey myth. Like *The Last Season*, *King Leary* suggests that the competitive drive required to succeed at the highest level of

hockey comes with a dark side. It also suggests that the hockey myth contains false promises—especially those having to do with masculinity. Ultimately, comedy itself becomes a critical issue in the novel: *King Leary* illustrates the value of approaching hockey—as well as life more broadly—with a touch of the blarney.

The way Quarrington approaches his main themes is hinted at by the novel's title. *King Leary* contains allusions to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and also to the historical Francis Michael "King" Clancy. There are many noteworthy echoes of King Clancy's life in the novel. Clancy was famous for his smallish stature (he weighed 125 pounds when he first tried out for the Ottawa Senators in 1921) which he made up for by competitive spirit, exuberance, ability, and guts. He was famous for his infectious grin, his storytelling, and his sense of humour. All these elements are hinted at in the novel's dedication to "the true King, Francis Michael Clancy, from whom I borrowed a nickname, a birthplace, and a bit of the blarney." Like the fictional Leary, the historical Clancy was born in Ottawa, though in 1903 not 1900; he played all positions in a National Hockey League (NHL) game once (in 1923 when he played for Ottawa against Edmonton) and had a distinctive skating style that seemed like running on his blades. He was also brought to the Toronto Maple Leafs by the Toronto owner (the historical Conn Smythe) and lived into very old age in various hockey related roles. Finally, the historical Clancy was a teetotaler, though whether or not he was inordinately fond of ginger ale, as is the fictional Leary, is something I have not been able to determine (Fischler 1984, 73–76; Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.).

Differences between Clancy and Leary are also important. For example, Quarrington's Leary begins his career in 1917, not 1921, which reinforces an ironic comparison between soldiers and hockey players invoked by chapter 10 (more on this below). 1917 is also the year in which the NHL was founded, which hints at Leary's story as a foundational myth for that league, just as his year of birth, 1900, adds to the mythic aura of his life (while making it realistic to assume he could have fought in World War One in 1916 and joined

professional hockey in 1917). Other aspects of Leary's life and career—like the fact that he learns hockey in reform school—are pure invention, and, as we'll see, directly apply to the novel's comic treatment of the hockey myth.

By coupling echoes of the historical King Clancy with Shakespeare's famous tragic protagonist, Quarrington sets up a series of jokey-serious parallels and contrasts. The character of King Lear is famous as the aging monarch who clings to power past his time. At the beginning of Shakespeare's play, the king is seduced by the flattery of his devious daughters, Goneril and Regan, while misrecognizing the devotion of his loving daughter, Cordelia. Lear eventually realizes his mistake and ends up wandering the heath during a great tempest, accompanied by his Fool and by Kent, a loyal nobleman in disguise. The ending of the play is tragic: after a great blood letting, most of the main characters are dead (including Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan), and Kent and two younger noblemen, Edgar and Albany, are left to pick up the kingdom's pieces. Quarrington plays with all of these elements, sometimes echoing them and sometimes comically inverting them.

Also worth mentioning is the novel's epigraph, which comes from another Shakespeare play, *The Winter's Tale*: "A sad tale's best for winter. / I have one of sprites and goblins" (2.1.33–34). These lines are from act 2, scene 1, lines 33–34, and are spoken by Mamillius, son of jealous King Leontes of Sicilia, to his mother Hermione, whom Leontes thinks has cuckolded him with his one-time best friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia. The epigraph emphasizes the cautionary aspect of *King Leary*, another tale warning about "the sprites and goblins" released by an untempered quest for success, and also hints at the tall tale-like quality of the novel (*The Winter's Tale* is one of Shakespeare's most fantastical plays). The epigraph also draws attention to the significance of winter. Not only does *King Leary* deal with a character in the winter of his life, but the novel uses Leary's point of view to subvert the portrait of winter as a healthy, character-building site of youthful play that is so central to the hockey myth.

As Cara Hedley puts it: “Rather than representing the promise of play, the white slate onto which young boys and men can project their dreams, winter [in the novel takes] on the symbolism of death” (2018, 36).

The Natural

The starting point of mythic representations of hockey, as Gruneau and Whitson have pointed out, is the idea that hockey is “a ‘natural’ adaptation to ice, snow, and open space” (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 132). *King Leary* portrays Leary as a true believer in this myth. Early in the novel he responds to a question about the historical origins of hockey by saying he didn’t realize it “originated.” Hockey, to him, was just “always there, like the moon” (Quarrington 1994, 8). Leary’s belief in the natural origins of the game is matched by his belief in the natural origins of his own ability. As Hedley puts it, Leary understands hockey to exist in his body “as a kind of mysterious, natural knowledge without origin” (2018, 30). Leary’s naturalness extends to rejecting scientific coaching and analysis. When it comes to skating, for example, he ridicules how modern coaches use “slide projectors set up to show diagrams of leg muscles and such palaver.” For him skating fast is just “hardstepping,” which is the opposite of science: “Here’s what you do. You puff up your spirit till it won’t fit into your body anymore. You get your feet to dance across the ice-belly of the world. You get empty except for life and the winter wind. Then you’re going like hell” (Quarrington 1994, 12). Leary’s beliefs shape the inscription he wants on his grave marker: “PERCIVAL H. LEARY, SOMETHING OF A NATURAL” (40).

That Leary is a true believer in the hockey myth is important to the novel’s comic point of view. Leary’s naïveté, in both word and action, creates a dramatic irony in which the reader knows more than Leary does. For example, Leary ends up in reform school because his friend Clay Clinton convinces him that the two of them “had to

defend the honor of [Clinton's] sister, Horseface" (29). Leary agrees to perform a retaliatory prank, which leads to a house burning down and his own incarceration, while never suspecting ulterior motives on Clinton's part (29–30). An even more pronounced example is how he keeps referring to his "Indian" nickname, "Loof-weeda," bestowed upon him by Poppa Rivers, the great-grandfather of another friend, Manny Ozikean. Leary takes the name to be a reference to the near mystical quality of his skating—the literal translation is "windsong"—and hence proof of his status as the "King of the Ice." His lack of self-awareness makes him blind to the duplicitous quality of the name (of which I will have more to say below).

Leary's status as a natural sets up an extended satire on core elements of the hockey myth. Much of this satire takes place in the section of the novel having to do with Leary's education at the hands of the monks at the Bowmanville (Annex) Reformatory. The main strand of this education, it turns out, is muscular Christian. The motto of the reform school plays off the idea that vigorous exercise in the cold northern air will lead to physical hardiness and moral virtue: "TO KEEP A BOY OUT OF HOT WATER, PUT HIM ON ICE" (34). To someone versed in hockey history, the monks who run the school will bring to mind Father David Bauer, the Basilian Priest who was a key developer and coach of the Canadian national team. The reform school itself is a castle and appears to Leary like a picture from a storybook version of *The Knights of the Round Table* (34). This adds a layer of heroic romance to the muscular Christian identity apparently inculcated by the monks through hockey. Round Table knights are synonymous with the ideal of chivalry—of heroic action combined with high moral character. Sir Percival, Leary's namesake, is a knight of special virtue; he is one of three knights worthy of the Grail Quest. The implication is that Leary's time at the reform school is an opportunity for him to acquire what he needs to realize the potential of his name.

Leary's education suggests that nature—the original outdoor setting of hockey—is not just a physical realm but a spiritual one.

Indeed, the nature evoked by the monks, as well as the hockey myth, is Romantic: the natural world embodies a divine truth or unity. This is made explicit by the rink upon which hockey at the reform school is played. “Our rink was a circle,” Leary recalls. “There was a full moon, and it filled the window across from my cot, and for some strange reason I could make out all the mountains and craters. The moon was a strange color, too, a silver like a nickel had been flipped into the sky” (145). The round rink, with its glowing twin in the sky, implies a connection between hockey and the centre of creation—what the Greeks called the *omphalos* of the world. To play on such a surface is to participate in the wholeness of the world. The purity of the rink is suggested by the fact that its ice is “hard as marble” and “blue-silver” (37). The imagery repeats the description of the ice on the Ottawa canal where Leary learns to skate, which was also “hard as marble” as well as “strong and true” (7).

The monks themselves embody the four classical elements of creation: earth (Simon the ugly, who looked like “what dogs are dreaming about when their back legs start twitching”); fire (Andrew the fireplug, with his “bright red face”); wind (Theodore, who is so “slight” that he was “just barely there”); and water (Isaiah the blind seer, whose eyes “were a strange milky blue color”) (32). Each monk has a special lesson for Percival about some aspects of hockey and life. Brothers Andrew and Simon teach skating techniques: one teaches “Bulldogging” and the other the kind of finesse moves that lead to the “St. Louis Whirlygig,” a signature move of Leary’s later on (38). Brother Theodore teaches Leary to shoot like a Zen master who Aims but does not aim, feeling the puck as if it were part of his body and using his “inner-eye” to put the puck into the back of the net (39).

Brother Isaiah is the “head honcho” monk (41). He combines the characteristics of a Kung Fu master and a blind prophet in the tradition of Tiresias from Greek mythology, with a dash of Yoda from *Star Wars* thrown in, when he uses something like The Force to stop pucks he cannot see. And, in keeping with his Christian name, he speaks in quotations from the Book of Isaiah. When Leary asks why the rink

is round, he replies by quoting Isaiah 40:22: "Have ye not heard? It is he who sitteth upon the circle of the earth that bringeth the princes to nothing" (37). This pronouncement evokes the cryptic prophesies of figures like Tiresias, while also lampooning the sorts of motivational sayings uttered by guru-like hockey coaches: it is easy to imagine such a quotation on the blackboard of Freddie "The Fog" Shero.

Quarrington, then, has a lot of fun with what Whitson and Gruneau call the "happy naturalism" at the core of the hockey myth (Whitson and Gruneau 2006, 1). The fun he has is akin to another text that portrays an athletic natural, Bernard Malamud's 1952 novel, *The Natural*, which became a film in 1984 starring Robert Redford. To appreciate the wider significance of *The Natural*, I refer you to Oriard's (1982) excellent analysis in chapter 6 of *Dreaming of Heroes*. For my purposes, I would like to stress the main point that Oriard makes, which is that "Malamud deals with baseball in *The Natural* in a consciously mythic way" (1982, 212). He does this by combining in the story of his protagonist, Roy Hobbs, events in baseball history that have been elevated to the status of myth, from "Babe Ruth's orphan background," to the "natural" greatness of Shoeless Joe Jackson, to the story of Eddie Waitkus, "mysteriously shot by a woman in a hotel room in 1949" (Oriard 1982, 212). Hobbs himself has an "infantile obsession with the acquisition of fame" that suggests "the juvenility of the athlete-hero" as portrayed in popular sports literature (Oriard 1982, 216).

I'm not sure how conscious Quarrington was about echoing *The Natural* in *King Leary*. His characterization of Leary, however, has significant echoes of Roy Hobbs. Not only is Leary also a "natural" who is driven by an "infantile obsession" with fame, but many of the events attributed to him are hockey equivalents of the mythic events attributed by Malamud to Hobbs. Both Hobbs and Leary have magical "weapons," descendants of King Arthur's Excalibur: Hobbs has a hand-carved bat named Wonderboy that he keeps in a bassoon case and Leary has a dragon-headed walking stick given to him by Brother Isaiah (Quarrington 1994, 56). When Hobbs says that he wants to

have people say “there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game,” it is easy to hear the voice of Leary (Malamud 1963, 34). Leary and Hobbs also begin their careers by deposing a previous “king,” Hobbs striking out the “Whammer” and Leary besting Newsy Lalonde with a play called “The Magic Stone” (Malamud 1963, 32; Quarrington 1994, 98). Most importantly, they each share the belief that by a remarkable feat of athleticism they can solve the problems of their lives. They cling to this belief until the end. In the case of Hobbs, despite his life becoming increasingly hopeless, he imagines that if he can make the winning play in the championship game he’d feel “eight foot tall, and when he got into bed with his wife, [she’d give] it to him the way they do to heroes” (Malamud 1963, 231).

King Leary, like *The Natural*, stresses the duplicitous quality of the mythic stature conferred by sport. The feat that crowns Leary as the King of the Ice illustrates this particularly well. As I mentioned above, Leary becomes king by dethroning Newsy Lalonde with “The Magic Stone.” According to chapter 18, this play occurs in overtime of the deciding game of the Stanley Cup final of 1919 (Quarrington 1994, 99). The goal Leary scores is akin to other heavily mythologized goals in hockey history: Bill Barilko’s overtime cup winning goal of 1951, Bobby Orr’s overtime cup winning goal of 1970, and Sidney Crosby’s “golden goal” at the 2010 winter Olympics come to mind. Afterward, Leary says “The rest is historical”—meaning that his reputation is made. The irony of Leary’s assertion will be apparent to well-read hockey fans, who will know that nothing about this incident could be “historical,” since there was, in fact, no Stanley Cup awarded in 1919. The finals of that year were cancelled after five games, with the series between the Montreal Canadiens and the Seattle Metropolitans tied, because of the Spanish Flu. This was the only time since 1893 that the Stanley Cup was not awarded, until the NHL lockout of 2004–5 (Marsh 2006). In other words, Leary becomes King of the Ice by scoring a goal in a deciding game that never happened.

The Manly Way

In his consciously mythic treatment of hockey, Quarrington sets up a series of jokey-serious comparisons between hockey heroes, heroes outside of hockey, and manhood. Chapter 10 is a good illustration. The chapter opens in 1916 when Manny and Leary decide they should go fight “the Huns” (Quarrington 1994, 56). They leave the reform school with the blessing of the monks, head to Toronto, and enlist. As they are about to depart with their respective units, the two of them shake hands “in a very manly way” and pretend not to notice that “the other guy was crying” (59).

Leary’s war experience sets up jokey-serious comparisons between soldiers and hockey players. Leary tries to make sense of the war by using the frame of reference he knows best: hockey. He imagines his brigade as “like a winger going up-ice along the boards,” and during the attack he “bulldog[s]” through the mud on all fours (59–60). When soldiers around him are killed, he imagines that “God was handing out Major Penalties” (60). And, in classic hockey player fashion, he downplays his injuries. After being shot in the head, he says “it wasn’t that big a deal. In a few years the famous son of a bitch Sprague Cleghorn would two-hand my bean and split it open like a nut, and this bullet was nothing in comparison” (60).

Blurring the lines between hockey hero and hero away from the rink was a feature of the World War One era. Propaganda for the war often appealed to the heroic desires of athletes. For example, Captain James Sutherland, president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, exhorted young Canadian hockey players to take up arms and “play the greatest game of [your] life” (cited in McKinley 2000, 90). This kind of appeal is the background for the moment when Leary describes a fellow soldier getting hit: “He didn’t die right away. He lay there, breathing hard, and tried to pretend he was in a story in a CHUMS book. . . . Finally all he could get out was, ‘To hell with this,’ and he died pissed off” (Quarrington 1994, 60). In CHUMS,

a boys' magazine published from 1892 to 1941, the language of heroism is used interchangeably to describe the manliness celebrated in sport, adventure, and war. Quarrington uses the reference in the same way as Timothy Findley in his famous First World War novel, *The Wars*, to signal a primary source for boys trying to understand what it meant to be a man. So when Robert Ross has to perform his first manly deed in *The Wars*—shoot an injured horse—he summons up a memory “of a cowboy shooting his horse behind the ear” in CHUMS (Findley 2005, 62).

King Leary illustrates the difficulty of translating hockey heroism into heroism beyond the rink in a particularly funny way through its references to a book series called “Leary & Clinton and Their Various Fabulous Adventures” (Quarrington 1994, 10). This series calls to mind CHUMS, or the Boy's Own Paper, or a series like *The Hardy Boys* (which began in 1927 and continues to this day). The premise of the series is that Leary and Clinton, as heroes of hockey, can also deal heroically with challenges away from the game. The nature of the books, however, as illustrated by the fictional excerpts within *King Leary*, points to the flaw in this logic. The excerpts are extremely formulaic; they are identical except for minor changes of phrase and setting. In each one Clinton is in trouble and exclaims a variation on “I'm afraid I'm done for,” while Little Leary, “his Irish blood at a boil,” replies “Don't be so sure!” and proceeds to effect a rescue (see Quarrington 1994, 10–11, 132–33). The characterizations are obviously stereotypes: Clinton is a stiff-lipped English gentleman; Leary a hot-blooded “Irishter” (53). The increasingly absurd scenarios of the books (*Leary & Clinton Fight the Dogstar People*) also highlight how out-of-touch with reality the books are, though it is also a sly comment, I think, about the enduring popularity of the old-fashioned manliness they represent.

The fact that the Leary and Clinton books are juvenile fiction, with obviously juvenile protagonists, adds another irony. The hockey myth, as we've seen, promises that the game can turn boys into men; but, as we have also seen, playing the game has a way of stunting the

development of those same players. There is something persistently childlike about Leary, especially when it comes to sexuality: he views women's bodies with the mix of puerile desire and squeamishness you'd expect in a fourteen-year-old boy (like Felix Batterinski, he is stuck in a state of arrested development when it comes to relationships). Like the players in Al Purdy's "Hockey Players," Leary is trapped in a "permanent childhood" by the game (Purdy 1965, 60)—just as his character is frozen in a permanent childhood by the Leary and Clinton books.

One last point about the books. A key episode in Leary's early life occurs when he and Clinton are skating on the Ottawa canals as boys. The ice cracks and they fall in. As they are falling, Clinton calls out "Percival, old bean, I'm afraid we're done like kippers." This, according to Leary, illustrates how Clinton "was already living in those damn adventure books" (14) as a child, which further underlines the persistence of the formulaic model (Clinton is probably mimicking something he read in CHUMS). More importantly, the real-life rescuer of Clinton is not Leary but Manny Ozikean, who saves Clinton and Leary both. Manny gets no mention in the Leary and Clinton books, which reflects the shabby treatment he receives throughout his life. This shabby treatment, as we shall see, carries heavy symbolic weight.

Loof-weeda

Much of *King Leary* is about the evil consequences of Leary's quest to be King of the Ice. Leary is blinded by ambition and stunted by the limited version of manhood he achieves through hockey.

Not surprisingly, given his adolescent attitudes towards sexuality, Leary is a lousy husband. His marriage to Chloe Millson is a result of a puerile deal: Chloe "would have no compunction against stripping off and swimming in my sight in the buff-bare" and in return Leary joined her "in holy wedlock" (Quarrington 1994, 109). Leary's

attitude to Chloe, just as his attitude to women more generally, is shaped by a combination of the hockey world and the era of the 1920s. Hedley sums up this attitude as follows: “Women are either the wives or girlfriends of hockey players or are placed under the spotlight in moments of objectification by men” (Hedley 2018, 37). Indeed, the main role of the female characters in the novel is to be objects of competition for the men. Jane, Chloe’s sister, begins as the girlfriend of Manny, but is taken from Manny by Clay Clinton. Chloe herself is involved with Clinton, who, the novel suggests, is the real father of Leary’s son Clifford. Leary is appalled by both his sons, but especially by Clarence, who is gay and a writer of gay pornography (Quarrington 1994, 47). The irony is that Clarence—or Rance, as he is called—is Leary’s true heir. Not only is Rance biologically Leary’s son, but he is also a brilliant skater and able to perform the St. Louis Whirligig, Leary’s patented move. Both of his sons love him, but Leary, like King Lear with Cordelia, fails to recognize the true love of a child for a parent; Leary rejects Clifford as “gormless” and his stunted views of manhood mean he can’t get past the fact that Rance “skates like a girl” (48).

Manny Ozikean, as *King Leary* makes clear, is the strongest and most gifted player of the era. He is the true “natural.” He is also a spiritual being who has a special connection with the hockey playing monks (99). His lack of ambition is shown when Clay Clinton demands to know how he expects “to get anywhere in the world.” Manny replies: “I’m already somewhere in the world” (95). Despite his lack of ambition, Manny outperforms Leary in every hockey event they are in together. Most telling is Leary’s feat of playing all the positions in a game in 1923. After one of Leary’s boasts about this feat, in which he characteristically fails to mention Manny, Blue Herman, a reporter who has followed Leary’s career step-by-step, points out that “Manny got seven goals that game” (36). Playing every position is a rather gimmicky accomplishment, like hitting for the cycle in baseball; scoring seven goals, however, is an extraordinary personal achievement. Manny’s seven goals would make him the co-holder of

the NHL record for most goals in a game, tied with Joe Malone, who performed the feat in 1920. No NHL player has matched this record since.

Because of his own ambition, Leary downplays or makes invisible the role of Manny in his own career, as well as Manny's own accomplishments. Worse, he betrays Manny as a friend. Two aspects of this betrayal particularly stand out. One is Leary's failure to intervene on Manny's behalf to help him stop drinking. The other is Leary's complicity in a trade of Manny from Ottawa to New York. As described in chapter 36 of the novel, Clay Clinton, as general manager of the Ottawa Patriots, decides to trade Manny to clear his own path to Jane Millson. By this point Leary's career has ended. Clinton hires him as coach in Ottawa, then runs the trade by him. Leary recognizes how New York will lead Manny back to drink and will likely destroy him. But he is intent on retaining the title of King, despite the end of his playing days, and Manny is his main rival. So he gives his okay—thus sharing Clinton's guilt in Manny's demise (189).

The evil consequences of Leary's quest are comically embodied by the "Indian" nickname that he receives. "Loof-weeda" is bestowed upon him by Poppa Rivers in the following exchange:

"What is this *loof-weeda* business?" [Leary asks].

"It is what I have decided to call you," [replies Poppa Rivers].

"An Indian name, huh?"

"Right."

"What does it mean?"

"Oh, a literal translation would be something like 'windmusic' or 'windsong.'"

"Because of the way I skate?"

"For sure. . . . The way you fucking skate."

"*Loof-weeda*."

Then there was a hint of that smell again. (138)

The smell is described as "like someone had made a stew with potatoes, death, and cow dung" (136). The context makes clear that Poppa

Rivers intends the name as an insult. He tags Leary with it because of his refusal to tell Manny, in a loving way, to stop drinking. Leary avoids making a commitment to do so and Poppa Rivers knows what this means. “You won’t do it, you *loof-weeda*” he says (138).

Loof-weeda embodies the two main features of Leary’s character—his obsession with achieving mythic status through hockey, and his blindness about the evil by-products of this ambition. Only late in life does Leary come to understand the stink that surrounds his claim to be King of the Ice.

The *Loof-weeda* references in *King Leary* are part of a pattern of jokes about farting and belching. These jokes, in turn, satirize the male culture of drinking, boasting, bullshitting, and entitlement that the novel identifies with hockey. Belching has a similar kind of duplicity as *Loof-weeda*. The first time Leary drinks ginger ale, for example, it make him want to “start fights, but only the good fights, fights with thugs, monsters and dragons” (53). But then it causes belching. When Leary belches, it turns out to be “like a dragon about to eat a maiden” (3). So, despite his noble intentions, he ends up aligning himself with the monstrous.

Aggressive masculinity of the kind often associated with hockey is about the projection of power and the hiding of weakness. Flagrant belching and farting can be read as displays of potency in men; they are rather like the playground taunts we engaged in as boys, where you’d bare your armpit at another boy and yell “Smell this!” Yet, like all such aggressive gestures, they are also defensive—a way to ward off feelings of vulnerability and impotence. Flagrantly farting or belching represents the classic defensive function of making a loud display to disguise the underlying reality of your powerlessness (see Dopp 1999, 50).

Human powerlessness is most revealed in the fact that we die. Fear of death has haunted human beings since we first attained self-awareness, and we have created various ways to cope with this fear. Sport is one of those ways. Michael Novak suggests that athletes—young, bursting with vitality, capable of acts that seem beautiful,

heroic, even transcendent—are ritual actors, and that their accomplishments can be read as “ritual triumphs of grace, agility, perfection, beauty over death” (Novak 1988, 48). There is indeed something about great athletic achievements that defies time; they seem to involve, as Novak suggests, a “momentary attainment of perfect form—as though there were, hidden away from mortal eyes, a perfect way to execute a play, and suddenly a player or a team has found it and sneaked a demonstration down to earth” (5). For this reason, the euphoria of winning is accompanied by “the sense of one’s inflation by a power not one’s own” (48). To win “is to have destiny blowing out one’s sails” (49); or, to put it in religious terms, to win is to be a favourite of the gods—chosen.

Although *King Leary* deals with existential issues only in a light-handed way, there is a definite sense that Leary, in the winter of his life, must face the ultimate questions he has previously avoided by his pursuit of being the King. Leary’s quest for mythic status is, at root, a bid for immortality. *Loof-weeda* wonderfully embodies the duplicity of such status. On the one hand, the nickname seems to imply, through its literal translation, “windsong,” that Leary possesses an indigenous spiritual power rooted in the land, as if he is, himself, a spiritual rather than a physical person. On the other hand, the nickname directly indicates his physicality. Few things emphasize the physicality of the human body more than a fart. A fart is a literal byproduct of decay, of the body’s physical functioning, which is why it smells, among other things, like death. *Loof-weeda*, then, not only embodies the byproducts of Leary’s quest to be King, but the impossibility of overcoming death through mythic status.

Canada’s Hero

King Leary, as Cara Hedley has written, “suggests important parallels between Leary’s personal story and the story of Canada” (Hedley 2018, 25). The equation is jokingly signaled by Leary’s favourite

drink: Canada Dry ginger ale. Leary's teetotaling implies, at first glance, a wholesomeness in line with the social values of a small town. His education by the monks, with its muscular Christian overtones, parallels the ideals of manhood and nation that we saw in *Glengarry School Days*. His career takes him from the small town environment of early Ottawa to the big cities of the NHL, a journey that parallels the growth of the country. And his character on the ice—the small player who succeeds by hardiness, determination, and creativity—mirrors the self-definition of Canada, especially in the early years of its history.

The equation between Leary and Canada is further emphasized by Leary's war experiences. In chapter 10, Leary participates in Vimy Ridge, the most mythologized battle in Canadian history. The Canadian War Museum's account is typical: "For the first time all four Canadian divisions attacked together: men from all regions of Canada were present at the battle. Brigadier-General A. E. Ross declared after the war, 'in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation'" (Cook n.d.). The success of the Canadians at Vimy Ridge is traditionally attributed to their toughness, teamwork, and ability to adapt to the rapid changes of the modern battlefield. Not coincidentally, these are also the characteristics often attributed to successful hockey teams.

One characteristic of Leary's that may seem unCanadian is his boastfulness. Leary's bombastic egoism seems the opposite of the niceness and humility Canadians are famous for (if only in their own minds). Hedley, however, makes the point that the one thing Canadians are not known to be "humble and nice" about is hockey. Canadians brag about hockey, and various hockey events (like the 1972 Summit Series or the 2010 Olympics) have shown how invested many Canadians are in the idea of Canada being the best at the game. For Hedley, one way to explain this is that hockey operates as a "kind of Prozac" to relieve national tensions (Hedley 2018, 26). Boasting about hockey fights off doubts about the legitimacy of the nation: "With the sport declared a 'possession' of Canada, hockey victories may be

regarded as promoting national legitimacy. The scoreboard never lies; as long as Canadian hockey teams and hockey players are winning, the nation reigns, in some small way, supreme” (26).

The identification of Leary with Canada allows Quarrington to make fun of some sacred cows of Canadian identity. Leary’s love of ginger ale, for example, works by inversion to satirize the idea of Canadians as moderate people. Unlike other hockey players, or sports writers like Blue Hermann, Leary does not engage in the alcoholic debauchery common in the professional sports culture of the time. The irony is that he drinks ginger ale because “it makes me *pissed!*” (Quarrington 1994, 3, 207). The fact that Leary’s favourite drink is so apparently benign only makes more starkly apparent how much he has indulged himself.

That hockey players embody small town values is also satirized. To explain the debauchery of Canadian hockey players in New York, Leary explains that “back then hockey players were young Canucks from small towns, if they happened to be from towns at all” (154). He goes on to say that the players came from places like “Swastika, Ontario . . . East Braintree, Manitoba . . . and St. Louis-de-Ha! Ha! . . . in Quebec” (155). On one level, the implication of this passage is that the players are simpletons unequipped to deal with the temptations of Big City Life, but below the surface are ironies that, like Stephen Leacock’s famous horseman, ride off in all directions. The names of the towns (“Swastika” especially) hint that there is a darker underbelly already in a small town that has nothing to do with being corrupted by the Big City. The Québec place name, which is of a real town, hints at a connection to myths about Crazy Frenchmen while blurring the distinction between “blarney” and “reality.” If St. Louis-de-Ha!-Ha! is a real Canadian name, how can you tell what is a real place and/or what is not in the country?

The biggest question hanging over the Canadian nation, of course, has to do with First Nations people. The hockey myth answers this question by promising a Canadian identity rooted in the land—an indigenization for non-Indigenous residents of Canada. As I argued

in chapter 2, the amateur ideal of early hockey excluded First Nations people. One of the most Canadian aspects of *King Leary*, then, has to do with Leary's betrayal of Manny, who, even with his red hair, is "mostly . . . an Indian" (Quarrington 1994, 75). The betrayal replays the historical treatment of First Nations people by settlers. Leary owes a great deal to Manny, including his life (which Manny saves twice), and his response could be said to mirror the European settlers in Canada who avoided their debt to the First Nations and instead claimed to be the rightful heirs to the land.

Complicating Everything

Another layer is added to the novel's portrait of Canada by Clay Clinton. As Jane Millson puts it, "Clay Clinton complicates everything. That's what he's best at . . ." (Quarrington 1994, 112). What is most complicating about Clinton is that his story is also the story of Canada.

The identification between Clinton and Canada is suggested by the echoes in his story of the lives of two famous hockey businessmen, Conn Smythe and Harold Ballard, both of whom, in turn, are Canadian icons. Smythe became co-owner of the Toronto St. Patricks team in 1927 and renamed it the Toronto Maple Leafs, using for the logo the leaf on the shoulder patches of Canadian soldiers in World War One (McKinley 2000, 198). By jettisoning the original Irish Catholic name and rebranding with the shoulder patch, Smythe created a team that billed itself as a representative of Canada—minus French Québec, of course, towards whom Smythe had a "democratic bigotry" (McKinley 2000, 199). Smythe, like the fictional Clinton, was an astute businessman and a gambler. One of the famous stories about him is that he used the winnings from a long-shot bet on a horse to buy King Clancy for the Maple Leafs in 1930 (Hockey Hall of Fame n.d.). Unlike the fictional Clinton, the historical Smythe was a true war hero, who raised battalions of sportsmen to fight in both wars,

and whose nickname “Major” was derived from the rank he achieved in the army. He was widely admired and is in the Hockey Hall of Fame in the Builders category.

Conn Smythe, however, also had a darker side. He promoted violence in hockey as good for business. “We’ve got to stamp out that kind of thing,” he famously said after a fight between Rocket Richard and Bob Bailey, “or people are going to keep on buying tickets!” (Smythe and Young 1981, 195). He was also part of the cabal of owners who crushed attempts by players to achieve better working conditions. In response to Ted Lindsay’s 1956–57 attempt to form a bargaining association, Smythe, according to Cruise and Griffiths, “favoured a scorched-earth policy. He was obsessed with crushing the association, *immediately*” (Cruise and Griffiths 1991, 97). The ruthless side of Smythe is suggested in *King Leary* by its account of the building of the Toronto Gardens, the fictional version of Maple Leaf Gardens. Smythe’s historical arena was built in 1931. A heavily mythologized fact about the construction is its completion in only five months—a feat sometimes said to constitute “a world record” for buildings of this sort. In *King Leary*, Clinton builds his arena in 1947 (to conform to the timeline of the novel) and—in what seems, at first, an allusion to the history of the original—the construction is said to have “set some sort of record.” The record set, however, turns out to be for lack of safety: “There were scores of injuries and no less than seventeen workers died” (Quarrington 1994, 131).

The darker side of Clinton’s character is made more explicit in allusions to the historical Harold Ballard, who won control of the Toronto Maple Leafs from the heirs of Conn Smythe after a bitter battle in 1971. Like Ballard, Clinton is born rich, is involved in shady dealings, including shady dealings with women, and ends up living like the Phantom of the Opera in an apartment specially constructed in the upper reaches of the arena. The friendship between Leary and Clinton mirrors the friendship between Ballard and King Clancy, who were famous in their later years for sitting together at games in a specially built corner box. Ballard also presided over the dismantling of

the Leafs franchise, making destructive trades out of personal animus, and, in general, being the archetype of the “very rich ‘hands-on’ owner, who is himself part of the show and is accustomed to running things” (Whitson and Gruneau 2006, 126)—just like Clay Clinton.

In *King Leary*, Clinton dies in 1967 and is laid in state at the Toronto Gardens. “Four thousand people,” according to the novel, come “to see his bloated body” (Quarrington 1994, 10). The account of Clinton’s death reinforces his connection to Canada: 1967 is the year of the Centennial, a peak year of Canadian nationalism, and the last year of the Original Six era, as well as the last year the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup. That Clinton’s body is displayed in the Gardens echoes the funeral of Howie Morenz in 1937. The echo is deeply ironic. Morenz was a superstar of his era who, at the age of 34, suffered a broken leg in a game and died of complications afterwards. The popular view of his death is that he died of a broken heart when he realized he couldn’t play any more (McKinley 2000, 140–41). That Clinton should arrange such a grandiose funeral for himself suggests the extent of his vanity. That only four thousand people came to see his body, compared to the fifty thousand who walked past Morenz’s coffin, suggests his true place in the hearts of hockey fans.

One other echo reinforces the connection between Clinton and Canada. Clinton bears resemblance to perhaps the most famous “frenemy” in Canadian literature, Percy Boyd “Boy” Staunton, who is described as Dunstan Ramsay’s “lifelong friend and enemy” in Robertson Davies’ *Fifth Business* (Davies 1970, 1). Resemblance between the two begins with their names: Clinton’s full name is Clay Bors Clinton (Quarrington 1994, 1). “Bors” links by sound to “Boyd” and also alludes to the Arthurian cycle: Sir Bors is a companion of Sir Percival on the Grail Quest. Unlike the Grail knights, Boy and Clay are morally suspect and egocentric individuals whose behaviour demonstrates the self-serving unscrupulousness of the moneyed class in

Canada. Clinton's war profiteering and exaggeration of his war record are direct echoes of Boy Staunton in *Fifth Business*.

That Quarrington intended the allusions to Boy Staunton is suggested by the snowball scenes at the beginning and end of *King Leary*. These directly echo *Fifth Business*. The opening of Davies's novel has Dunstan and Percy (before he grew up and, ironically, became Boy) competing over who has the better sleigh. Despite the fact that Percy's sleigh cost a lot of money, it goes more slowly, and this makes Percy "vindictive" (Davies 1970, 2). As a result, he throws snowballs at Dunstan on the way home and, in a gesture that anticipates his ruthless side, makes one up with a stone in it (3). This stone-containing snowball sets in motion the plot to follow and haunts the lives of both men, until the stone reappears mysteriously in the mouth of Boy at his death (296). In the same way, Clay tries to win the skating race at the beginning of *King Leary* by pelting young Leary with snowballs, one of which has "a quarter inch of ice formed around it" (Quarrington 1994, 13). The doctored snowball returns near the end thrown by the ghost of Clay Clinton (188). By this point, the snowball is not just a reminder of Clay's dubious character but of his lifelong connection, as friend and enemy, to Leary. The original snowball scene ends with the rescue of Leary and Clinton by Manny. Tellingly, the snowball's reappearance is followed by the revelation of how the two of them traded Manny to New York (189).

Fifth Business, like *Two Solitudes*, is famous for its definition of Canada. Though the drama term "fifth business" is too specialized to have entered popular discourse like "two solitudes," the term (helpfully defined by Davies in a fictional epigraph to the novel) captures a prominent strain of Canadian self-definition: "Those roles which, being neither those of Hero nor Heroine, Confidante nor Villain, but which were nonetheless essential to bring about the Recognition or the denouement were called the Fifth Business" (Davies epigraph). The implication is that, although Canada doesn't play a role on the world stage equivalent to the great powers, the country

does play a part in helping to bring about “the denouement” of historical events. Dunstan Ramsay’s own story resembles the role of fifth business, and thereby embodies one version of the nation. Indeed, Ramsay’s small town Scots-Presbyterian background reflects an influential version of Canadian identity. His upbringing, however, is more negative than Hughie Murray’s in *Glengarry School Days*. Davies stresses the drab, unheroic, repressed environment of Ramsay’s home town of Deptford and its stunting effect on those who grow up there. Though Staunton and Ramsay come from different ends of Deptford society, they share the quality—signaled by Staunton’s nickname—of having been hindered by their backgrounds from attaining full manhood.

Despite Dunstan’s identification with fifth business, the definition of Canada in *Fifth Business* is not restricted to him. Instead, the definition emerges from the interaction of the characters, each of whom represents a different aspect of the nation. This is an important lesson for *King Leary*, for despite Leary’s identification with the myth of hockey and the story of Canada, the portraits of hockey and Canada emerge from the interaction of the characters. Clinton and Leary, as main characters, have main roles in this, but other characters are also involved. The female characters embody the limited choices available for women within the historically dominant identity of the country. And Manny, of course, points to the problematic treatment of First Nations people.

There is one reference to a First Nations character in *Fifth Business*. This occurs when Ramsay and other soldiers are given a hero’s welcome upon their return home. A local First Nations veteran, however, is not included in the welcome ceremony. As Ramsay explains, George Muskrat is an “Indian sniper, who had picked off Germans just as he used to pick off squirrels,” but he is excluded from the ceremony because he “was not a very respectable fellow” (Davies 1970, 109). The exclusion of George Muskrat, and the discrimination it implies, anticipates a key plot point in *King Leary*, for what motivates Leary’s journey to the new Sports Hall of Fame is the exclusion of

Manny from that Hall. Manny is the greatest hockey player of his generation. He is excluded from the Hall, however, because of his manner of death, drunk in a New York hotel room, and, of course, because he is “mostly . . . an Indian.” In atonement for his part in the wrongs done to his childhood friend, Leary decides to sneak into the Hall and place a token of Manny—a crucifix—in the Hockey Section of the new Hall.

The Comic Spirit of Hockey

Stories of aging athletes are rich for tragedy. Aging athletes, in a sense, die twice—once at the end of their careers and again at the end of life. The end of an athletic career, then, carries a heavy existential weight. Michael Novak describes this weight as follows: “In the aging athlete, the ultimate reality of sports breaks through the symbol, becomes explicit. Death advances on us all. Not even our vitality, not even our beauty of form, not even our heroic acts can hold it back” (Novak 1988, 48). *The Natural* and *The Last Season* both take on this tragic potential directly. Malamud’s novel ends with Roy Hobbs striking out on three pitches, which inflicts the same defeat on him that he inflicted on the Whammer. This illustrates the inevitable rise and fall that is part of life and underscores the chimerical quality of the glory Hobbs had been seeking. In the end, we all “strike out.” MacGregor’s novel ends with not just the metaphorical but literal death of its protagonist, and although the immediate circumstances of Felix Batterinski’s death are accidental there is a sense of inevitability about it. The poisoned cauldron, as I mentioned in the last chapter, symbolizes the history that will return despite Batterinski’s attempts to erase it.

King Leary takes a different approach. Although there are tragic events in Leary’s life, and although his story raises moral and existential issues, Quarrington’s approach is a comic one. Leary comes close to embodying the spirit of comedy itself. Tragedy stresses that

humans are doomed to suffer and die, either through our failures and weaknesses, or simply because we are mortal. Comedy, on the other hand, stresses our resilience. As Robert W. Corrigan puts it, “The constant in comedy is the comic view of life or the comic spirit: the sense that no matter how many times man is knocked down he somehow manages to pull himself up and keep on going” (1965, 3). This brings to mind Leary’s summary of his first professional hockey training camp: “They kept knocking me down. I kept getting up” (Quarrington 1994, 64).

There are times when Leary has qualities like Charlie Chaplin’s Little Tramp. Both the Little Tramp and Little Leary are small and weak, but both are resilient. The Little Tramp exposes to ridicule the police officers and other authority figures who try to oppress him. This is a key aspect of comedy—so much comedy is about subverting falsely dignified or pretentious authority (which all authority, in certain circumstances, has the potential to be). Figures of authority in comedy are revealed to be not all powerful but fallible, and the social order they represent not timeless but open to change. Sigmund Freud, in his classic *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, points out that comedy often works to “unmask” people who have “seized dignity and authority” by “directing attention to the frailties which they share with all humanity, but in particular the dependence of their mental functions on bodily needs” (Freud 1960, 201–02). Such unmasking points out that “such and such a person, who is admired as a demigod, is after all only human like you and me” (202).

What’s tricky about Leary is that, although his resilience brings to mind comic heroes like the Little Tramp, he denies his own humanity in his quest to be King. Leary, in fact, claims to be a hockey demigod and thus aligns himself with a false authority. Leary’s resilience—which aligns him with the spirit of comedy—suggests that he can bounce back one last time to redeem his life, but to do so he has to become aware of, and to make atonement for, all his humanity-denying acts.

A key figure in this process is Iain, the male nurse from the South Grouse Nursing Home, who accompanies Leary and Blue Hermann on their journey to the Sports Hall of Fame. If Blue Hermann is an ironic version of the loyal Kent in *King Lear*, who accompanies Lear into the wilderness, Iain is the Fool. Various details in *King Leary* identify Iain with Shakespeare's Fool. Early on Leary points out that Iain speaks in voices, doing impressions of various characters, and that he has a strange appearance, with "nappy hair," "thirty or forty" pairs of glasses, and a tattoo of a bird on his right forearm (Quarrington 1994, 17–18). Like a court jester, Iain's role is to entertain and minister to the king. He jollies Leary along at various points with cheerful banter and plays cards with him on the train (84). He calls Leary "my liege" (50, 80) and refers to him as "royalty" (79), and when things are looking grim, addresses him in a consoling singsong that sounds like it could be lifted out of Shakespeare: "King, King, O mighty King" (163).

Court jesters are important for understanding the deeper meaning of comedy. Jesters are powerless, in one sense, and are often used as scapegoats; yet they also get to behave in ways that others cannot—as long as they keep the king amused. The jester's greatest power is his ability to mock the king. There is a serious purpose behind this mocking: it is designed to remind the king that, despite his exalted status, he is still human, with human weaknesses, and so protect him from the sin of pride. Pride in the Middle Ages was thought to make one vulnerable to demonic possession. Which is why, as Fisher and Fisher write, the jester's mocking was an act of spiritual protection designed to guard the king from "the evil eye" (Fisher and Fisher 1981, 51).

Iain, in *King Leary*, protects Leary both physically and spiritually during the journey to the Sports Hall of Fame. Twice he saves Leary from falling (Quarrington 1994, 80). When Leary gets deluded by fantasies of grandeur, he wraps his arms around him and counsels him to come back "to the real world" (20). And when Leary complains

that he is not properly taking care of him, Iain replies—correctly—that he is “looking after [Leary’s] spiritual self” (164).

Accompanied by Iain, Leary undergoes a series of revelations on the way to the Hall of Fame. He is confronted by the wrongs he has committed against Chloe, Jane, Clarence, and Clifford, and makes partial amends. The last atonement, for Manny, involves Iain. By this point Iain is identified with Manny. His ambiguous racial identity (his “nappy” hair and references to African American culture) and his descent into an alcoholic stupor echo Manny. When he takes his first drink on the train, for example, claiming that one beer won’t hurt him, Leary points out that “Manny used to make a similar grand production” (92). Iain’s sexuality is also ambiguous, which creates a secondary identification with Rance. In any case, Leary’s last words in the novel are spoken to him. “Because you love me,” Leary says, “I’m asking you for this promise, that you will stop drinking the liquor that hurts you so badly” (231). These are the exact words that Poppa Rivers had wanted Leary to speak to Manny. By speaking them to Iain, Leary acknowledges his earlier failure and seeks atonement. He also, in that moment, assumes the role of Fool on behalf of Iain, attempting to minister to Iain’s bodily and spiritual selves.

Comedy, as Fisher and Fisher have written, has a way of “reminding us that all humans, no matter what airs they put on, are made of ‘body stuff’” (Fisher and Fisher 1981, xi). The weakness of human beings, as revealed by their bodily nature, comes with an upside: it means that any social order made by human beings is not timeless and absolute but fallible and changeable. Hence the reversals that are the stuff of comedy: a fool becomes the King becomes the Fool. Leary senses this comic quality when he tries to undo the trade of Manny by invoking his gift of the gab and connection to the Blarney Stone, in the quote that is my first epigraph above. Though history cannot be undone in this simple fashion, the spirit of comedy stresses that as long as life goes on, there is always the possibility of a happier ending.

King Leary, in keeping with the spirit of comedy, allows its protagonist a happy ending. Despite his own vanity and weakness, and all the awful things he has done to become and remain the King, Leary achieves a measure of redemption at the end, represented by his return, after death, to the hockey game of the reform school monks. Leary's return suggests that, although myth and blarney can obscure the wholeness promised by the game, there is value in the quest to achieve this wholeness. After his last act of atonement, then, Leary rejoins "the circle" of monks on their round rink under "the big silver moon" (Quarrington 1994, 232).

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8

Hockey as a Gateway to the Underworld in Wayne Johnston's *The Divine Ryans*

It's the Apuckalypse. The Apuckalypse has come. Just like
your father said it would.

—Uncle Reginald to Draper Doyle in
The Divine Ryans

Wayne Johnston's 1990 novel *The Divine Ryans* tells the story of nine-year-old Draper Doyle Ryan and his attempt to make sense of the mysterious death of his father. At the outset of the novel, Draper's father appears as a ghost, in the manner of Hamlet's father's ghost, and with the usual ghostly imperative: Draper must solve the riddle of his father's death in order to allow his father to rest in peace, to put an end to his own unhealthy mourning, and to realign the time that, as in *Hamlet*, has been rendered "out of joint" by a father's death. Draper suffers from a loss of memory—a "missing week"—from the period of his father's death. Clearly, the amnesia and the circumstances of the death are connected. In order to solve the riddle, Draper must recover the memories from his missing week.

The ghost of Donald Ryan has a unique characteristic: he carries a hockey puck. Indeed, each time Draper sees his father's ghost throughout the novel, the ghost is either carrying a hockey puck or doing something hockey related, which suggests that the riddles of the missing week and the father's death can be found in a chain of associations connected to the game. Indeed, as Méira Cook puts it, all the "relationships, family secrets, and sexual codes [in *The Divine Ryans*] are . . . mediated through the rules and references to hockey" (2004, 118). Ultimately, in a climactic dream sequence, Draper Doyle descends into the underworld wearing his goalie equipment, like a knight on a quest, carrying pucks that he has saved. There he performs rituals to unlock the last missing memory. This memory allows him to solve the mystery of his father's death, while also freeing himself, his sister, and his mother from the oppressive grip of the Ryan family, thus enabling them to escape to new lives.

Hockey, then, operates in *The Divine Ryans* as a gateway to the underworld. How does this gateway work? And how is it related to the imaginative dimensions of the game? To answer these questions, we need to return to the beginning and retrace the path of Draper's journey.

The Not-So-Divine Ryans

Draper's story, like all human stories, begins with family. Draper's is comparable to Catholic royalty in St. John's, Newfoundland. The family nickname—the *Divine Ryans*—reflects the number of Ryan "priests and nuns," as well as the nature of the family's empire, which consists of a virulently Catholic newspaper, *The Daily Chronicle*, a funeral home, and the local orphanage and convent, which have been run for ages by someone named Ryan (Johnston 1998, 12). The family is ruled by an unholy Trinity composed of three siblings: Father Seymour (orphanage), Sister Louise (convent), and Aunt Phil (professional widow and self-appointed family C.E.O.). The Trinity is

opposed by Uncle Reginald, the disinherited oldest son, who turns out to be Draper's guide and ally.

By the year of the story—1967—the family's power is waning. The description of *The Daily Chronicle* at the beginning of chapter 7 suggests why: "The problem with *The Daily Chronicle* was that while other papers in the city had changed with the times, toning down or disguising their biases, it had stayed the same, continuing to denounce those who, as its editorials often put it, were of the 'wrong' politics or the 'wrong' religion" (65). Unknown to Draper, the death of his father has exposed the fragility of the Ryan empire and has thrown the family hierarchy into crisis. Because there have been so many priests and nuns in the family, Draper is now the only remaining male who might produce a male heir with the family name, just as his father was before him. As a result, Aunt Phil tries to force his path in life: he must marry, have lots of children (especially sons), and take over the family business.

To bend Draper to her will, Aunt Phil wields the twin authorities of family and religion—authorities that, in the case of the Ryans, are inextricably linked. She stresses how everyone in the family has to sacrifice to preserve the empire. The house in which Draper, his mother, and sister live must be sold, just as Uncle Reginald's house was sold years before (1). The official story about Donald is that he worked himself to death as editor of the *Chronicle*, just as his father had before him, the implication being that Draper must embrace this fate as well (26, 69). Donald also made another personal sacrifice. It turns out that he had wanted to enter the priesthood, "but his father, irony of all ironies, had prevented him from doing so" (130). Despite his calling, Donald was forced to accept marriage as "his vocation," and, in compensation, was allowed to go to Oxford "to pursue a layman's course in Latin and scholastic philosophy" (131).

The oppressive possibilities of religion are on full display in *The Divine Ryans*. Guilt, shame (particularly about sexuality), and the threat of eternal damnation figure prominently in Draper's childhood. Two controlling tactics by Aunt Phil are particularly

noteworthy. One is her forcing Draper to attend wakes, which he has had to do since he was five (115). Wakes, from Aunt Phil's point of view, are reminders of mortality that help to enforce obedience. "A boy's pride had to be broken," she believes, and "there was nothing like the sight of a corpse to instil humility" (115). The other tactic is her forcing Draper to take confession with Father Seymour, her brother and ally. Draper is forced into confessing intimate details about his life and afterwards can't be sure how Father Seymour will use the knowledge (58).

Oppression takes a creepy turn in the character of Father Seymour. When Draper persists in his visions of his dead father, Aunt Phil gets the idea of having him join Father Seymour's Number. Father Seymour, it turns out, directs a select group of one hundred boys at the orphanage trained "in the arts of dancing, singing, and . . . boxing" (14). The motto of the Number is muscular Christian—"Toughness of body, soundness of mind, purity of soul" (14)—though Uncle Reginald, in his jokey-serious way, captures the reality, describing the Number as "a cross between the Vienna Boys' Choir and the Hitler Youth" (14). The oppressive environment is illustrated by the "frequent strappings" given by Father Seymour, during which he maintains "a kind of joviality" that has more than a little creepiness about it (34). When, inevitably, it comes Draper's turn to be strapped, the description of Father Seymour capturing him and attempting to do it is like a sexual assault: "Father Seymour was now hugging me to his chest, now to his stomach, now to his crotch. . . . [Now] he lay there, on his back with me belly-up on top of him, rising and falling on his chest each time he breathed" (176). Fortunately for Draper, his mother has by this point been roused to action, and she saves him (178).

To a reader in 1990—especially a reader in Newfoundland—the portrait of Father Seymour would be made more sinister by the Mount Cashel Orphanage scandal, which broke into full view the year before. The Mount Cashel Boys' Home (popularly known as the Orphanage) was a St. John's landmark, founded in 1898, and run by

Irish Christian Brothers, a Roman Catholic lay order. Beginning in the 1980s, multiple criminal investigations revealed an extensive pattern of sexual and physical abuse of the residents dating back decades, as well as complicity on the part of police, government, and religious authorities in hiding or downplaying this abuse (Higgins 2012). A Royal Commission, the Hughes Inquiry, held hearings in 1989 and 1990 and ultimately reported on the abuse of the boys, and the betrayal of the overseeing authorities, in excruciating detail (Hughes 1992). The Mount Cashel scandal bears an uncanny resemblance to the Residential Schools scandal involving First Nations children that was the subject of The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015.

The Church of Hockey

Hockey has a contradictory role in the Ryan empire. Aunt Phil thinks of the game as trivial. She scoffs at Draper's vision of his father by declaring that people do not come back from the dead "to throw pucks up in the air" (Johnston 1998, 7). None of Aunt Phil, Sister Louise, or Father Seymour have any real affection for the game. Yet the family gathers on Saturday nights to watch and cheer for the Montreal Canadiens. So regular is this ritual that Draper recalls it as one of only two things the family does on "a regular basis," the other being "to go to early mass on Sunday morning" (72). Of special note are games against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Then, according to Draper Doyle, the contest becomes "not a hockey game, but a holy war, a crusade carried on nationwide TV, Rome's Canadiens versus Canterbury's Maple Leafs" (77–78). The extreme nature of the family's investment in the Canadiens is lampooned by Uncle Reginald in a series of over-the-top claims about the Catholic identity of the team. According to Uncle Reginald, "the real coach of the Montreal Canadiens was the pope, who was sending Toe Blake instructions from the Vatican"—and so on (78).

Uncle Seymour's behaviour during the broadcasts magnifies his creepiness. He knows "almost as little" about hockey as Aunt Phil and Sister Louise but affects to be an expert. Worse, he tries to use hockey to ingratiate himself with Draper: "Father Seymour sat down on the floor beside me. I knew what was coming. It was his make-contact-with-the-boy-routine" (80). After taking a drink of Draper Doyle's Pepsi, Father Seymour makes a lame joke about the "CH" on the Canadiens' uniform being the first letters of the word "Church," but that the word "means nothing unless 'u r' in it" (81). His attempt to ingratiate himself is a thinly disguised attempt to usurp the role of father left vacant by Donald Ryan's death. This is part of a pattern in which he tries, Claudius-like, to usurp the place of Draper's father with gifts and "innocent" flirtations directed at Draper's mother, Linda. Draper, wise (if troubled) child that he is, recognizes Father Seymour's behaviour as a "routine."

One last point about the family's use of hockey. The Ryan Saturday night gatherings have the appearance of a family ritual so often celebrated in hockey lore. In the case of the Ryans, however, this ritual is only an act—a "routine." Jason Blake, in his excellent analysis of the varieties of play in *The Divine Ryans*, points out that Father Seymour's view of sports "is radically instrumentalist," and as a result, he uses sports as "a mirthless means to an end" (2018, 50). *The Divine Ryans* emphasizes the gap between the outward appearance of the Ryans' world and its underlying reality. The "routine" nature of the hockey watching is like Aunt Phil's choice of Christmas movies. Each year she forces the family to sit through *Boys' Town*, *Going My Way*, and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, the three classic Hollywood movies about priests, nuns, and orphans (Johnston 1998, 85). Obviously, the members of the Trinity like to see themselves in these movies, just as they like to imagine their family as defined by the hockey-watching ritual. The novel, however, makes clear that these are both sentimental façades. The gap between appearance and reality suggests something hollow at the core of the Ryan Trinity's power. Draper, it turns

out, discovers the nature of this hollowness, and how to exploit it, during the climax of the novel.

The Dodge Ball School of Goaltending

Draper is a true hockey fan. His sister, Mary, says that his passion for the Montreal Canadiens is “not normal” (16). The text, however, implies that Draper’s love for the Canadiens represents something normal in him, that despite the weirdness of his family, a part of him remains an ordinary boy, a good Canadian kid, and thus worthy of being the novel’s moral centre. Nine-year-old Draper’s identification with the unbeatable Montreal Canadiens is, in fact, comparable to ten-year-old Roch Carrier’s identification with the unbeatable Montreal Canadiens in “The Hockey Sweater.” Such identifications, as Carrier explains in *Our Life with the Rocket*, are what “all the peoples of the earth do when they feel small in the face of a world that’s too big” (2001, 156).

In addition to being a fan, Draper is a player, though not a good one. He has played in goal since the age of six, “not because I preferred it, but because I couldn’t skate well enough to keep up with the other boys” (Johnston 1998, 16). Draper’s lack of physical prowess suggests that he does not conform to the masculine type of the young hockey player, and that, during his quest, he will have to depend on other means to succeed. A clue about what these other means might be comes from his description of his shrine to Montreal Canadiens goalies. The row of pictures, he says, has a strange effect; it looks like “one of those charts that show the evolution of some species over time. From cro-magnon goalie to goalie erectus in a mere one hundred years” (17). The joke hints at Draper’s intelligence and wit—those favoured weapons of the weak. There is also something contrarian about the shrine. That Draper’s imagination leads him to a comparison with evolution hints at a subversive streak for a child raised in a conservative Christian home.

Draper attributes the badness of his goaltending to the fact that he subscribes to “the little-known dodge ball school of goaltending, which was founded on the economy of pain principle, which stated that if it would hurt more to stop a shot than to let it in the net, you should let it in” (17). Besides reinforcing the idea of Draper’s physical weakness, this comic description has a metaphorical purpose, for at the beginning of the novel, Draper’s amnesia—his missing week—is a consequence of him repressing painful memories. Faced with a reality too painful to bear, his psyche has employed “the economy of pain principle” in much the same way as Draper does when playing goal. The reference to goaltending also sets up a key feature of Draper’s dream journey at the end. In the dream, pucks are falling from the sky (the “Apuckalypse” described in the epigraph to this chapter), and, as Uncle Reginald says, Draper needs to save three of them for use during his descent into the underworld. “Only a goalie can do it,” Uncle Reginald explains (195). Left unexplained is the fact that, in order to make the necessary saves and thus to have the means to learn the truth about his father’s death, Draper has to overcome his previous avoidance of pain.

The appearance of the puck-carrying ghost at the beginning of the novel implies that Draper and his father share a traditional father-son bond related to hockey. The evidence of the text is that Donald Ryan has not been very involved in his family, but he does share an interest in hockey with Draper. Draper remarks that his father knows “so much about hockey” (79). One way in which father and son connect is the ritual they use to communicate the Hockey Night in Canada scores when Draper is too young to watch games to their conclusion. During this time, Donald would etch the score into the black, laminated copy of *The Cartoon Virgil*, one of a series of kids’ classics that he has given Draper, and in the morning, Draper would “put a sheet of paper over the book and shade it with a pencil” until the score emerged (75). The father’s comment on this ritual foreshadows the novel’s conclusion: “‘Here it comes,’ my father would say

[about the etched in score], ‘here it comes, emerging from the underworld’” (75).

As the novel goes on, and what is hidden below the surface in Donald’s life is brought to the surface, the father-son relationship becomes ironic. The fundamental irony is that Donald Ryan did not want to be a father. He is, in fact, gay (one of the novel’s key secrets), and it becomes clear that he was forced into marriage and fatherhood by his family. His desire to become a priest had been an attempt to escape the impossible bind posed by being gay in a family like the Ryans. His whole life, including his part in the traditional rituals of father and son over hockey, has been a façade (another “routine”). As evidence for Donald’s gay identity builds in the text, the exchanges he has with Draper take on double meanings. When he describes the expression “fire on ice,” for example, he explains that although many people think the expression captures the essential nature of hockey, there is a second meaning that comes from the mythic literature he and Draper have read. The reference is to Satan in *The Cartoon Dante*, how he is trapped “[Within a] block of ice, frozen for all eternity, caught forever in the act of committing mortal sin” (135). The context makes clear that Donald is trying to tell his son in coded fashion how he feels about his own life.

Uncle Reginald and Oralysis

In her classic study, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman points out that “[the] ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (Herman 1997, 1). This response poses a challenge in helping traumatized individuals. Children, because of the state of their development, are especially prone to a “wide array of psychological defenses,” including the ability, sometimes, to “[wall] off” abuse or trauma “from conscious awareness and memory” (102). To help trauma survivors, then, requires a series of steps. Herman

describes three fundamental ones: “establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community” (3).

Draper begins *The Divine Ryans* as a traumatized child. Much of the action of the novel has to do with how he reconstructs his “trauma story.” Before the reconstruction can begin, however, Draper Doyle must establish a place of safety. At the beginning of the novel this appears to be an impossible task. The Ryan Trinity seems to have totalitarian power. Yet a place of safety does appear, and from a seemingly unlikely source: Uncle Reginald.

Uncle Reginald is the odd one out when it comes to the Ryan empire. Upon his death, Reg Ryan Sr. left ownership of the empire to Aunt Phil, an act of disinheritance that prompted Uncle Reginald to joke: “Well, at least he let me keep his name” (Johnston 1998, 2). The joke hints at why his father thought him unsuitable to head the family: he is the family jokester, and he extends his comic attitude to the empire. Uncle Reginald works at the funeral home but is “not involved in the actual running” of it (22). When need arises, he drives the hearse, picking up “customers” and delivering them later to the cemetery for burial. To perform these tasks, he dons an all black costume with a very high top hat (24–25). The costume accentuates his unusual height and thinness, which, along with the “mournful grace” of his movements, gives him the appearance of a “dapper Grim Reaper” (25).

Uncle Reginald’s appearance and manner create various mythic resonances. His comic style brings to mind the fool or court jester, who speaks truth to power, but in an entertaining way so as to avoid direct confrontation (since he has no real power). Sometimes he is a trickster. When he names the elevator connecting his apartment to the rest of Aunt Phil’s house the “devil *ex machina*” he could just as well be referring to himself (24). Tricksters are both godlike and fallible: they work by playing pranks, but, like the coyote in the Road Runner cartoons, are often the victims of their own pranks. Tricksters are also associated with breaking taboos and mocking rigid categories of mind or society, and, for this reason, they often appear at crossroads and

borderlands—the very places Draper needs to navigate to fulfil his quest. As the driver of the hearse, Uncle Reginald also brings to mind Charon, the mythical ferryman in Virgil's *The Aeneid*, who takes the souls of the dead across the River Styx to the underworld. He recognizes this affinity himself with the joke he makes when transporting a body to the graveyard: "Another ferry to the mainland" (25). Finally, as Méira Cook has pointed out, Uncle Reginald plays Virgil to Draper's Dante in the final dream sequence, guiding Draper to the metaphorical ninth circle of Hell to rescue his father (2004, 144).

Though Uncle Reginald has a tricky manner, he turns out to be a true mentor and guide. The beginning of his assistance is a course of "oralysis" he gives to Draper. Oralalysis is a humorous inversion of Freud's talking cure, in which Uncle Reginald, as the oralyst, does all the talking. Instead of taking the patient seriously, as an analyst would, the oralyst goes off "on tangents entirely irrelevant to the patient's problems . . . thereby confusing the patient and having fun at his expense" (Johnston 1998, 29).

Uncle Reginald's comic takedown of psychoanalysis turns out to have an ironic effect: it works. The weekly hour in Uncle Reginald's apartment, surrounded by walls of books, becomes a time of safety for Draper. Soon the sessions become "the highlight of [Draper's] week" (30). Not only that, but Uncle Reginald's jokey method helps Draper gain access to his unconscious. For example, Uncle Reginald's riff on Sister Louise's "paraline" (she was paralyzed in an accident as a child; this is the line on her body where paralysis begins) leads, by association, to the formation of "Momary," Draper's nightmare creature representing female sexuality. Momary is made up of Linda's "big-breasted torso waddling about on Mary's skinny legs"—that is, half "mom" and half "Mary" (42). The nightmare causes Draper to wet the bed—a nine-year-old's version of a wet dream—which, in turn, leads to a comic subplot of him buying stacks of underwear to hide the evidence. The mock epic of Draper's underwear buying, as Cook points out, is a comic subplot that counters the high seriousness of the main story dealing with "a father's haunting, a son's grief" (129).

But it also has a serious purpose. Draper's bedwetting is a classic hysterical symptom, his body speaking what his mind cannot consciously acknowledge, which is that the circumstances of his father's death relate to sexuality. The wet dreams are also his body's response to the accelerated maturation he has been forced into by his traumatic experiences; they could be interpreted as him having a premature adolescence or attempting to return to the safety of early childhood—or both at the same time. In any case, the Momary nightmares, as terrifying as they are, represent a loosening of Draper's unconscious, a primary goal of therapy, and this loosening is made possible by Uncle Reginald's oralysis. In oralysis, as Uncle Reginald says, "the patient . . . [is] treated like a child"—a treatment that Draper finds comforting and reassuring, and that gives his unconscious the freedom to begin its work (29).

As important as the "analysis" that occurs in the weekly sessions is the bond of trust that develops between Uncle Reginald and Draper. The bond between therapist and patient is the foundation of therapy. Irvin D. Yalom, the great American therapist and writer, puts it this way: "A great many of our patients have conflicts in the realm of intimacy, and obtain help in therapy sheerly through experiencing an intimate relationship with the therapist" (2017, 11). Like many of the patients Yalom describes, Draper begins the novel with a terrible secret and needs to achieve a state in which he can reveal this secret without fear of rejection or condemnation. Achieving this state depends on the caring relationship he develops with Uncle Reginald. This relationship turns out to be crucial in the novel's climactic sequence, when Draper must trust the advice of Uncle Reginald about how to navigate the perils of the underworld.

Zee Resistance

The Divine Ryans distinguishes good and bad characters by whether they have a sense of humour or not. The oppressive nature of the

Ryans is signaled by the portraits of the male ancestors on Aunt Phil's dining room wall, which Uncle Reginald labels "Grandpa Stern, Grandpa Cross, Grandpa Grim, and Grandpa Disapproving" (Johnston 1998, 26). Throughout the first two-thirds of the novel, Linda, Mary, and Draper use humour to bolster their spirits. Their early efforts at resistance, however, are ineffective. When Aunt Phil shames Mary about developing breasts, for example, Mary dons one of Aunt Phil's bras outside her sweater stuffed with "most" of that week's laundry (43). Linda then joins in by putting various other taboo laundry items on like "some court jester," and Draper, Mary, and Linda laugh together until tears stream down their faces (44). Then Aunt Phil appears. The hilarity stops. And Aunt Phil uses her power to shame them back into submission.

By chapter 14 Linda has become strong enough to form what she calls "Zee Resistance." She meets nightly with Mary and Draper for a session of "group oralysis," sometimes in mock-French accents, in which the three of them tell funny stories about anything that comes to mind—including themselves (165). Though he doesn't attend, the idea for the sessions has come from Uncle Reginald, who gives them the mission "to locate and destroy the enemy's 'dehumourizer'"—an imaginary machine designed to remove laughter from the environment (166). So empowering are these sessions that one night Linda informs Aunt Phil of her plan to return to school and thus to leave St. John's with Draper and Mary (169). Unfortunately for her, she does not have enough real power yet, and Aunt Phil is able to quash her plan by threatening to have the children taken by legal force (169).

The setback of the resistance at the end of chapter 14 illustrates both the possibilities and limitations of laughter. Laughter makes Linda, Mary, and Draper more resilient, and gives them some ability to resist Aunt Phil, but it is not enough in itself to free them from their situation. Laughter—like oralysis—helps Draper to gain access to his unconscious. To truly solve the mystery, however, he needs to apply the techniques of oralysis and laughter to the clues left by his father.

The Apuckalypse

Religion, laughter, and hockey come together in *The Divine Ryans* in the chain of associations that resolve the mystery. This chain begins with the puck carried by Donald Ryan's ghost. How to interpret this puck? The necessary method, I think, is suggested by Donald's explanation of the origins of the word: "The word 'puck,' my father had once told me, originally meant 'demon.' For a time, it had even been used interchangeably with 'hobgoblin.' I made a mental note of thanks to that anonymous inventor of hockey who had had the good sense to opt for 'puck'" (3).

This etymology is false. Although the origin of "puck" in hockey is obscure, most historians believe the word evolved from the verb *to puck* (a cognate of *poke*) used in the game of hurling for striking or pushing the ball, which in turn is related to the Scottish Gaelic *puc* or the Irish *poc*, meaning "to poke, punch or deliver a blow" (Oxford English Dictionary; Fittell 2012, 112). At some point, the verb used to describe striking the ball became associated with the ball itself. As hockey evolved from precursor games like hurling, the name was attached to the object made from cutting the top and bottom off a rubber ball that we know today as a "puck." At no time did early hockey players associate the object struck by a hockey stick with the hobgoblin-like creature alluded to by Donald Ryan. This "puck" has a different etymology.

One way to read the false etymology is as a joke. Parents have been known to tease their children this way. A good example is the father in the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* (modelled on Bill Watterson's own father), who does it habitually. When Calvin asks how people make babies, for example, his father explains that "Most people just go to Sears, buy the kit, and follow the assembly instructions" (Watterson 1995, 53). Teasing like this may be a parent's way of subtly venting the frustration that is part of parenting, a harmless bit of "revenge" on the child who, despite his or her smallness and naïveté, has such a powerful claim over you. Perhaps there is a bit of this

motivation in Donald Ryan's joke. The joke is also significant for what it reveals about the teller. Donald's reference to the other "puck" hints at his educated background. The impish creature of folklore he refers to is most famously represented as the character Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Donald's educated background, in turn, supplies additional clues to the mystery of his death, since one set of clues leads to his time at Oxford, and the final revelation comes from *The Cartoon Virgil*, which he has given to Draper. The stress Donald puts on the demonic aspect of Puck also hints, by association, at his own dark secrets. There is a doubleness in his use of "demon" similar to his evocation of "fire on ice": in both cases, he is indirectly revealing how he feels about himself.

Seeing his father's ghost is a hint that what Draper needs to know is buried in his own unconscious. The false etymology of puck suggests how clues about this knowledge will need to be read, not with reason, but through the logic of jokes (in wordplay, puns, reversals, and so on). An important insight of Freud's was that the language of dreams is very much like the language of jokes. Elements in dreams, Freud points out, are often linked by "assonance, verbal ambiguity, temporal coincidence without connection in meaning, or by any association of the kind that we allow in jokes or in play on words" (1965, 568). In order to interpret a dream, then, you need to attend to the way the contents of the dream are transformed by these joke-like elements. As Freud puts it, in dreams "no joke [is] too bad, to serve as a bridge from one thought to another" (568–69).

After its introduction on the opening pages, the puck acquires various meanings, often through joke-like associations. To Draper, as a goalie, a puck is his "nemesis" (Johnston 1998, 3). To Donald, in another association with a double meaning, it is an image for sin, which, he explains, leaves a mark on the soul like the "black mark the puck leaves on the board" (51). In a dream, Draper associates the puck with the wafer given during communion, a surreal image in which the black oval of the puck substitutes for the white oval of the wafer, the embodiment of sin substituting for the embodiment of

redemption (83). This “hockey liturgy” dream suggests that religion and hockey together contain clues about Donald’s death. Later, the puck is associated with Bobby Hull’s slapshot, which, according to Uncle Reginald during his “Mid-season Review” analysis sessions, is so hard that it is “faster than the speed of light,” travelling back in time to alter the outcome of games long over (125–26). The association of the puck with time is reinforced by Draper in a memory of his father describing a star as “a hole made when a puck had been punched out of the night sky” (134). The puck-time associations link imaginatively to Draper’s missing week and Donald’s missing year—those missing pieces of time that have to be recovered to solve the mystery.

The existence of Donald’s missing year is a key revelation in the novel. Draper learns about it when he remembers the souvenir puck his father gave him. Taped onto this physical puck is a piece of paper explaining that it was “Caught by Donald Ryan” in overtime during a National Hockey League (NHL) game on April 16, 1953. Nineteen seconds later, “Elmer Lach scored to win the Stanley Cup for Montreal” (152). Draper takes this puck to Uncle Reginald to entice him to talk more about hockey. When Uncle Reginald sees it, he realizes it is from the year after Oxford when Donald failed to return home. He explains what happened. The revelation about the missing year leads Draper to the only photograph of his father at Oxford, with a group called the Rhodes Blades, who pose like “turn-of-the-century . . . gentlemen hockey players” (157). Draper recognizes the ironical posture of the players, and realizes “there was some further, private joke involved,” which he eventually learns has to do with a play on words. “The Rhodes Blades,” it turns out, is a disguise for “The Gay Blades” (184).

Various associations come together in Draper’s climactic dream of the Apuckalypse (a pun that illustrates Freud’s dictum about no joke being “too bad to serve as a bridge from one thought to another”). The Apuckalypse occurs in the second half of chapter 16. The first half of the chapter, significantly, recounts the loss of the 1967 Stanley Cup

finals by the Montreal Canadiens. This loss is experienced by Draper as an apocalypse: “The notion that, although the Habs had just lost the Cup, the world was going to go on as usual was more than I could bear. . . . [Surely], it seemed to me, there would be no next week” (192). The proximity of Draper’s apocalyptic feelings about the Canadiens’ loss and his dream of the Apuckalypse suggests an association between the two—a good example of what Freud calls the “overdetermination” of dream elements, which is to say that “the elements . . . [are] determined by the dream-thoughts many times over” (Freud 1965, 318). In this case, the Apuckalypse is “determined” by Draper’s response to the Canadiens’ loss, by his own readiness to undertake the journey into the underworld, by earlier hints from Uncle Reginald, and by various associations that have accumulated around the puck.

The Apuckalypse itself, as various critics have noted, echoes elements from Book VI of Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, in which Aeneas journeys into the underworld to find his father, Anchises. Draper faces a series of obstacles on the journey that echo those faced by Aeneas. Aeneas, for example, must get by Cerberus, the three-headed Hound of Hell. He does this when the dog is tossed a “lump of honey and drugged meal / To make him drowse” (*Aeneid* VI: 568–69). Draper must get by Tom the Doberman, a neighbour’s dog with an aggressive manner and engorged penis (three penises, actually!). He does this by tossing him a puck (Johnston 1998, 196). The puck as dog biscuit links by association to the holy wafer of the “hockey liturgy” dream.

The fathers in *The Aeneid* and the Apuckalypse have affinities but also play importantly different roles. Anchises, though an immaterial spirit Aeneas cannot embrace, is walking about in a state of honour and offers prophecies that bolster the ultimate goal of Aeneas’s quest—to return from Troy to found the city of Rome. In this, Anchises performs one of the traditional roles of the dead in stories of descent, which is to provide knowledge that only the dead can have. As Margaret Atwood puts it, “Because the dead are outside time, the dead know both the past and the future” (2002, 168–69).

Donald Ryan, in contrast to Anchises, is frozen in the posture of his death. Draper's description of finding him contains a number of important details:

I could see against the wall a sofa on which my father was laid out, his hands clasping what looked like a prayer book to his chest. The pose was the same as in the Morenz dream, as if they were waking him on the sofa instead of in a casket. He was even dressed the same, in a tuxedo with a ruffled front, and had his hair slicked back. (Johnston 1998, 198)

In the Apuckalypse dream, Draper finds his father in the "red room," the room in Reg Ryan's Funeral Home in which he had been waked (118). The act of entering this room represents an overcoming of the pain of remembrance necessary for Draper to learn the truth. That he finds his father on "a sofa" indicates that the image comes from Draper's memory of finding his father after his suicide. The whole memory comes to him soon after—how he had woken up, gone downstairs to the living room, and found his father on the sofa "staring in what might have been wide-eyed amazement at the ceiling" (205).

Draper has two tasks in the dream. The first is to put pucks on his father's eyes, thereby keeping them closed and letting him rest in peace (198). Pucks are the proper objects to do this, not only because they visually echo the coins traditionally put on the eyes of corpses to pay the Ferryman for the journey across the river Styx, but, as we have seen, they represent lost pieces of time. The pucks restore the proper order of time, in which the dead are dead and remain in their proper realm (the past), and thereby put a stop to how the father's ghost haunts the son. The second task is to take the "prayer book" from his father's hands. This turns out to be *The Cartoon Virgil*, the black book upon whose cover Donald used to etch hockey scores. Donald, it turns out, was holding this book when Draper found him (205). Upon waking, Draper realizes he needs to

do a tracing of the cover like he used to do when he was little—and, when he does, he finds his father’s suicide note (207).

The revelation of his father’s suicide allows Draper, like the returning hero in a quest narrative, to act on behalf of his community. For the world to know that Donald Ryan had committed suicide—and why—would be a scandal from which the Ryan family would never recover. The power of this knowledge allows Draper to confront and defeat Aunt Phil and to lead his mother and sister to a new life away from St. John’s.

One last thing about how Draper finds his father. Why the Howie Morenz-like pose? This detail harkens back to a dream Draper has in chapter 10, in which he is at Morenz’s 1937 funeral in the Montreal Forum. The earlier dream is triggered, most immediately, by Aunt Phil forcing Draper to attend the wake of a child (in the first half of chapter 10). The imagery of Morenz’s funeral, however, comes from Uncle Reginald: Morenz was Reginald’s favourite player, in part because of the grandeur of his laying in and service at the Forum, and he has told Draper about these events in detail (123). In the chapter 10 dream, Aunt Phil tries to force Draper to kiss the corpse, which is laid out for viewing at centre ice—a continuation of her tactic of using death to enforce obedience. The corpse turns out to be not of Morenz but of Donald. Draper realizes that he is “the one person who could bring [his father] back to life” and instinctively recoils (124). The implication is that if Draper gives in to Aunt Phil’s macabre demand, he will be trapped forever in a situation in which his father is “alive” to haunt him—because, presumably, he will have assumed his father’s place in the line of human sacrifices required to maintain the Ryan empire.

The Morenz imagery—overdetermined as dream elements usually are—probably also comes from the part of Draper’s unconscious that still, despite everything, wants to revere his father. The imagery confers a dignity, even a heroic quality, upon the memory of the man, perhaps even elevates him to a status akin to Anchises.

Remember also that the mythologized version of Morenz is that he died of a “broken heart” when he realized he couldn’t play hockey anymore. Draper has plenty of reason to feel angry and betrayed by his father’s suicide. By associating his father with one of the greatest of hockey heroes, however, Draper seems to have decided to concentrate his grief on the “broken heart” that was the ultimate cause of his father’s death.

Hockey Liturgy

The Divine Ryans illustrates very well the complex imaginative space occupied by hockey in Canada. In one sense hockey is implicated in the oppressive religious regime that contributes to Donald Ryan’s suicide: his gay identity is not part of the traditional masculinity projected by the game any more than it is part of the “family values” of the Catholic church. At the same time, hockey is shown to be a potential site of resistance to that regime. The possibility of resistance is indirectly a product of how strong the myth of hockey is: forming a hockey team at Oxford (The Rhodes/Gay Blades) was probably excellent cover for a gay men’s club in the 1950s. More directly, though, resistance is made possible by how the meanings attached to the game are not natural to it; the meanings are never fully fixed but are part of an ongoing process of imaginative response. Similarly, from one point of view, the hockey-defined relationship between Donald Ryan and his son is a way to avoid talking about difficult issues; but from another point of view, it offers a way to talk, obliquely, about those very issues—and, in particular, a way to speak in the only way possible about what is taboo in Donald Ryan’s life. The very obliqueness of hockey talk makes it the right vehicle to open the doors to the underworld of hidden truths.

There are two last lessons from *The Divine Ryans*.

The first has to do with the importance of loss. I mentioned earlier that the Apuckalypse is preceded by the loss of the Stanley Cup final

by the Montreal Canadiens in 1967. Draper's feelings about this loss inspire his climactic dream. The loss itself, though, also points to important lessons. Not only does the world go on after your team loses in hockey, Draper discovers, but no team is unbeatable in the way he thought the Canadiens were. The Canadiens are not super-human but made of "body stuff." Though the text doesn't make it explicit, there is a sense that Draper's disillusioning is necessary to the insights he receives in his dream. There is a parallel here to Roch Carrier's childhood attachment to Maurice Richard. As I argued in chapter 5, Carrier understands the psychological need served by such attachments (a little person's need to feel bigger), but also the need to restore the history made invisible by the creation of such mythic figures as the Rocket. Growing into adult awareness requires acknowledging history. Draper's resistance to history, in the form of the truth of his missing week and the truth behind his father's missing year, must be overcome for him to work through the trauma he has experienced. The defeat of the Montreal Canadiens helps to prepare him for this.

Another hockey loss is also important. This occurs in chapter 9, when Mary defeats Draper in her final Fleming Street game. The sibling rivalry between Mary and Draper, acted out as opposing goalies in the neighbourhood hockey game, is a charming bit of comic relief in the middle of the novel, but, like other comic elements, serves a serious purpose as well. The turning point of the game is when Mary instructs her team to aim for the bullhorn with which Draper is doing play-by-play. With the bullhorn, Draper sounds like a combination of Danny Gallivan and Foster Hewitt, and as a result, his play-by-play energizes his own team and demoralizes the opposition. Without the bullhorn, Draper has to use his own voice, which is "so absurdly puny that everyone laugh[s]" (Johnston 1998, 110). The loss of his bullhorn voice is, of course, painful for Draper; but it also illustrates, symbolically, a key aspect of the journey of self-understanding he is on: he needs to learn to speak with his own voice.

The loss to Mary also exposes the sexism that has affected both Mary and Draper. What does it mean to grow up in an environment in which “most grownups of either sex agreed that boys were . . . ‘better’ than girls”? (105). After her victory, Mary gets to enact the ritual of “One Last Rush,” in which she stickhandles the length of the ice, in slow motion, while all the other players pretend to try to stop her. By the time she reaches the other goal, she has “ten of them draped all over her, *à la* Maurice Richard,” and ritually fakes Draper out and scores (112). The ritual subtly insists on the need to challenge the rigid gender roles of the time (a girl as Maurice Richard?). Challenging these roles takes on additional urgency as it becomes clear that the father of Mary and Draper has also been a victim of them.

The second lesson has to do with the body. So many of the interconnections between religion, laughter, and hockey in *The Divine Ryans* are mediated through the body. There are, as I’ve already suggested, bodily implications to laughter. Underlying comic elements is always, ultimately, what Fisher and Fisher call “body stuff” (Fisher and Fisher 1981, xi). “Body stuff” leads inevitably to mortality, which leads to human responses to mortality, which leads to both hockey and religion.

Less obvious, perhaps, is how hockey and religion are connected though the body. At first glance they seem to inhabit separate realms, religion dealing with the spiritual, hockey with the physical. The humour created by the religion-hockey coupling is based on the seeming incongruity of the two. Yet muscular Christianity provides a clue about their underlying connection. Remember the motto of Uncle Seymour’s Hundred, “toughness of body” is supposed to lead to “purity of soul,” which, as we saw in the analysis of *Glengarry School Days*, links back to some of the earliest meanings projected onto hockey. Muscular Christianity is rooted in the belief that a well-disciplined body contributes to a spiritually upstanding self. But how is this religious?

An important lesson from the philosophy of religion, relevant to the cultural study of hockey, is that what defines a religion is as much—or more—about rituals as it is about metaphysical beliefs. The American theologian James A. K. Smith has written about this in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. To understand how religions work, according to Smith, you have to go deeper than “beliefs or worldviews” to examine “formative practices”—which is to say, “liturgies” (Smith 2009, 24). The way religions work day-to-day is by embedding their vision of the good life surreptitiously, in the body, through their practitioners’ participation in repeated rituals. They do this, Smith claims, because “we are the sorts of animals whose orientation to the world is shaped from the body up more than from the head down” (25). For this reason, liturgies “aim our love to different ends precisely by training our hearts through our bodies” (25).

With this in mind, Draper’s “hockey liturgy” dream becomes a rich, jokey-serious distillation of many of the key themes in *The Divine Ryans*. The dream takes place at the end of chapter 8. Draper, worn out by staying up to watch the Montreal Canadiens’ season opener (which they lost), finds himself dozing off the next morning in church.

As a result, Father Seymour’s droning sermon begins to mix in his mind with “the play-by-play of both Danny Gallivan and Foster Hewitt” (Johnston 1998, 83). This mythic combination leads to a vision of a referee who, at a face-off, breaks the puck above his head and gives “one piece to each player” (83). The referee intones the words of the Eucharist, “Do this in memory of me,” which is itself a quote of Jesus’s words at the Last Supper, as reported in 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 and Mark 14:22–24. The invocation of memory reinforces the demand implied by the ghost of Draper’s father: remember me. Not spelled out explicitly, however, is that the bread and wine consumed in the Eucharist symbolically represent Jesus’s body and blood, and to consume them is to affirm the promise made by Jesus for human salvation. The broken puck in the dream, then,

in addition to its other meanings, represents the body—the very place Draper must seek the truth about his missing week and find his own salvation.

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Playing with the Hero in Richard Harrison's *Hero of the Play*

These are the figures of my escape: men who could fly, bend steel, come to life each month in my eager eyes, my flight from my father's face. Determined men I watch cross and re-cross the comic-panel lines that mark their play; these are my figures, the Greats.

—Richard Harrison, “The Greats”

People keep forgetting that hockey is also a big business. . . . There is nothing spiritual about hockey.

—Bobby Hull, *Hockey Is My Game*

Michael Oriard's 1982 claim that the sports world is “the particular domain of heroes” and that literature about sport must “focus on this essential fact” was prescient for the hockey writing boom in Canada (1982, 25). *The Last Season* and *King Leary*, as we have seen, explore a series of questions related to being a hockey hero. What does it take to succeed in the game? What does “success” mean? How does the status of hockey hero translate to life outside the arena—or does it? *The Divine Ryans* features a protagonist who is the farthest thing from a hockey hero but who completes a classic hero journey with an assist

from the game. Draper Doyle performs the traditional hero role: he shows bravery (overcoming his fear of pain), performs a great and difficult task (uncovering the memory of his missing week), is rewarded (with powerful knowledge), and uses his new power to help rejuvenate his community (allowing Mary, Linda, and himself to escape the not-so-divine Ryans).

A text that explores heroes in a particularly rich way is Richard Harrison's 1994 collection of poems, *Hero of the Play*. Though it was not the first full collection of poetry devoted to hockey (John B. Lee's *The Hockey Player Sonnets* appeared in 1991), *Hero of the Play*, as Paul Martin has pointed out, has become "the most recognized and widely read collection" of hockey poems (2018, 58). In his collection, Harrison creates a multifaceted picture of the game, with a stress on its ritual-like and mythic qualities, and, of course, its heroes. A particularly important figure is Bobby Hull, to whom a number of poems are devoted. Hull, at his apex, was one of the most idolized figures in hockey, both for his on-ice accomplishments and his Adonis-like beauty. Harrison uses Hull's life and career as a cautionary tale about heroes, as well as a way to explore his own attraction to such figures.

Before I begin, a note on the text. The 1994 edition of *Hero of the Play* consists of fifty-two prose poems. In 2004, a tenth anniversary edition was published with an additional thirteen poems. In 2019, a third edition, *25: Hockey Poems New and Revised*, was published to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original collection. 25 has eight new or uncollected poems, as well as a few poems from other Harrison collections, and revises or deletes a number of poems from the first two editions. In what follows I cite from the tenth anniversary edition, which is the most widely disseminated of the three.

Playing with Poetry

A good place to start is with the form of the poems. Except for a few additions to 25, these collections are made up of prose poems.

Martin explains that Harrison chose to write in this form to create texts that looked a bit like “sports page columns” on the page. His idea was that by making the poems look familiar, instead of too obviously like poetry, sportspeople would “give the poems a chance” (2018, 60). At the same time, to prevent the poems from becoming straight prose, he used a “prose-poem line break,” in which he deliberately chose his line endings for rhythm and to create subtle moments of emphasis (Martin 2018, 60).

Although Harrison chose his form to make his poems more accessible, it’s useful to think about what defines a text as a prose *poem*, as opposed to straight prose. The distinction has to do with the elements of poetry itself. Prose poems, despite their lack of the more obvious elements of poetry (line breaks, stanzas, and so on), share with other poetry a particular focus on language. Poetry exploits possibilities in language not typically made use of in everyday speech. The musical elements (rhyme and metre) are obviously part of this—but so is the possibility of words to mean more than one thing at a time. Poetic language trades in multiple layers of meaning/effect—as in a metaphor, where comparing one thing to another encourages us to think of a range of similarities and difference between the two things. The logic of poetry also tends to be less rational and more associative or emotional. Poetry is more about felt response, lived experience, and evocative detail, than it is about logical explanation. The result is that the “truth” that emerges from poems tends to be tentative and multilayered, rather like the truths of life itself.

The history of the prose poem is also relevant. Prose poems were first popularized by the nineteenth-century French writers Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Valéry. Edward Hirsch argues that the form was a rejection of “the straightjacket of classical French versification” (1999, 58). Indeed, Baudelaire’s description of his poems in “À Arsène Houssaye” stresses the liberatory quality of the form. His “prose poétique,” he writes, seeks to be “musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements

lyriques de l'âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience" ["musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and strong enough to adapt itself to the lyrical movements of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the somersaults of conscience"] (Baudelaire 1969, 8 my translation). Quite often, prose poems seem like stream-of-consciousness writing; they follow the twists and turns of the mind, the "undulations of reverie," and are filled with internal effects not typically found in straight prose.

Harrison brings an awareness of these possibilities to his treatment of hockey in *Hero of the Play*. A glimpse of the rich possibilities this can lead to is hinted at by the title of the collection itself. Note the different interpretations you can make of this title. A first reading probably brings to mind a hockey player making a key play—like Percival Leary scoring an overtime cup winning goal—and thus becoming a hero. The title, however, also evokes the idea of a hero in a *play*—that is to say, a stage play, a drama, or the play of language that is poetry itself. This second meaning invites comparisons between a hero in literature and a hero on the ice. Comparisons of this kind are, in fact, a recurring feature of the text.

Another layer of significance is hinted at by the cover art of the first two editions, which is not of players on ice but of a tabletop hockey game (only a trace of this art remains in the design of 25). The tabletop game is an image of childhood play. Perhaps the hero in the title, then, is the one created in a child's imagination? Perhaps the hero is the child himself (or herself) created by the games of childhood? In a more general way, the image reinforces that *Hero of the Play* is not just about hockey itself but about make-believe versions of the game. Tabletop hockey is an imitation of hockey played on the ice—a symbolic representation. The symbolic nature of the image is made even more complex if you consider that the cover is not an actual tabletop game but a photograph of a portion of such a game—it's a representation of a representation of the game.

One last point about the cover. If you look closely, you will see that the uniforms of the tabletop players are in the colours of the Toronto

Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens. This echoes the album cover of Stompin' Tom Connors's "The Hockey Song" as well as the content and illustrations associated with Carrier's "The Hockey Sweater." The evocation of the Montreal-Toronto rivalry hints at the Original Six era of the National Hockey League (NHL), an earlier Golden Age; it also hints at the historical significance of the rivalry for acting out English-French tensions within Canadian society, as well as the rivalry between Protestants and Catholics (as we saw in both "The Hockey Sweater" and *The Divine Ryans*). These associations, it turns out, are developed in some of the poems themselves.

In a certain way, you could say that *Hero of the Play* treats hockey not only *in* poetry but *as* poetry. To explain what I mean by this, consider the poem that most directly echoes the collection's cover. This is "All-Time Game," which describes two brothers picking teams for an "all-time game" of tabletop hockey (Harrison 2004, 49). The dramatic situation brings to mind the old tabletop games containing metal players in the likeness of NHL stars; as the poem goes on, however, it becomes clear that the literal existence of the metal players is not the point. Every choice the brothers make is heavy with symbolism. Early on they argue about the greatest English players versus "Lemieux, Robitaille and The Rocket"—a reference to English-French conflict acted out through hockey. When they up the ante to "the ultimate game" they choose more violent players, including Eddie Shore "because he nearly killed a man." By this point it is clear that the brothers are acting out their own conflict through their choices (choosing Eddie Shore is like saying "I'd like to do to you what Eddie Shore did to that guy!"). The precise nature of the conflict between the brothers remains unexplained but there is a wonderful hint about the tangled-up complexity of it in the line "the language inflated and gross the way men talk when they mean it pretending they don't"—a line that also, in a subtly self-reflexive way, highlights the heightened attention to language that is characteristic of poetry. All of this contributes to an ending heavy with symbolism: "huge pucks in the tiny nets, the anger of 30 years, everything out of proportion."

The double-meaning evoked by the ending of “All-Time Game” is a classic poetic device: the tabletop hockey pucks, which are literally out of proportion to the size of the tabletop hockey nets, become symbolic of the disproportionate anger of the brothers at whatever grievances they had in the past. In keeping with a common effect in poetry, the last line also reopens the meaning of the title: what “game” does the title end up referring to? Note also how the two brothers ultimately create a text—a symbolic representation—with their choices of players for table-top hockey. In a sense, the brothers co-author a poem that expresses the fraught relationship between them. Such poem-like creations, *Hero of the Play* suggests, are found in other forms of hockey as well.

The Naked Man Beneath the Flag-Bright Colours of the Team

Hero of the Play is the third of Harrison’s six books of poetry. The first two, *Fathers Never Leave You* and *Recovering the Naked Man*, appeared in 1987 and 1991. Though it might not seem so at first glance, these books offer valuable context for *Hero of the Play*. A key issue in the late 1980s and early 1990s was how men should respond to feminism. By this time feminism (especially the so-called “second wave” that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in conjunction with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States) had had a significant impact on North American society, and many men were trying to understand the implication of the changes for their own identity. Scores of books and articles were published on the subject. I think of the 1987 collections *Men in Feminism*, edited by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, and *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*, edited by Michael Kaufmann—among many others. This was also the beginning of the so-called “men’s movement,” which, depending on your point of view, was a reactionary attempt by men to recover their traditional privileges, or an attempt by men to

positively redefine masculinity in the light of cultural changes. The founding text of the men's movement, Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Men*, was published in 1990 and was a massive best-seller.

Fathers Never Leave You and *Recovering the Naked Man* inhabit this environment. In these collections, Harrison offers a remarkably candid exploration of his identity as a man in light of feminist critiques of patriarchy. Many of the poems centre on his love-hate relationship with his father, an ex-British soldier and athlete, who comes to represent not just biological but cultural paternity. In a later essay, Harrison describes his father like this: "Dad was old school. He lived by the virtue of a man's given word, the principles of discipline and duty and the necessary violence to see duty done. He'd been through war, fought with machines and hand-to-hand. He was, by all accounts, good at his job" (Easton and Harrison 2010, 118).

In his poems, Harrison details how his youthful adulation for his father gave way to feelings of disappointment and betrayal. "Summer Garden," for instance, opens with his father as a traditional masculine hero, who tells stories about the sound of bullets and his own first parachute jump, but who also poisons family life in the present: there is "death in my father's skin / as he speaks / even of joys," and there are "dying men in his eyes / where my sons play / before him" (Harrison 1987, 13–14). The implication is that the same characteristics that allow the father to be a traditional hero make it difficult for him to be a good husband and father.

Many of the poems use Harrison's father as an object lesson for what is wrong, from the son's post-feminist point of view, with the norms of masculinity. Poems like "Fathers," "My Father's Body," and "My Father's Goodbye," illustrate how the father's power depends upon emotional detachment, an implied (or explicit) threat of violence, and a self-defeating denial of the body. Harrison's attempt to redefine his own identity sometimes takes the form of confessing and attempting to excise the tendencies he has inherited. In "I Wanted to be a Soldier," he admits that he too has loved like a soldier, and come "from a woman's bed / as ignorant of beauty / as a

pornographer,” and in “My Father’s Goodbye,” he admits that he too has been “a man glancing at his watch / inventing important, stupid things / to keep himself away” (Harrison 1991, 45–46). A poem along these lines that anticipates *Hero of the Play* is “Confessions of a Sensitive Post-Feminist Male,” which includes in Harrison’s list of inherited male tendencies his love of combat sports:

I like football helmets
and body checks,

the way muscular men in the flag-bright
colours of the team
divide the world on a playing field, or
the plane of the rink

(Harrison 1991, 13)

The avowed goal of Harrison’s early poetry is, as the title of the second collection suggests, to recover the naked man. The imagery of nakedness implies a stripping away of the masks of masculinity, of the rituals and disguises that support male privilege, in order for a more positive masculine identity to emerge. The foundation of this new identity, as “Out of Costume” suggests, is the naked body: “just myself / naked with you” (Harrison 1991, 68). Nakedness, for Harrison, is associated with honesty as well as vulnerability. In poems like “Out of Costume,” he attempts to name—and hence recover—the fragile male body hidden by the costumes of masculinity, to undo the aggression and violence enabled by the denial of that fragility, and so to make a tentative step towards a healthier male identity.

Interestingly, the most positive male role model in *Recovering the Naked Man* is a fully costumed one: Batman. In the poem of the same name, Harrison describes this cartoonish figure from his youth (not to be mistaken for the hardboiled hero of the more recent films) as a man “sheathed” and “pure,” whose cock and testicles “lie dormant in his hero suit, bound / not painfully, but adequately for

his true / action which is to save / and not to want.” Batman has all the power of the father with none of the violence. There is “nothing weak” about him, yet he is a man “women feel safe around.” How to square this costumed role model with the goal of recovering the *naked* man? Perhaps it has to do with how Batman’s costume brings out the essence of the man, getting rid of “the awkward protuberances” while presenting him as “poured from the idea of himself” (Harrison 1991, 35). This would be consistent with Harrison’s later writing on superheroes, in his critical book *Secret Identity Reader: Essays on Sex, Death and the Superhero*, in which he argues that, for all their seemingly cartoon-like qualities, figures like Batman represent “ideas and ideals” (Easton and Harrison 2010, 23). Perhaps, though, it is also a recognition of the impossibility of true nakedness with regard to heroes. Heroes always appear, to a degree, in costume. For Harrison, this is “nothing to make fun of,” and yet, the last line of “Batman”—“He says only enough to fill a word balloon”—plays with the strong silent type in a way that may or may not be ironic (Harrison 1991, 35). Is the strong silent type an ideal to aspire to or a stereotype to be mocked?

Hockey Superheroes

Hero of the Play takes as its main subject those other costumed heroes of Harrison’s youth: hockey players. The collection contains poems about NHL stars (Paul Coffey, Eric Lindros, Jaromir Jagr, Bobby Orr, Bernie Federko, and others), players with tragic stories (John Kordic, Brian Fogarty), famous personalities (Don Cherry), the Stanley Cup, the Russians, and a few poems about women (Manon Rhéaume, the Hockey Mom). The 2004 edition contains tribute poems to Jean Béliveau, Gordie Howe, Bobby Hull, and Maurice Richard—whom Harrison refers to as his “fantasy four,” an echo of the “Fantastic Four” of comic book fame (Harrison 2004, 13)—commissioned for a fundraiser hosted by the Calgary Booster Club. Overall, as Paul

Martin puts it, the poems explore “the complex tensions among masculinity, violence, and identity” embodied in the game (Martin 2018, 63). Harrison deals with issues similar to what we’ve seen in earlier texts: the cost of success, the limitations of the masculinity associated with hockey, and the complex relationship between the game and the world outside.

Harrison is particularly interested in mythic elements. As he explains in *Secret Identity Reader*, myths, to him, are like folk tales, “a culture’s way of encoding its wisdom for the young” (Easton and Harrison 2010, 36). In *Hero of the Play*, Harrison connects stories about hockey to a long heroic tradition that goes back at least to Homer. Various classical and literary allusions reinforce this connection. “African Hockey Poem #2,” for example, imagines the townspeople in the Ivory Coast city of Abidjan staring at his hockey stick “just as the inland farmers who had never seen the sea stared at Ulysses with his oar” (2004, 32). “Driving Through the Night, the Station on Sports Talk Radio” imagines the dial of the radio “lit up with the glow of a peephole in the fence around Olympus” (88). A particularly intriguing literary allusion occurs in “The View from the Top,” in which the mythic potential of the Stanley Cup, raised by Scott Niedermayer on a mountain near Cranbrook, BC, is described as “no jar on a hill in Tennessee ever stopped time and stuffed all the eye can behold into the barrel of itself better than this Cup” (93). The phrase “no jar on a hill in Tennessee” is an allusion to “Anecdote of the Jar,” a 1919 poem by Wallace Stevens, in which a jar placed in a landscape “made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill” (Stevens 1980, 76). The jar illustrates the myth-making power of the imagination. A self-conscious act of imagination like placing the jar makes the “slovenly wilderness” acquire order and, potentially, meaning; and although this order is only fictional, to create it is a profoundly human—and necessary—act. By associating the Stanley Cup with Stevens’ jar, Harrison implies that it shares a similar myth-making power.

Other poems in *Hero of the Play* treat players in a self-consciously mythic way, by focusing on elements that seem to “leave recorded time behind” (Harrison 2004, 16). The poems about great players tend to focus on an exceptional ability that defines that player—his or her meaning in the pantheon of hockey gods and heroes. The poem about Jean Béliveau, for example, stresses Béliveau’s legendary hockey sense, how he was always made the right play, but quietly, with an almost Zen-like grace, and without violence. All of this is implied by the poem’s last line: “[Béliveau] teaches me *The puck going into the net is silent*” (86). The poems about Maurice Richard, on the other hand, stress Richard’s legendary competitiveness, as embodied in his black-eyed stare. One of the most famous examples of Richard’s competitiveness is the time he seemed to carry a 200-plus pound defenseman, Earl Siebert, on his back, as he drove to the net to score—an incident recounted in Harrison’s “Maurice” (87) and also alluded to in *The Divine Ryans* when Mary performs the ritual of “the final rush” (as we saw in the last chapter). The fiery spirit of Richard sets up the moving poem that ends *Hero of the Play*, “Elegy for the Rocket,” in which the legend of the Rocket becomes Maurice Richard the dying old man, whose “famous eyes” now show “a humble fire at the end of [their] use” (95). This poem captures very well the pathos of the aging / dying athlete, which reminds us that someone who seems immortal, so favoured by the gods, ultimately is only human.

The four poems about Gordie Howe point to the larger significance of heroes. Two images recur in these poems: one is of Howe flicking rink chaff over the head of a guy looking for an autograph, and one is of him telling Wayne Gretzky to “work on your backhand” (46, 70, 85). The effortless flicking of the chaff is a reminder of the physical virtuosity of Howe, as well as a form of intimidation—the two traits for which Howe was known for as a player. Telling Gretzky to “work on your backhand” hints at Howe’s all-round game (he was ambidextrous) and his role, later in life, as a mentor to the next generation.

The larger significance of Howe is suggested by “Acts of Worship.” This poem takes the form of advice to a young player. The poem presumes that the player will worship someone like Gordie Howe but that “If you’re too much in awe, you’ll never love this game.” “Sooner or later,” the poem goes on to say, “you’ve got to hit Gordie and flatten him,” even though this is an impossible task, given Gordie’s mythical strength. The consolation for your failed attempt is that “if you’re lucky, he’ll give you an elbow behind the ref’s back and you’ll see what a bastard he is,” which will “cure you” of your worship (71).

Before and after “Acts of Worship” are poems about the relationship between fathers and sons. This is not, I think, an accident. What happens between Gordie and the young player is reminiscent of the relationship between a son and a father. “The Greats,” from which I drew the epigraph to this chapter, makes the connection explicit (75). What “The Greats” emphasizes is that hockey heroes—like superheroes—are father-substitutes. For Harrison, this leads to an ambivalent reaction: on the one hand, such heroes allow him an imaginative escape from his biological father; on the other hand, they embody a similar, perhaps even more idealized, masculinity—the strong, silent, sometimes angry, often absent, man of action. “My Father’s Face” begins “To begin (always beginning) to speak of my father’s face uncovered at last”—an echo of Harrison’s ongoing desire to “recover the naked man” (78). In the determined look of hockey players, the poem goes on to say, is the look of other men defined by anger, including Harrison’s father, and, sometimes, despite his own best efforts, Harrison himself. “This Is My Hockey” stresses how the idealized image of fathers and hockey heroes depends on absence: “This is the lie that keeps us looking into the faces of worshipped men: if only you were there, then everything would have been OK.” The father, like the hockey hero, is “perfect in the highlight film”—a line that could have read “*only* perfect in the highlight film,” since it is clear that the closer you get, the more imperfect such figures become (78).

The Not-So-Golden Jet

The contrast between the hockey hero as “idea or ideal” and the reality of the man is most dramatically embodied in Harrison’s poems about Bobby Hull. Seven poems in *Hero of the Play* reference Hull. Before these poems, Harrison published “Bobby Hull” in *Recovering the Naked Man*. This earlier poem sets the table for what is to follow.

“Bobby Hull” begins with an assertion of likeness between the persona of the poem (Harrison) and the player, even though Hull “is The Greatest / Player Of All Time, / and I play the tabletop version of his game” (Harrison 1991, 66). Then the poem elaborates upon the on-ice abilities and matinee good looks that earned Hull the nickname “The Golden Jet”: “the power of his legs,” a shot that “could push a man off his skates / and back into his own goal,” and a Greek godlike beauty, as captured in the famous photograph of him “pitching hay, topless . . . / on his farm in Pointe Anne, Ontario” (66–67). The photograph appeared originally in a profile by Trent Frayne in *MacLean’s* magazine in 1966. Frayne’s profile is an example of the myth-making power of sports journalism. It begins with Hull’s status as “the most dashing and attractive player in hockey” and goes on to describe his small town character and perfect home life, with an adoring wife, and three sons “all with light-blue eyes and great thatches of hair so blond as to be almost platinum” (Frayne 1966).

The second half of “Bobby Hull” alludes to a 1972 event that shocked many fans: Bobby Hull, at the height of his success, left the NHL “and the record books” for a rival league, the World Hockey Association, and “a million bucks” (Harrison 1991, 67). Hull, at the time, was 33 years old, had just come off his fifth fifty-goal season, and had already scored 604 goals in the NHL. He was on track to retire as the highest NHL goal scorer of all time. To many fans—especially young ones, like Harrison at the time—his decision to leave the NHL was a betrayal. Not only did it damage his legacy, but it offered a glimpse of the underbelly of the hockey business that many fans were not interested in seeing. Hull’s decision led to his

exclusion from the 1972 Summit Series despite the fact that he was, arguably, Canada's best winger. Harrison's disappointment is captured in the last lines of "Bobby Hull":

the stick figure that represents him on my game
fills me with the dread I will not live up to him,
yet he has failed me already;
he is everything that does not live up
to its promise. (67)

Hull's decision to leave the NHL was only the beginning of a decade long fall from grace. He had moments of on-ice glory during the 1970s—most notably his performance in the 1976 Canada Cup tournament, when he reunited with some of his old NHL colleagues—but his personal reputation deteriorated. Rumours of his drinking, philandering, spousal violence, and cruelty to his children began to circulate. When his wife, Joanne, filed for divorce, Hull's personal flaws were exposed in excruciating detail. Gare Joyce, in *The Devil and Bobby Hull: How Hockey's Million-Dollar Man Became Hockey's Lost Legend*, summarizes the effect of Hull's 1980 divorce trial as follows:

When Bobby Hull broke into the NHL [in 1957] the media portrayed all its stars as solid family men, upright heroes like you'd find in an old-fashioned boys' novel. Hull embraced the image of faithful husband and good father. He made public appearances with Joanne, an arm trophy inevitably cast as the dutiful and worshipful spouse. He worked their sons into commercials to buff that image. It was all a patent lie. (2011, 178)

As described in the divorce proceedings, the Hull marriage had been rocky since the 1960s. Joanne Hull filed for divorce the first time in 1970 after Hull beat her during a trip to Hawaii (188). The couple subsequently reconciled and tried to maintain Hull's image as a family man. So fake was this image, however, that even the image of the three blond-headed boys was fake: son Blake, it turns out, had dark

hair, but his hair was dyed blond as a child “so that he was a neater fit at appearances and in commercials” (55).

The collapse of Hull’s reputation haunts the poems in *Hero of the Play*. The first of these, “African Hockey Poem #1,” describes how Harrison, while in the Ivory Coast, forges an unlikely bond with a hotel manager because of Bobby Hull’s name. The manager is a hockey fan; he knows about the winger. After exchanging a manly handshake with the manager, Harrison skates on the hotel rink and feels elated: “I touched the ice and I could be any boy in love” (2004, 31). Who or what is the boy in love with? It could be the game, or a girl, or himself. Whatever the object of the boy’s affections, the constant is the sense of wholeness and euphoria associated with love. These last words of the poem subtly recall the twin features of Hull’s reputation: how he was not only a great player, but, as Frayne put it, “dashing and attractive.” The skater feels elated because the hotel manager’s recognition allows him to bask in the reflected glow of Hull in his glory.

For the tribute to Bobby Hull that was part of the “fantasy four” celebration, Harrison rewrote “African Hockey Poem #1” as “Bobby in Africa.” This version appears in the “Overtime” section of *Hero of the Play* and is almost identical to the original, except that the last line now reads “I will be like Bobby Hull—each time he touched the ice, he was every boy in love” (2004, 84). The new last line shifts focus away from Harrison to Hull. That Hull was “every boy in love” hints at his grace on the ice and also at how boys, throughout the ages, have projected their desires to be “dashing and attractive” onto such figures.

“African Hockey Poem #1” and “Bobby in Africa” foreground The Golden Jet version of Hull. This mythic version, however, is haunted by the history of Bobby Hull the man. To suggest that Hull represents “every boy in love” is, of course, deeply ironic, given the history of Hull’s behaviour in love.

Other poems in *Hero of the Play* make clear that Harrison is aware of the troubled history behind the image of The Golden Jet. “Reunion,

or Grieving” opens with Harrison pasting his own face over Brett Hull’s in a photo of Brett and his father. This, Harrison writes, is “further proof that I practiced with Bobby in ’76 when I was scouted by the Jets for goal”—a claim first made in “Bobby Hull” (2004, 33). The claim—like its proof—is patently fictional, the kind of claim a young fan would manufacture to impress his friends. This anticipates Harrison’s description of the photograph of Bobby and Brett as also fictional: “Bobby is proud of his son. . . . [They] are perfectly again husband and child together.” The word “perfectly” here resonates with “perfect in the highlight film” from “This is My Hockey”: both suggest that the image is only perfect from a distance. The next line underlines the point. As a boy, Brett waited “for Bobby to appear in the almost-empty stands of junior” (33). In other words, Bobby wasn’t there for key moments in Brett’s growing up. The separation of the Hulls took place when Brett was twelve or thirteen, and after the divorce in 1980, fifteen-year-old Brett remained with his mother and two younger siblings in Vancouver—and saw even less of his father than before.

“My Favourites (The National Game)” further dramatizes the distance between father and son. In this poem, Harrison’s own father calls from Victoria to say that he has acquired a Bobby Hull hockey card (perhaps knowing that Hull is Harrison’s favourite player). Harrison then contrasts this early card of “Bobby at his peak” with a later one of “Bobby as a Jet—after the divorce . . . [scoring] goals no one counts except in brackets” (2004, 34). Finally, at the end, Harrison receives a card of Brett Hull “poised, intent, waiting for the pass.” This closing image resonates with the line about Brett waiting for “Bobby to appear” in “Reunion, or Grieving.” In both cases there is a sense of incomplete legacy, a lack of paternal regard, the son waiting for and not receiving what is “passed” down from father to son.

The significance of this troubled history is most apparent in “The Hero in Overtime,” the title poem of the section added to the Tenth Anniversary edition of *Hero of the Play*. This poem describes the aftermath of the most famous goal of Brett Hull’s career, his triple

overtime Stanley Cup winner for the Dallas Stars in 1999. In the dressing room, a TV commentator goes to interview Hull and, first thing, “reminds him again he’s from a great hockey family” (Harrison 2004, 83). The commentator is prompting Hull to make some comment about “his famous father,” but, instead, he “does what no other player has done tonight—he thanked his children” (83). That Brett Hull thanks his children is a reminder of the lack of connection between himself and Bobby, despite the many “like father, like son” stories that accompanied Brett’s career. It is also a reminder of what the true priority of a father should be—the implication being that Brett is trying, despite the challenges of being a professional athlete, to be a good father.

Bobby Hull also appears, briefly, in “African Hockey Poem #3” and “Stanley Cup.” The first of these picks up on the image of Harrison walking through the streets of Abidjan with a hockey stick. This time, however, Harrison is reminded of how he used his stick as a boy to play ball hockey. In Bobby Hull’s hands, he remembers, such a stick led to “a million-dollar shot, the birth of the mask, thousands in the stands” (2004, 40). The reference to the “million-dollar shot” evokes Hull’s legendary slap-shot—a rare and valuable talent—but also Hull’s abandonment of his NHL career for the WHA, which he did for a signing bonus of a million dollars.

The reference to Hull in “Stanley Cup” is particularly poignant. The poem stresses the mystique of the Stanley Cup, the hardest trophy in sports to win, and how the players yearn for it so strongly that it is a kind of love. Yet, the poem goes on, “Bobby Hull passed on his chance to drink champagne from its lip when the Hawks won it [in] ’61 because he thought there’d be so many in his life” (Harrison 2004, 62). This line hints at Hull’s early brilliance (leading the Hawks to their first championship in twenty-seven years at the age of 22), but also the hubris that contributed to Hull’s fall. The line implies that Bobby Hull’s story is ultimately one of unfulfilled potential—a powerful irony when it comes to a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame whom some will argue was the greatest winger of all time.

The Other Father

Harrison often describes Bobby Hull as if he were a son describing his father. This suggests that Harrison has an internalized image of Hull rather like the internalized image of his own father: both are attractive as masculine ideals but also deeply flawed.

In *Secret Identity Reader*, Harrison writes that although the conclusions of *Iron John* “are largely dismissed today as an embarrassing fad,” Robert Bly did make an important point: “most men’s fathers are a mystery to them” (Easton and Harrison 2010, 119). In poem after poem throughout his career, right up to his Governor General’s Award winning 2016 collection, *On Not Losing My Father’s Ashes in the Flood*, Harrison has shown how important it is to him to explore the mystery of his father. His writings about his cultural fathers—hockey heroes and superheroes—are part of this exploration, and allow him to explore, through metaphor and imagination, issues about masculine identity that are embodied by his biological father.

Another father is at play in *Hero of the Play*, however: Harrison himself. Exploring the mystery of his father—or of cultural fathers—is often accompanied in Harrison’s writing by questions about himself. To what extent is he or isn’t he like his father? To what extent has he reproduced the negative aspects of his father—despite all his post-feminist efforts? This self-questioning continues in *Hero of the Play*. “Reunion, or Grieving,” for example, ends with the admission that Harrison missed his stepson’s wedding. “How could you?” he asks himself (33). The unspoken context behind this self-accusation is the breakup of Harrison’s first marriage, after which he did not attend the wedding of his stepson. The lines themselves appear after the image of Brett Hull waiting for his father to appear in the “almost-empty stands” of junior. Was Harrison’s absence at the wedding comparable to Bobby Hull’s absence from the life of Brett? The poem suggests that this is so through a richly complex image. The self-accusation comes from the face of Harrison whose lips are

moved by a “face beneath.” The full final line is “*How could you? the face beneath my face moves my mouth and asks me*” (33). The context associates the face beneath with Brett Hull, whose place, as the son of the mythic hockey star, Harrison imaginatively supplants with his fantasies about Bobby Hull. Brett’s accusation points to the history elided in the elevation of Bobby Hull to a mythic hero: he interrupts Harrison’s childlike fantasy with a reminder of the flaws of the actual man who was his father, while simultaneously reminding Harrison of his own flaws.

Details from Harrison’s personal life are scattered throughout *Hero of the Play*. I’ve already mentioned poems about his father, his brother, and himself. “Love and the Hockey Pool” has some disguised references to the beginning of the relationship that led to his second marriage. “*R loves L*” in part 4, “Ice,” is probably a reference to “Richard” and “Lisa,” and the “you” throughout “Love and The Hockey Pool” is probably “L”. Harrison’s identification with Bobby Hull is itself as much personal as mythic. A popular joke in hockey circles applies here. “If you want to know when a guy thinks the Golden Age of hockey was,” the joke goes, “find out when he was eleven years old.” Harrison was born in 1957. In 1968–69, Bobby Hull scored 58 goals to shatter the NHL record for most goals in a season, and to reinforce his status as “the most dashing and attractive player in hockey.”

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Hockey, Zen, and the Art of Bill Gaston's *The Good Body*

Of course it was foolish to ponder these big questions, even when what might be an evil disease was shouldering you in that direction. Life throwing its gloves off, staring you down. It was even more foolish not to ponder them, even if you know there are no answers.

—Bob Bonaduce in *The Good Body*

Bill Gaston's 2000 novel, *The Good Body*, also explores the relationship between religion and hockey—but with a twist. Like a number of other novels and stories by Gaston, *The Good Body* dramatizes the encounter between an “everyday” Canadian man and the principles of Buddhism. What Buddhism teaches, Gaston told Tony Tremblay in a 1991 interview, is that “the human condition is one of somnambulism. We flounder about, pretending that our concerns matter, focused on little things which in the span of a life don't mean dick” (Tremblay 1991, 207). Gaston's texts often depict a main character who is living a life of somnambulism. The character encounters Buddhist principles, often in the form of a Buddha figure, and through a chain of events experiences “a moment of wakefulness or awe or surprise” (204). This is the larger trajectory of *The Good Body*. What

is distinctive about this novel is that the “everyday” guy at the centre of it is a hockey player.

The Good Body tells the story of Bob Bonaduce, a forty-year-old minor-league player, and his attempt, at the end of his playing days, to reconnect with his son, Jason. Jason is a student at the University of New Brunswick and a member of that university’s hockey team. Bonaduce plagiarizes his way into a graduate school creative writing program with the aim of joining the hockey team himself. He hopes that the camaraderie of playing hockey together will break the ice with Jason: “Set a guy up, no matter how much he hates you he has to come and whack you on the ass” (Gaston 2000, 167). Pursuing this ill-thought-out scheme causes Bonaduce to sleepwalk from one disaster to another. Finally, after a harrowing sequence culminating in a car crash and the onset of full-blown multiple sclerosis (MS), he ends up crippled, incontinent, speech-impaired, and with no prospects for future improvement. In his hospital bed, however, he seems finally at peace. He slurs out a joke. He tries to comfort his friend Marg, who huddles tearfully beside him. He claims that the tears running down his face are not of sorrow but of laughter. What makes the ending of *The Good Body* a seemingly “happy” one is that Bonaduce’s journey has led him to a state of Buddhist-like wakefulness. What matters, he now understands, is “you, because it is you leaning over the bed. . . . What matters is this light streaming glory through the orange curtain” (269).

The journey that culminates in Bonaduce’s state of wakefulness is deeply intertwined with *The Good Body*’s portrayal of hockey. The novel suggests that Bonaduce’s somnambulistic life is a consequence of his pursuit of the hockey dream, and that hockey (at least professional hockey) is emblematic of the kind of life that might lead a person into somnambulism. Yet the novel also suggests that there is more to hockey—as well as to Bonaduce—than a focus on “little things which . . . don’t mean dick.” By its end, the novel implies that, for all their differences, hockey and Buddhism share uncanny parallels to one another. The encounter between Zen and hockey in *The*

Good Body, then, leads to a fascinating and multilayered (not to mention often hilarious) meeting of cultures—an encounter that adds further insight into the connections between hockey and religion that are part of the popular conception of the game, and that we have already encountered in *The Divine Ryans*, *King Leary*, and elsewhere.

The Body Person

From the outset, *The Good Body* makes clear that Bonaduce's pursuit of the hockey dream has had dire consequences for his life. Bonaduce's alienation from Jason, along with his ex-wife, Leah, illustrates a profound irony: the quest to be a professional hockey player, which is so often associated with traditional ideals of masculinity, can turn a man into a lousy father and husband. In the case of Leah, the novel suggests that she and Bonaduce have always had a strong sexual connection but that she was turned off by Bonaduce's hockey role as a fighter. Bonaduce, in turn, was ill-equipped to maintain a relationship. In the case of Jason, Bonaduce lacked the skills to be a good father, and even if he had put in more effort, the demands of his career would have made it difficult to stay connected. This points to an irony in the hockey myth that I explored in the chapters on *The Last Season* and *King Leary*—that hockey, so often mythologized as a way to make a boy a man, has a way of turning out lousy lovers, husbands, and fathers. Perhaps the most poignant line in *The Good Body* occurs in the dressing room when it dawns on Bonaduce that the indifference Jason has projected towards him throughout the novel is, in fact, not an act: "the catchphrase he'd for two hours been breathing to himself, 'We're both pretending I'm no one special,' now transmuted to the thought *He's not pretending*" (Gaston 2000, 201).

The novel implies that the problems associated with hockey in Bonaduce's life are also reflective of deeper existential issues. An important clue is the body imagery that appears throughout the text. As a professional athlete, Bonaduce is a "body-person," and the novel

shows how his attention to his own physique leads him to judge others through the lens of physicality. For example, Daniel Kirk, the first “manprof” he meets, is a “buttclenched male animal” (17) and Margaret, the student who will become his closest new friend, “probably thought a bit about food” (15). Bonaduce’s identification with the body—and his related tendency to use a head-body dichotomy to categorize people, with “head-people” understood as the irreconcilable other—can be read as symptomatic of the limited quality of his hockey-focused life. Chögyam Trungpa argues that a key aspect of Buddhist practice has to do with the synchronizing of mind and body, which he describes as “a basic principle of how to be a human being” (2002, 52). Similar claims could be made about various Western philosophies (especially feminist philosophies). Bonaduce’s identification with the body, on the other hand, is a version of the masculine tendency to deny bodily weakness and what that weakness points to.

That Bonaduce has lived in denial about aging and death is underlined by the event that most directly triggers his attempt to reconnect with Jason. This is his discovery that he has MS. MS is described in the novel as an incarnation of death itself. Bonaduce recalls the morning of his first MS attack as a continuation of “sleep’s dreamscape,” a transformation of himself into the kind of living dead creature you’d find in nightmares:

You wake up with vision so fuzzy it’s like sleep’s dreamscape has continued, and then you find the legs don’t work too well. Couldn’t even bloody walk, he was a big nightmare puppet with packed rag legs. It wasn’t some awful new injury, because he’d been feeling so weak and weird lately he hadn’t even been playing. (Gaston 2000, 43)

As a disease, MS involves a step-by-step withdrawal of feeling and function from the body, sometimes slowly over years, sometimes very quickly (Mayo Clinic n.d.). For Bonaduce, it means different parts of his body going dead in a foreshadowing of the overall death

of his body: “Hold your fork. Dead hand on the lap under the table” (Gaston 2000, 234).

Bonaduce’s response to his MS, until the very end of the novel, is to deny the reality of the disease, just as his body focus has meant a lifelong denial of human weakness, aging and death. His attempt to play hockey for the UNB team goes directly against the medical advice he has received, which is not to overexert himself. When the overexertion has the predicted effect—an acceleration of his symptoms that turns him into “a limping mummy”—he responds in classic hockey player fashion by attempting “to walk it off” (235). Eventually he hits moral and physical rock bottom, breaking the leg of a player on Jason’s own team to try to win Jason’s favour and triggering an almost debilitating onset of MS symptoms, and then, in a last attempt at denial, gets in his car and tries to “get gone” (247). The crash that follows is like a forceful, final assertion of the body. Bonaduce wakes up in the ditch to find that he is paralyzed and has soiled himself, his body “emptying itself, muscles he couldn’t feel” (262). Only when he is forced to experience his utter helplessness before the weakness of his body, with the terror and panic that comes from a clear awareness of his own mortality, is Bonaduce able to glimpse what it means to be truly alive.

Wise Men or Wise Guys

The deeper existential issues faced by Bonaduce in *The Good Body* are the primary focus of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism takes as its starting point the view that human suffering arises not so much out of the inevitability of change and death as out of our attempts to “solve” these facts of existence in some final way, either by denying their reality or by trying to explain them in a way that transforms them into something other than what they are. As Steve Hagen puts it, “We think we have to deal with our problems in a way that exterminates them, that distorts or denies their reality. . . . We

try to rearrange and manipulate the world so that dogs will never bite, accidents will never happen, and the people we care about will never die” (1997, 18). Buddhism teaches the folly of such thinking. Rather than try to “solve” the facts of existence, Buddhism encourages us to cultivate non-attachment. Hsing Yun puts it like this: “Prajna [wisdom] teaches us that nothing should be clung to because there is nothing that can be clung to. Everything is empty” (2001, 78). Non-attachment is not about escaping reality but about “dealing with the fundamental nature of reality,” which is its lack of an essential meaning and the inevitability of change (90). The pay-off for achieving Buddhist wisdom is to live more fully in the present. This is all that is meant by “enlightenment” in Buddhism. Indeed, as Hagen points out, the term “Buddha” simply means “awakened one” (1997, 3).

Gaston’s first three novels all revolve around Bonaduce-like protagonists who are startled towards wakefulness by an encounter with a Buddha figure. In *Bella Combe Journal*, Vaughn, a hockey-playing wanderer, is challenged by Bert Flutie, a far-seeing bum, by Lise/Annie, whose only rule is “wakefulness” (Gaston 1996, 192), and by Connor Peake, a poet who goes from the extremes of meditating to performing weird antics in order to shake up the people around him. The Baal twins in *Tall Lives*, who struggle equally with the opposite extremes of order and chaos that dominate their lives, are challenged by Felix, a Buddha-shaped French-speaking philosopher, who ultimately sees the futility of attempting to “change the world” and as a result burns up his life’s work, an encyclopedia, along with his house (Gaston 1990, 207). And in *The Cameraman*, the protagonist, Francis Dann, also a hockey player, is challenged by his friend Koz in much the way that Vaughn is challenged by Connor Peake. Koz, like Connor, is a tricky agitator whose antics seem designed to shock people into wakefulness—but in this case as a film director rather than a poet. Koz’s ideal is to think of life as a very expensive movie with only one chance to do things perfectly. “The way we waste time,” he

goes on to say, “you’d think we forgot we’re going to die” (Gaston 2002, 156).

There is a characteristic ambiguity in Gaston’s Buddha figures: they are all tricksters as well as agents of enlightenment. Koz is typical. He is described throughout *The Cameraman* by way of antinomies. He is an ordinary guy with extraordinary abilities, a popular jock who is also uncannily a top student, the kind of kid who “was absent a lot, yet always got perfect scores on tests” (Gaston 2002, 25). Koz is both “the maze and the map out” (232), a maker of films that suggest both “silliness and genius” (61), a possessor of eyes that suggest “a wise man, or a wise guy” (187). To Francis, some of Koz’s deeds might have been intended to “shed light” but others “could easily mean nothing at all” (60–61), which adds a destabilizing layer of irony to the catchphrases Koz uses to draw attention to his work: “watch this” and “trust me.”

The ambiguity of Gaston’s Buddha figures reflects an ambiguity in Buddhist teacher figures more generally. There is a lot of reverence towards teacher figures in Buddhist literature and many stories are told of the journeys towards enlightenment experienced by these teachers, journeys that become object lessons for others to follow. There are also many stories about the tests posed by teachers in order to prepare students to learn. Often the tests involve hardships or frustrations that at first seem extreme or inexplicable. In *Zen in the Art of Archery*, for example, Eugen Herrigel describes long periods of apparently fruitless repetition at each stage of his learning to shoot. At the beginning he spends the better part of a year simply practicing drawing the bow (incorrectly, as it turns out). Eventually he learns that the repetition is necessary to “detach him from himself,” for “all right doing is accomplished only in a state of true selflessness, in which the doer cannot be present any longer as ‘himself’” (Herrigel 1953, 67). Another way to put this is that the tests set by the teacher are designed to break down the ego-investments of the student, investments that are expressed, among other ways, in the

student's desire to be a "good student" or to "get" something from the teacher. As Chögyam Trungpa explains, "the impulse of searching for something is, in itself, a hang-up" and only when this hang-up is exhausted can enlightenment take place (2002, 42).

That the teacher's role in Buddhism is to challenge the student to give up his or her ego-investments implies that the teacher wields a great deal of power. In order to thwart the desire to "get" something, the teacher will inevitably make what seem like arbitrary or inexplicable demands, acting, apparently, as a wise guy and not a wise man—and the student must submit to this. Herrigel points out that the teacher-student relationship in Zen depends upon the student's "uncritical veneration of his teacher" (1953, 62). For Trungpa, the basic condition of true learning is an openness in the student that comes from a kind of "psychological surrender" to the teacher. "It is essential to surrender," he writes, "to open yourself . . . rather than trying to present yourself as a worthwhile student" (Trungpa 2002, 39).

Coupled with this reverence towards the teacher, however, is an awareness of the limitations of the teacher's role. There is a crucial distinction in Buddhism between the wisdom that the teacher may convey and the nature of true wisdom. The teacher is, in an important sense, only an agent, only someone who might help the student achieve his or her own experience of truth. Ultimately enlightenment has to be experienced directly. The role of the teacher is very much like the role of the "sacred" texts of Buddhism. These texts are revered, but at the same time, it is understood that they do not contain truth in some concrete or extractible way. As Hagen puts it, "Buddhist teachings and writings can assist you, but you won't find Truth in them, as if Truth somehow resided in the Buddha's words" (1997, 10). One of the most famous metaphors in Buddhism has to do with how the Buddha's words are like a finger pointing at the moon. The finger can point the way, but ultimately, to see the moon, you have to look for yourself. The same is true of the teacher. To think of the teacher as some superior being who possesses wisdom or truth

is to mistake the finger for the moon. This is why Trungpa, in the same chapter that describes the need for psychological surrender, also cautions against the idea that this might lead to any kind of “master-servant relationship.” Instead, he suggests that the way to think of the teacher is as a “spiritual friend”—someone who assists the student from a position of equality. The process of learning, then, becomes “a meeting of two minds” and “a matter of mutual communication” (Trungpa 2002, 39).

The Weirdness of Goalies

The Good Body takes Gaston’s portrayals of ambiguous Buddha figures a step further by making the Buddha figure in the novel a goalie Bonaduce rooms with for the last part of his career in the minors. In the character of Fournier, Gaston draws a comic parallel between the ambiguity of Buddha figures and the stereotypical weirdness of goalies, who are usually understood to be either the most thoughtful players on a team or the craziest (another version of “a wise man or a wise guy”). The usual goalie weirdness of Fournier is magnified by “his accent and Montreal suave,” which make him stand out even more than the other Canadian hockey players in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Bonaduce’s team at that time is based. Bonaduce senses what is special about him:

[Fournier’s] English wasn’t great, but the glint in his eye leapt easily over language. He had a way of smiling at your subtle question, looking at you with understanding but saying nothing. If you persisted, he might wave it away and say happily, “No matter!” . . . He read so much. (Gaston 2000, 119)

Eventually, once Fournier gets to know Bonaduce enough, he admits that “his lifestyle was in keeping with the traditions of Zen”: he shopped “only for the food of one meal,” had only two sets of clothes, and so on (119). Unlike the other players, who tended to pick up

women in bars, Fournier met women in libraries or the grocery store, and the ones he dated tended to be “Zen or health-food types themselves” (120).

Fournier only appears on a few pages of *The Good Body*. On these pages he plays the role of concerned friend, checking in on Bonaduce by telephone (114), sending his new girlfriend’s book about “yeast infections” as a treatment for Bonaduce’s MS (186), and helping to arrange a last, large pay cheque from Bonaduce’s former hockey team (266). He is not the immediate catalyst for Bonaduce’s enlightenment. The New Age-like quality of the therapies he suggests for Bonaduce’s MS (by way of his extremely New Age girlfriend) underlines the extent to which he may be a flake. His presence in the novel, however, suggests the availability of another way of approaching life from the somnambulistic one that has defined Bonaduce’s approach so far. Bonaduce, importantly, is open to Fournier’s ideas. When he goes along with Fournier’s Zen lifestyle Bonaduce feels “lighter, more ready for the game, party, movie, or call-up to the bigs” (120).

Dressing Room Savvy

Bonaduce’s openness to Fournier’s Zen-like ideas is one of a number of clues that there is more to Bonaduce than the stereotype of a “stupid rough hayseed hockey player” (Gaston 2000, 41). Long before his fateful crash, Bonaduce is shown to have other important qualities: he is genuinely literate, a guitar player and aficionado of contemporary music, and he is often a clear-eyed observer of both hockey and the larger world. For example, early in the novel he looks out the window to see a landscape where nothing is happening and has a Buddhist-like thought: “You could think of it as an empty stage waiting for something to happen. Birds. Deer. They had to come. In two months, snow. There were worse things to watch than an empty stage” (35). Later he remarks upon the “trivial ugliness” that a career in hockey must seem like to someone like Leah, whose own work

involves helping refugees and “victims of war and torture” (54–55). And at various places he makes astute—and funny—observations about the world of academia. His most telling observations in this area involve comparisons between academia and hockey. There is macho posturing in the academy, he points out, that is not unlike that found in hockey, as his hilarious account of Phil “presenting” in a graduate seminar shows (40). The graduate students are good at irony, he observes, because they practice it “like pros” (85). And, most significantly, the intelligence on display in academia is not foreign to the hockey dressing room, where there is also a great deal of “wit” as well as “nightclub and taxi savvy,” not to mention the “sound public management of pride and envy, something academics were famously inept at” (42).

An important aspect of Bonaduce’s astuteness is that it occurs not only in *spite* of his being a hockey player but also *because* of it. Bonaduce’s interest in music and literature, as well as his openness to the ideas of Fournier, marks him as a “freak” in the eyes of his teammates (34). Yet the astuteness of Bonaduce’s observations is related to the “savvy” he has absorbed from the hockey dressing room. Beyond the worldliness of the dressing room savvy, there is a sense that Bonaduce’s astuteness is a result of his ability to observe with an innocent eye practices whose absurdity is hidden to those who are immersed in them. This is particularly true in his satires of academia. What this suggests is that the point of view of “regular sorts . . . hockey-jacket types” is not only a source of “somnambulism” but also potentially of critical insight (220).

That Bonaduce’s astuteness occurs not only in *spite* of his being a hockey player but *because* of it is itself reflective of the double-sidedness of hockey in *The Good Body*. Yes, hockey is associated with somnambulism; but hockey, the novel suggests, also contains elements that can point the way to enlightenment. Take Bonaduce’s body focus. Though Bonaduce’s self-identification as a “body-person” suggests an unhealthy division of body from mind, the body-focus of his life as an athlete also contains clues about a way out of this

unhealthy division. As an athlete, Bonaduce has daily physical rituals not unlike the practices of meditation. Exercise helps to quiet his busy mind: “Jog the legs, the spine, the body into a pleasant stupor, hard breathing” (10). Gaston’s first novel, *Bella Combe Journal*, makes an explicit connection between the “hard breathing” of physical activity—especially skating—and the awareness of breath that occurs in meditation (see Gaston 1996, 77–78, 142).

A number of passages in *The Good Body* show Bonaduce’s awareness of breath. Take this one from his first night in his new bed in Fredericton:

[This] pure and gentle going-in that almost erased you, a tender secret muscle the size of your body that turned you to air if you flexed it right—if you stayed here like this, you could be one of those people, and he knew they existed, one of those people who know only what matters, who can play life like the game it is.

(Gaston 2000, 47)

The implication of passages like these is that Bonaduce’s awareness has been heightened by his activities as an athlete.

The goal of an athlete’s physical practice is to achieve that elusive state referred to as “the zone.” Gaston, in his hockey memoir, *Midnight Hockey*, likens the zone to the mental state that comes from meditation:

The funny thing is, the zone appears to be exactly what meditators are seeking when they meditate. Go ahead, read any book on meditation and check out how they describe the sought-after state: a heightened clarity, a stillness, a place beyond words, and effortless. . . . It’s mind and body together, in perfect union.

(2006, 99)

Bonaduce himself had an experience of the zone during a period in Kalamazoo when he scored an amazing number of goals, “first of a bunch of flukes and deflections,” and then others when he actually tried to score (Gaston 2000, 191). The clarity Bonaduce achieves at

the end of *The Good Body* is very much consistent with the characteristics of the zone he aimed for—and sometimes experienced—as an athlete.

Luck's Big Magnifying Glass

Perhaps the most fascinating intertwining of Zen and hockey in *The Good Body* has to do with the treatment of luck. Luck is foregrounded in the opening pages of the novel with the description of the antique air freshener that dangles from Bonaduce's rear-view mirror (Gaston 2000, 3). His friend Marg identifies this talisman as Bonaduce's "rabbit's foot" (29) and tries to increase his chances of good fortune by giving him another good luck charm in the form of a dream catcher (34–35). References to stars (49), astrology (61), and fireflies (those living embodiments of stars) (101) help to maintain the profile of luck in the novel. All of these references underline the significance of Bonaduce's observation that the confluence of events that brings him to Fredericton—the folding of his minor league team, his MS diagnosis, and a rare letter from Jason—suggest that he is taking his turn "under luck's big magnifying glass" (13).

Luck, of course, has a powerful mystique in sports. The prevalence of superstitions among athletes has to do with the fact that success or failure often seems determined by factors over which an individual has no control. A lucky bounce here or there can make all the difference. When Bonaduce is in the zone, he experiences it as a form of luck (191). The challenge for an athlete is that this zone of apparent good luck is both elusive and fragile—hence the tendency to think of it in mystical terms and to try to control it by magical means. Bonaduce describes the tendency like this: "The good zone you seek is delicate and there's nothing of it to hold on to, which is why the guys have their little thing. . . . Shamrock, Buddha, girlfriend's bandana, lucky rock" (262–63).

Luck, from a Buddhist point of view, is complicated. The idea of luck implies something outside of ourselves, some external force that might work either for or against us. Good luck charms are intended to “charm” this external force into acting on our behalf. Given the Buddhist teaching that “you are your own refuge, your own sanctuary, your own salvation” (Hagen 1997, 19), the idea of appealing to some external, quasi-supernatural force to fix your life is deeply flawed. As Shravasti Dhammika explains, the Buddha “considered such practices as fortune telling, wearing magic charms for protection, fixing lucky sites for buildings and fixing lucky days to be useless superstitions” (2005, 41). Yet there are psychological aspects to luck that have affinities with the goals of Buddhist practice. Richard Wiseman from the University of Hertfordshire summarized the results of his ten-year study of self-identified “lucky” and “unlucky” people as follows: “Lucky people generate their own good fortune via four basic principles. They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophecies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good” (2003).

One of the truisms in sports psychology is that it is important to have a positive attitude. Being positive is no guarantee, but doubting yourself is a sure way to failure. Bonaduce knows this: “Doubt can kill luck all by itself” (191). At the same time, success requires that you can’t want to succeed too badly. To be lucky in the deepest sense—to be in the zone—requires non-attachment. As Gaston puts it in *Midnight Hockey*, “you can’t force your way into the zone—it has to simply happen” and “it has more to do with relaxing than it does with straining” (2006, 98–99).

A Gaston story that develops these ideas about luck in a particularly illuminating way is “Saving Eve’s Father” from the collection *Sex Is Red*. “Saving Eve’s Father” tells of a boy named Alex who discovers that his girlfriend Eve’s father—a man who has the good or bad fortune to have the same name as a famous hockey player, Mike Gartner—is addicted to a video gambling machine. Alex takes all his

savings out of the bank in loonies, goes to the store with the machine in it, and proceeds to play for hours upon hours as Eve's father and other local addicts look on. His plan is to play until all his money is gone (minus one dollar he leaves in the bank to keep his account open). When asked by Eve why he is doing it, he replies that he isn't sure except that "as long as I'm playing, [her father and the others are] not" (Gaston 1998, 9). The store owner understands that Alex is sacrificing himself. "The boy's dyin' for your sins is what he's doing," he tells the addicts (12).

The larger context of the story makes clear that the video gambling machine preys on the desire of the men to fix their lives by a stroke of luck. Even Alex recognizes its seductiveness. When he wins a game "the peeling angel-song of the electronic bells" and the "cartoon-blue" of the screen are "like some version of paradise" (11). Unlike men like Eve's father, however, Alex recognizes that the game is fixed, that not only do you always lose in the end, but that along the way the machine creates unlikely lucky streaks to "suck you in" so that you play on in hope until it has "all your money" (11). The machine, the story implies, is an analogue for life itself. Life contains good fortune and bad, but, in the end, our luck always runs out. The wise response to this condition, from a Buddhist point of view, is non-attachment. Real luck has to do with not clinging to luck. Alex discovers this for himself when his desire to fail at the gambling machine is spent. At this point, a symbolically appropriate twelve loonies short of losing all his money, he has to stop, because "He knew now what luck was, how it came of truly not caring if you had it or not. And, knowing this, he saw that if he kept playing he would start to win, and keep winning, and ruin it all" (13).

Pure Desire

The interconnections between Buddhism, hockey, and life are well-captured by a passage Bonaduce writes as part of his creative

writing course. Immediately before, he had made a joke about Shakespeare and received a comeback from a fellow student who says “Shakespeare’s a waste of time. Hockey isn’t. Oh” (Gaston 2000, 136). This inspires him to write as follows:

When you read a book you are nothing but a fan. And fans of books have nothing—nothing—over fans of hockey. That a puck is an utterly meaningless thing to chase is exactly the point. They might never think of it this way, but hockey fans are drawn to the spectacle of men who are the best in the land at using their bodies to fulfil *pure desire*. (136)

The passage goes on to say that the desire of the players is “pure” because the puck is “the perfect symbol of worthlessness.” This makes the game “so abstract, so pure in its meaninglessness, it is almost Japanese” (137).

Bonaduce’s passage riffs on the assumption that hockey, as a game, is not “serious.” Hockey is not part of the world of striving and doing and transforming of the material world that we associate with “real work.” For this reason, you might say that hockey is “utterly meaningless” (136). Then again, so is life. Hockey is fundamentally like Buddhism because they are both part of the reality of life itself. Human beings are creatures of desire, and our desires (to do things, to accomplish things, to get lucky, even to be a “good” student of Buddhism) can make us mean and make us suffer, but they can also lead us, in spite of our meanness and suffering (and sometimes because of them), towards enlightenment. To be enlightened is to be awake to life’s reality (the opposite of somnambulism). This wakefulness, in turn, is associated with the state of “pure desire.” Pure desire implies a desire that has worn itself out, that has become devoid of the impulse to desire for any specific thing. Pure desire doesn’t search for something but just is. This is akin to what happens when Alex’s coins run out in “Saving Eve’s Father.” His desire wears out; he stops searching, hoping, and craving. And at the moment when he no

longer cares whether he is lucky or not, luck returns to him (or would if he kept playing).

What happens to Bonaduce at the end of *The Good Body* is akin to what happens to Alex when his luck runs out. With the crash, Bonaduce's luck runs out. He has to face the reality of his mortal body. In that moment, he lets go of his shit (literally and metaphorically) and thus of his desire to clean up the mess of his life. Only then, after he no longer cares if he is lucky or not, does luck return in the form of "the light streaming glory through the orange curtains" (269).

Nothing should be clung to because there is nothing to cling to.

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Cara Hedley's *Twenty Miles* and the Challenge of the Hockey Barbie

Highlight reels are a lie. A hockey game writes its own Coles Notes, this much is true. It's like it's manufactured in an ephemeral package, ready to be butchered and filleted into three clean chunks, then chopped further, this massacre, then strung together in highlight reels—for those who missed it, for the illegitimate fans who believe a hockey game is a list of the goals and fights, nothing else.

—Isabel “Iz” Norris in *Twenty Miles*

Despite their exclusion from the hockey myth, women and girls have played hockey from the beginning. As Joanna Avery and Julie Stevens point out, women played alongside men on the Rideau Hall rink in the 1880s “at the invitation of Lord and Lady Stanley,” and the *Ottawa Citizen* reported on a competitive women's game on February 11, 1891 (Avery and Stevens 1997, 57). With the spread of hockey across the country in the 1890s, women's teams were formed alongside men's, and in some cases women and men played together (59). The twentieth century brought further opportunities for women in

education and sport. In 1900—eight years before the first men’s professional hockey league—a five-team women’s league was established in Québec (60). The universities of Toronto and McGill established physical education degrees for women in 1901 and 1908, and, in clubs and universities, “women took up the same sports as men and were just as competitive” (59).

The 1920s and 1930s saw a boom in women’s hockey. Leagues grew and women “strived to claim titles and trophies all across Canada” (63). The 1925–26 Queen’s University women’s hockey team won the intercollegiate championship and were “the first women athletes at Queen’s to receive their athletic letters” (61). In 1929, 12,000 fans watched the Ladies Ontario Hockey Association champion Patter-son Pats of Toronto defeat the Québec champions, Northern Electric Verdun, by 2–0 at the Montreal Forum during the annual winter carnival (64).

After its initial boom, women’s hockey suffered the double-whammy of a withdrawal of resources during the Second World War and a renewed devaluing of women’s sports. Even during the early popularity of the women’s game, men’s hockey took precedence when it came to ice time and finances. During the war, authorities stressed the importance of supporting the men’s game “to keep up morale”—and the resources that were available went to the men (74). By the later 1940s and 1950s, public focus was strongly on men’s professional hockey (this is the heyday of both the Original Six era and the hockey myth), and support for women’s hockey was hard to find. Sponsors realized there was more money to be made in the men’s game and “most abandoned the women’s teams” (76). Along with the more general withdrawal of resources, schools responded to cuts in athletic funds by sacrificing girls’ and women’s programs (76). The post–Second World War era was also a time of intense propaganda intended to return women to traditional roles.

Women’s hockey began to revive in the 1960s, and by the 1970s had made various advances. Struggles over resources and recognition continued, however. Avery and Stevens point out that the national

governing body for hockey in Canada, the Canadian Hockey Association, didn't recognize female hockey until 1982 (82). A benchmark case was that of Justine Blainey, whose lawsuit, decided by the Supreme Court in 1987 after three years of litigation, improved the rights of girls to more opportunities in competitive hockey. Tellingly, Blainey was subject to a significant amount of abuse during the course of her lawsuit. As she recounts in a later documentary, "I was told I was gay, I was sleeping my way to the top, I'd never get married, and I'd never have kids" (McKeown 2017). The 1990s was the decade of the most visible strides for the modern women's game. The first official Women's World Championship was held in 1990 and women's hockey was finally added to the Winter Olympics in 1998. In Canada in the 1990s, various universities introduced, or reintroduced, women's hockey as a varsity or club sport (Avery and Stevens 1997, 78).

The 1990s flourishing of women's hockey sets the stage for Cara Hedley's 2007 novel, *Twenty Miles*. According to the novel's acknowledgements, *Twenty Miles* uses the "voices and stories" of players and coaches from the University of Manitoba Bison Women's Hockey Team, of which Hedley was a member from 1997 to 2000 (Hedley 2007, 204). The story is focused on Isabel "Iz" Norris, a rookie who tries out for the fictional Winnipeg University Scarlets. After she makes the roster, Iz goes through a process of initiation, and, step by step, becomes an accepted member of the team. The initiation structure gives Hedley the opportunity to educate her readers, through the eyes of Iz, about the world of women's hockey during a key period of its development.

Twenty Miles also contains a deeply critical response to the hockey myth. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Iz understands that the myth defines hockey very selectively: certain elements have been said to capture the essence of the game (the "highlight reel"), while others have been excluded as secondary or irrelevant (Hedley 2007, 146). The flaw in this way of thinking is dramatized in *Twenty Miles* by a recurring motif. One of the first hockey lessons Iz learns comes

during her time on a boys' Tykes team, when the coach, Uncle Larry, scolds a crying boy by saying "Keep it off the ice, Chad!" (16). By the time she reaches the Scarlets, Iz has serious doubts about this lesson. During her rookie season, various crises expose the impossibility of keeping things "off the ice" and challenge Iz to reconceptualize the game in a way that is more attuned to her own needs and to the complexity of life.

The Hockey Barbie

One of the enduring prejudices against women in sport has been the belief that "if a woman is strong, she must not really be a woman" (Robinson 2002, 10). Justine Blainey experienced this prejudice when she pursued her court case in the 1980s. In *Twenty Miles*, Hedley challenges the prejudice by combining descriptions of the strong bodies of the Scarlets with traditionally feminine elements. This begins in the opening scene, in which Iz reports for her first practice. On the way into the arena, Iz notices another player, who turns out to be Hal, the Scarlets' team captain. Hal, Iz observes, has "the three-headed monster heels of hockey players." She is tall, with "the bulk of her thighs given away by her jeans," and is so strong that she carries her black hockey bag over her shoulder "as though it were the weight of a purse" (Hedley 2007, 8). In the dressing room, Hal pulls off her street clothes to get into her hockey gear and reveals "a ridge of muscle" as well as "a black lace bra" (8, 11).

The mixing of strength and femininity continues during Iz's try-out for the team. A key moment occurs during her first scrimmage, when she accidentally lays Hal out with a bodycheck. Afterwards, Hal sprawls, her gloves and stick "littering the ice in a circumference appropriate to impact, like a plane wreck" (17). Someone yells "Yard sale!" and the coach and others rush over to help. Iz tries to apologize. "I forgot—" she says, "I played hockey with guys, and—" Meanwhile, Hal picks herself up and a teammate, Toad, asks if she is

alright. “I was just laid out by a fucking Barbie doll,” Hal replies. “Other than that, I’m fine” (18).

Iz checking Hal echoes a key scene in *Scrubs on Skates* in which Bill Spunski hits Pete Gordon at an early practice. Though the circumstances of the two scenes are somewhat different (especially since bodychecking is not allowed in women’s hockey), the core elements are the same: each features a new player trying to make a team who takes out a star player. In *Scrubs on Skates*, Pete lands “with a sickening thud” and, when he staggers to his feet again, there is “no spring to him” (Young 1952, 26). Bill’s hit is both awkward and powerful; nobody can figure out “whether he planned it . . . or whether it was an accident” (26). The awkwardness suggests the rookie-status of Bill (he isn’t sure yet how to play properly), but the outcome suggests the ability and toughness that will allow him to excel. Something comparable is implied by Iz’s hit on Hal. The scene also calls to mind the mythic episodes in *King Leary* and *The Natural*, which I discussed in chapter 7, in which Leary bests Newsy Lalonde and Hobbs bests the Whammer. Sports literature often tells a version of the aging monarch story, the old—sometimes infirm—monarch supplanted by the new hero, in a process that hints at both death and renewal. By echoing this classic sports literature motif, *Twenty Miles* hints at continuities and differences between the men’s and women’s games, while also playing with the mythic patterns so often associated with sport.

The check on Hal illustrates the toughness of the Scarlets. The first reaction of the other players—“Yard Sale!”—is a joke that minimizes the hit’s violence. The implication is that the Scarlets are not phased by body contact, even though, technically, bodychecking is against the rules. When Moon, the Scarlets’ coach, tends to Hal, her concern is only the regular one of dealing with a potentially injured player. There is no sense of special treatment, nothing to imply that a female player should be cared for differently than a male player. Hal’s burn on Iz also downplays the hit while revealing how self-aware the Scarlets are about feminine stereotypes. “Barbie” makes fun of Iz for

being traditionally feminine in appearance, while stressing that the Scarlets reject the Barbie version of femininity, with its emphasis on attractiveness and passivity.

“Barbie” in *Twenty Miles* is related to “totsi,” a term that the Scarlets use to describe women who are Barbie-like without irony. As Toad puts it: “The thing about being a totsi is that it’s so boring, so predictable. I mean, where is your sense of irony? You know, if you are going to wear hot pants and have blond hair, at least throw on a Harvard Debating Cardigan too” (Hedley 2007, 103). The context of Toad’s comment is a gathering of the Scarlets in a Hooters restaurant where another teammate, Heezer, is a server. The news of Heezer’s employment—and willingness to dress up in the revealing Hooters uniform for money—causes a debate among the Scarlets. Does Heezer’s willingness to exploit her traditional feminine features make her a totsi? Heezer resolves the issue by pointing out that she has two sets of “big guns”—her breasts and her biceps (98–99)—and she intends to enjoy them both. Heezer’s retort adds to the proof that femininity and strength are not mutually exclusive.

The nickname “Barbie” stays with Iz. On Rookie Night, she is forced to dress up as a Hockey Barbie. Her costume blends stereotypes of hockey and femininity. Her dress is “a massive, hot-pink number with shoulder pads and a yellow bow drooping from the waist.” When she is dressed up, her teammates use make up to add a black eye, rainbow bruises, and stitches. The final touch is a “Jill strap” which is also a “chastity belt” on which are written the words “*DON’T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT, PERV*” (69, italics original). Iz’s Rookie Night costume combines the classic image of hockey toughness, the Happy Warrior, with the stereotype of the Barbie. This creates a rich set of linkages and ironies between femininity and strength.

As the image of the Hockey Barbie suggests, the Scarlets are self-aware about their identities as hockey players, just as they are about their identities as women. Their raunchy humour, their use of nicknames for each other, and the pinup poster of “David Hasselhoff in a green Speedo and a Santa hat” all reproduce and parody

characteristics of male hockey team culture (10). When the team shorts arrive with “HOCKEY” across the backside, Toad jokes “I love how the shorts announce our junk in the trunk. Like everyone can’t tell what we play, come on. Yeah we’re fucking gymnasts” (29). Toad’s joke plays on the traditionally huge glutes of hockey players mixed in with the stereotypical self-consciousness of women about their bodies. Similarly, on Rookie Night, the players tell various gender-themed jokes. Toad claims to have been traumatized as a child when she received figure skates for Christmas: “The horror. And there you have it, ladies. . . . I was a hockey player trapped in a figure skater’s body” (70).

The Scarlets’ self-awareness extends to a common prejudice related to “if a woman is strong, she must not really be a woman.” This is the claim that women who like sports must be lesbians. The Scarlets deal with this prejudice by treating the lesbians on the team as they treat everybody else. When two players, Duff and Hugo, are discovered to be in a relationship, the other players arrange a “celebration” for them rich with ironies. Part of the celebration includes party hats with “*Duff and Hugo are Gay!!!*” scrawled across the back (118). There is some back-and-forth among the players about the appropriateness of the party (and the hats) but Boz provides the clinching argument in favour: “[What] do we do to everyone else when they like someone? We bug them, right? You get teased if you have a crush. Lord help you. . . . So the fact that Duffy and Hugo have been ignored by us . . . [is] tragic” (118).

The details in *Twenty Miles* that play with the relationships between strength and femininity ultimately make a key point: the Scarlets come in different shapes, sizes, and sexual orientations, but they are all women, all strong, and all hockey players. A telling moment along these lines occurs in class one day when a boy remarks to Iz that she doesn’t “look like a hockey player.” When she challenges the boy to explain what a female hockey player looks like, he replies, with a smile, “Not you.” The boy is trying to flatter her, to tell her that she is attractive, unlike female hockey players generally (whose

strength means they can't be real women). Iz dismisses him. To her the Scarlets "all looked like hockey players" (131).

Last-Year Stories

Though the Scarlets represent an opportunity for Iz, the team itself, in keeping with the historical pattern of women's hockey, struggles for resources. *Twenty Miles* identifies Iz's rookie season as the team's second year of operation. The returning players have an "unending" supply of "last-year stories," many of which have to do with underfunding. The inaugural season, it turns out, was "a test run for the university and so the team had been on welfare . . . paying a fee at the beginning of the year, buying their own jerseys, paying for their own meals" (128). The situation is now somewhat improved, but the money dedicated to the women's team is "still not as much as the other teams" (129).

Despite improvements, then, the Scarlets remain lower in status than the men's varsity team—and they know it. When Toad discovers that Iz has become friends with Jacob Copenace, a player on the men's team with whom Iz played as a child, she warns Iz to be careful. "Know what they started calling us last year?" Toad asks. "The Scarlet-ettes. First of all, what? Second of all, they have their panties all tied up in knots 'cause they think our team's going to end up taking away their money from the program. Uh, have you seen their dressing room compared to ours?" (54).

Even when the university tries to give more equal treatment to the two teams, there is sexism in the attempts. When the Scarlets get team jackets, for example, they are duplicates of the men's jackets, boxy and unfashionable, and wearing one makes Iz feel like she is "wearing a mascot costume" (94). When the university plants a story in the campus paper to promote the hockey program, the story includes matching photographs of the men's and women's team captains, but the photograph of the men's captain is a game shot of him

“leaning nearly parallel to the ice as he cut a sharp corner,” while the photograph of Hal is of her in “a black, low-plunging dress with jewel-studded spaghetti straps”—a shot taken during the previous year’s athletic banquet (125).

A particularly telling episode occurs after the team’s night at Hooters. Once they leave the restaurant, the players go to the campus pub for last call. They chug more beer and make their way back outside. In the parking lot, Toad announces that she has to “whiz” (106). Following Toad’s lead, they all line up against a wall, drop their pants, and begin to urinate. While they are in the middle of this, a campus security guard appears and asks “Uh, what are you doing?” (107). The security guard—a young guy “with a sad, failed attempt at a moustache”—reminds them that there are “ladies’ bathrooms all over campus” and Toad retorts that they are not “ladies” (108). This leads to a testy back-and-forth. The exchange ends with the security guard, who has recognized their team jackets, making a threat: “What do you think your coaches are going to say about this?” (108).

The security guard’s reaction suggests a sexist double standard. The guard’s initial confusion has to do with the fact that the Scarlets are women; his choice of the word “ladies” to remind them of the bathrooms suggests that such behaviour is not “lady-like” in his eyes. That he hardens his attitude after Toad makes fun of his moustache adds to the sense that his masculinity is threatened by women acting up. Would the guard react the same way to discovering members of the men’s team urinating outdoors? Unlikely.

The aftermath of this incident reinforces the existence of a double standard. Moon, the Scarlets’ coach, rants at the team members when she finds out. Toad, the most rebellious of the Scarlets, refuses at first to apologize, claiming that “it’s discrimination, this notion that we should have to run around frantically with our knees together looking for the closest powder room, when guys—they just” (109). At this point, Stan, the other coach, joins in to remind the players that they are “ambassadors of this team and the Scarlets Athletic Program” (109). The reactions of Moon and Stan, which have an edge of

panic to them, hint at how hard it has been to get a women's team supported by the university, and how fragile that support likely is. Unlike members of the men's team, the implication is, the Scarlets have to be extra careful to maintain their image.

On the Ice and Off

As she reveals in her apology after hitting Hal, Iz grew up playing with boys. Back in Tykes League she felt relatively free of gender typing: all the players, with the same voices and faces disguised by their helmets and cages, "were the same" (Hedley 2007, 16). Over time, however, she became more noticeable as a girl on the ice, and the behaviour of the boys she played against changed. By the time she was a teenager, boys tried not to hit her. Sometimes they did without realizing she was a girl, and afterwards, as she was "crumpled on the ice . . . trying to disguise the pain," the boys slumped "when they realized what they'd done" (56). Sig calls this the Sleeping Beauty Syndrome, or the Princess force field, in which "no matter what [Iz] did on the ice, no one would touch [her]" (61).

Iz hates the special treatment she gets in the later part of her time playing with boys. She says that she would "rather have her ribs cracked than hear [the boys'] sheepish apologies" (56). In other words, she desires to be like Manon Rhéaume in the poem "Rhéaume" by Richard Harrison. Manon Rhéaume was another trailblazer in women's hockey, who is famous for being the only woman to play in a National Hockey League (NHL) game (she played in exhibition games for the Tampa Bay Lightning in 1992 and 1993). At the time Rhéaume was subjected to the typical sexism women face in sports, most particularly the idea that no matter what a woman does as an athlete, "she is always a woman and sex is everything." What Harrison imagines Rhéaume most wishing for as an athlete is "[to] be a woman and have it be her play that counts" (2004, 73).

One of the benefits of playing with the Scarlets, for Iz, is that the Princess force field no longer operates. Another part of her early hockey career persists, however. This has to do with the motto “keep it off the ice.” She first hears this phrase in Tykes League when a boy on her team, Chad Trenholm, breaks down and wails “I want my mommy” (Hedley 2007, 16). The coach then yells at Chad to “keep it off the ice.” The phrase implies that hockey success requires the suppression of emotion, the blocking out of elements not directly part of the game, and the cultivation of the kind of rough masculinity historically associated with being a “real man.” Iz recognizes it as “our first training as men” (16). To someone aware of hockey history, the phrase also echoes Gordie Howe, who, after his near-death experience on the ice in 1950, brushed away questions about the dangers of hockey by saying that “It’s a man’s game.” As I wrote in chapter 4, Scott Young uses Howe’s words near the end of *A Boy at the Leafs Camp* to rationalize hockey violence.

The novel’s treatment of “keeping it off the ice” implies an important distinction. A source of joy in games and sports is that they always allow us, to some extent, to leave daily life behind. Sports have their own special rules and spaces, and always involve an element of play (even if, in professional sports, they are also work for hire). As Johan Huizinga famously put it in *Homo Ludens*, play is defined by “a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own” (1955, 8). In this sense, then, hockey always involves a degree of “keeping it off the ice.” Iz understands this—and the comfort of it—when she compares how much easier it is to anticipate Jacob’s moves during a hockey game than to anticipate his moves “[off] the ice . . . with that distance removed” (Hedley 2007, 171). The comfort of hockey, Iz understands, is that it is “just a game;” this is why it can be “[a] safe space for people to put their hopes in” (179).

What *Twenty Miles* identifies with “keeping it off the ice” is not the inevitable separation of games from the outside world, but the tendency to a further, unhealthy narrowing of what defines hockey

and its players. The novel offers two definitions of this narrowing. One has to do with the “highlight reel”—the version of the game reduced to “a list of goals and fights, and nothing else” (146). The other has to do with the denial of the full humanity of the players—as in the example of Chad Trenholm. The two definitions come together in an example late in the novel, when Iz observes some TSN hockey highlights. One sequence is about a Calgary Flames player whose father died in the morning, but who went ahead and played that night anyway, and was rewarded with three goals. Before the replays of the goals, the announcer celebrates the player’s achievement as an example of “keeping it off the ice” (199).

The example of the Calgary Flames player, in the last pages of the novel, is a reminder of episodes in *Twenty Miles* that more fully expose the limitations of “keeping it off the ice.” An important formal feature of the novel is that game descriptions do not focus on “highlight reel” moments. During the Home Opener, for example, the narrative focuses on Iz’s subjective experience, her nerves beforehand, her taking a penalty against an opposing player who has been harassing Tillsy, the Scarlets goaltender, and so on (60). So focused on other things is the game account that it is not clear, by the end, who has won or lost. Only afterwards does Iz report, almost as an afterthought, that “We lost. To the *Pandas*” (62).

The game accounts in *Twenty Miles* are different from those in *Scrubs on Skates* and Stompin’ Tom Connors’s “The Hockey Song,” both of which read like play-by-play broadcasts (as I pointed out in chapter 1, “The Hockey Song” portrays itself literally as a broadcast). Both of these texts reproduce the hockey myth in an uncritical way and so portray the essence of hockey as transcending history (Bill Spunski’s success makes him “Canadian” in a way that erases the trauma of his Polish family background). The game accounts in *Twenty Miles* are more like Roy MacGregor’s *The Last Season*—and for a similar reason. As chapter 6 noted, *The Last Season* contains almost nothing about Felix Batterinski’s two Stanley Cup wins and ends with Felix accidentally ingesting rat poison in an attempt to break

the spell his birth seems to have cast on him—a symbolic attempt to overcome his family history. History, the ending of *The Last Season* seems to assert, will out; and the attempt to use hockey to escape or erase history is always, ultimately, doomed to failure.

One way history asserts itself in *Twenty Miles* is in the subplot involving Terry, Hal's mother. In the middle of the novel's second part, Iz discovers Hal crying in the bathroom. When Hal comes out, she trashes the dressing room microwave—and it is revealed, by Boz, that Terry is sick (Hedley 2007, 113–14). By the novel's third part, Terry is in the hospital dying, and Sig forces Iz to go with her for a visit. It turns out that she is the only teammate to make the visit to the hospital. The other teammates try to express their support for Hal indirectly, by dropping off food at Hal and Terry's house (148). The news of Terry's death comes one day at practice. When she realizes her mother has died, Hal collapses to the ice crying, and the teammates gather round to console her “as teams do, as families do” (155).

This subplot illustrates the possibilities and limitations of the bonds teammates form with one another. The Scarlets try to help Hal with her grief, and they do to some extent, which implies an improvement in acknowledging Hal's emotional needs compared to what happened to Chad Trenholm. Yet the Scarlets can't overcome their awkwardness around death. Being teammates, the novel implies, is not a magic solution to life's existential challenges. Everything that happens in the subplot after the discovery of Terry's illness refutes the Scarlets' first reaction to the news, which is to “[play] on” as if “nothing could get in” (114–15).

A second way in which history asserts itself is in Iz's relationship with Jacob. This subplot contributes to a wider portrait of Iz as a new student on campus that compares her initiation into team culture with her initiation into university culture. The text is silent about her previous romantic history, which gives her relationship with Jacob an aura of “first love”—an aura strengthened by the fact that first love is a standard theme of coming-of-age novels. There are charming

inversions in the relationship that reinforce the novel's complex portrayal of gender. Jacob has a "girly" laugh (36). He chooses a "chick flick" for them to go to and asks if "we're growing" (147–48). Iz, on the other hand, feels closer to her hockey teammates than to him.

Jacob is Indigenous. He has a portrait of Ted Nolan, an Ojibwe NHL player and coach, on his wall. Soon after he reconnects with Iz, he explains why he disappeared from organized hockey the year after he played with her. Turns out that his family car broke down and "we didn't get another one for months" (36). His father set up nets on the reserve for Jacob and his friends to play street hockey with, but his Uncle Grant, driving drunk, smashed them with his truck. Jacob frames this account with a joke about how "You should never be afraid to *live the dream*" (36). The joke emphasizes the irony in the account. To live the hockey dream, the account shows, is not just about what is "on the ice." Who is "on the ice" to live the dream, and how the dreamer experiences the dream, are both deeply affected by history.

Changing the Story

The first pages of *Twenty Miles* make clear that Iz is uncertain about her commitment to hockey. Before she makes the Scarlets, she thinks that getting cut from the team might be "a simple solution" to doubts that she has (42). When she makes the team, she is "flattered" but also "shipwrecked" (43). During an early team bonding session, she is asked by a drunken teammate what she would give up to keep playing. Would she cut off a finger? In the interest of team solidarity, Iz says that she would, but her inner thoughts reveal this to be a lie: "I'd never cut off a finger for hockey. I wouldn't cut off my hair" (91). The lie makes her realize that she can't "perform gestures of hockey adoration" without the knowledge that she is "acting"—and this realization means she has begun to "quit hockey" (92–93).

Iz's uncertainty is, in part, a reaction to her father's legacy. Her father, Kristjan, was a Junior hockey star who died two months before she was born. After her mother disappeared, Iz was raised by Sig, her grandmother and Kristjan's mother. Sig was determined to pass down Kristjan's legacy to Iz, and, as a result, Iz began to skate and to play at an early age (sometimes in Kristjan's old equipment). Iz, then, never really chose to play; she just went along with the expectation that she would. As she tells Jacob, when you have a family history like hers, "You skate because you are thrown on to the ice because your dad played hockey" (76). By the time of her try out for the Scarlets, Iz feels oppressed by her identity as Kristjan's daughter. This oppression is made worse by the fact that the Zamboni driver at the university arena, Ed, is an old friend of Kristjan's and wants to reminisce about him whenever he sees Iz. Eventually, Iz cuts Ed off: she decides that she can't help him find Kristjan again (152).

The funeral of Terry makes Iz remember the video of her father's funeral. This memory, in turn, reminds her of the uneasiness she has with her legacy as the daughter of Kristjan "Norse" Norris. Shortly after the funeral, Sig reveals that she too is sick, though what she has is not "the big C" (160). Though Sig seems to be not in immediate danger of death, the reminder of her age and frailty ratchets up the emotional pressure on Iz. Then, at the next Scarlets' game, Moon gives a pep talk: "I know we've all had a rough week and we're worried about Hal. . . . But we've gotta just get out there and give it a hundred and ten. Play every shift like it's your last. And just . . . keep it off the ice" (180). Iz now understands the full import of Moon's words: "Moon wanted us to imagine. Imagine that the ice was a safe place to put our hope. Imagine Hal and Terry never existed" (180).

Shortly after this, Iz does the unthinkable and walks out on the team in the middle of a game. She falls, not from a hit by another player, but because she trips herself. When she gets up, she skates off the ice and keeps going (182). Back at home, Sig is furious. Over a number of days, she and Iz debate the legacy of Kristjan, the

meaning of hockey, and what the opportunity to play for the Scarlets represents for Iz. A particularly telling exchange occurs when Sig tells Iz that playing for the Scarlets—getting an education while also playing hockey—was an opportunity Kristjan never had (189). Iz replies that Kristjan might have been a good hockey player, but he was also just “a kid,” who left behind a mess. She also says that she “never wanted” all the stories that created the mythic version of him (190). Then, when the argument quiets down, Iz quietly alludes to the fact that Sig is sick. “But what will you do?” she asks (191).

Ultimately, Iz returns to the Scarlets. The decision to return occurs after a series of events related to skating. First she has a memory of learning to skate, how she fell, and fell again, and Sig always caught her (193). Then she dreams of herself skating in the clothes of Isobel Stanley. Isobel Stanley—her namesake—embodies the complexity of her relationship to hockey as Kristjan’s daughter and as a woman (Isobel probably introduced hockey to her father, and played herself, but was hindered by the gender-norms of the time; the Stanley Cup is typically associated with her father and not herself). In the dream she has also lost Pelly, one of the most vulnerable members of the Scarlets, with whom she feels a close bond. To dream of losing Pelly probably signals Iz’s fear of losing her bond with the Scarlets, as well as a need to find and care for the Pelly-like part of herself. Finally, she goes skating, in the present, around the oval trail of the lake upon which she learned to skate as a child. She associates falling down with the ripping of muscles necessary to grow stronger (193). After a long hard skate, she senses that the ice is “changing its story” and realizes that she “needed to play” (197).

In one sense Iz’s decision to return is simple: she chooses to play rather than having hockey chosen for her. But the novel doesn’t present this choice simplistically. The end of the novel, in fact, stresses the complexity of her life. The issues she has to deal with are not fully “solved” when she chooses to return. Complexity is consistent with the novel’s criticism of “keeping it off the ice,” which presumes a separation from life that is both reductive and damaging. Iz seeks a

version of the game that is more attuned to her own needs and to the complexities of life itself. This implies a game that doesn't repeat the same old story; a game that evolves and develops, that is an ongoing process.

A Cigar for the Women's Game

Since the time period depicted in *Twenty Miles*, women's hockey has continued to evolve in Canada. Hockey Canada reports a steady growth in the participation of girls and women at all levels of the game throughout the country. The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) has also reported growth in women's hockey worldwide, with a 34 percent increase in registered female players between 2007 and 2018 across the 81 nations with IIHF memberships (Murphy 2020). The Varsity women's game is now well-established in Canadian and American universities. The presence of women's hockey in the Olympics has boosted interest in women's hockey and has helped to inspire the formation of professional leagues. As of 2024, the Inaugural Six teams of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) are gearing up for their second season of play.

Obstacles, however, remain. Attracting funding for women's sport continues to be a challenge. Sexist attitudes towards women have also persisted in hockey, sometimes with the underlying implication that "if a woman is strong, she must not really be a woman."

A telling example occurred during the 2010 Olympics, when the Canadian women's team, after its gold medal victory, went back onto the ice after the arena had emptied for a celebration. Players drank beer and champagne and pretended to smoke cigars. Photographs of the players appeared shortly after, which caused a controversy that had a strong edge of moral panic to it. Reports stressed the fact that one of the Canadian players, Marie-Philip Poulin, was underaged at the time (Knoblauch 2010). Hockey Canada issued an apology, and for a while, there were fears that the International

Olympic Committee would sanction the Canadian team in some fashion. The over-the-top reaction to this benign celebration revealed a continuing sexist double-standard (the incident is reminiscent of the Scarlets urinating in *Twenty Miles*: it is unlikely that a men's team, in similar circumstances, would be subjected to such intense criticism). And, as history shows, Marie-Philip Poulin was not corrupted by her participation. In fact, she went on to become one of the most celebrated Canadian players of all time, the captain of the 2022 Olympic gold-medal-winning team, whose nickname, "Captain Clutch," refers to the fact that she scored the gold-medal-winning goals in each of the 2010, 2014, and 2022 Olympics (Wikipedia n.d.).

Progress has been made with regard to gender stereotyping in hockey, but "old school" attitudes towards women in hockey remain. As recently as August 2020, NBC announcer Brian Boucher, a former NHL player, suggested that the isolation of players in the NHL Covid-bubble was "terrific" for those "who enjoyed the focused experience of being with their teammates 24/7" (Haupt 2020). This comment was seconded by another former NHL player, Mike Milbury, who said: "Not even any women here to disrupt your concentration" (Haupt 2020). The league tried to walk back the obvious insensitivity of these comments, which insulted both women (as disruptors of concentration) and men (as unable to control their sexual urges), and the NHL has tried in various ways in recent years to be more inclusive. The Milbury incident, however, pulled the curtain aside on lingering sexism at the highest levels of the game.

Twenty Miles, then, offers a snapshot of an important transitional time in women's hockey. It also illustrates the need to reimagine hockey in order to acknowledge the wider well-being of players. By exposing the limits of "keeping it off the ice," the novel suggests new approaches that could be of benefit to both male and female players.

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The Faustian Bargain of the Athlete-
 Hero in Randall Maggs's *Night Work*:
The Sawchuk Poems

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of Heaven,
 That time may cease, and midnight never come!

—Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical
 History of Dr. Faustus*

One of the enduring subjects in literature and film is the highly successful person, usually a man, whose inner demons lead to his destruction. Think of the title characters of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Orson Wells's *Citizen Kane*, as well as characters like Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Such characters echo real-life figures. Wells famously modelled Kane on the American newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst. In the arts such figures are legion, from writers like Malcolm Lowry and Dylan Thomas, to celebrities like Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, and Jim Morrison. Sports, of course, also has its Faustian characters: Babe Ruth, Pete Rose, Lance Armstrong, and Tiger Woods come to mind. Such figures raise important questions about success. Does success always involve moral and personal compromise? Are the inner demons that

drive overachievers necessary to what they achieve? Are the rewards of great achievement worth the price? Is there behind every highly successful person a Faustian bargain?

Hockey, in history and literature, has many Faustian characters. A number of these have appeared in the texts I've already discussed, beginning with the unnamed players in "Hockey Players" who have sacrificed their bodies to "sing the song of money all together" (Purdy 1996, 25). Felix Batterinski and Percival Leary both make deals with the devil to achieve success. The real-life Bobby Hull, as I hinted at in chapter 9, is a Faustian character, as are some of the other historical figures in *Hero of the Play*. A telling fictional example is Benny Moore, Bill Spunski's antagonist at the end of *Boy at the Leafs Camp*. As I argued in chapter 4, the idealistic model for hockey success represented by Bill Spunski resonated for many years after *Scrubs on Skates* appeared. Yet Young reveals in his adult sequel to the trilogy, *That Gang of Mine*, that it is not Bill but Benny, the personally damaged boy who will do anything to succeed, who goes on to a National Hockey League (NHL) career.

One historical player whose career raises the spectre of a Faustian bargain is Terry Sawchuk. Sawchuk, as many fans will know, was one of the greatest goaltenders in NHL history. He won four Stanley Cups and four Vezina trophies, was the goaltender of record in some of the most famous games ever played, and his records for games played and shutouts stood for decades after he set them. But Sawchuk was also famously troubled, with the kind of temper that damaged his marriage and made other players steer clear of him. He played much of his career battling injuries, partly as a result of his style and partly as a result of the vulnerability of goaltenders in the Original Six era, and this, along with the usual pressures of being a professional athlete, contributed to bouts of drinking and depression. His death at the age of 40, while a member of the New York Rangers, raises difficult questions about the price of hockey success.

Randall Maggs's 2008 collection, *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems*, offers a richly nuanced exploration of what makes a player like Terry Sawchuk. In an interview with Bruce McCurdy, Maggs suggests that there are many possible explanations for why the goaltender was the way he was, including "the game, his position, his nature, his family situation—his brother's death, his mother's withdrawal, for example—his growing up in a poor part of the city, [and] being an immigrant in a not-very-tolerant period in this country's history" (McCurdy 2010). Each of these gets some treatment in *Night Work*. The book, however, doesn't offer any easy answers about Terry Sawchuk. Indeed, Sawchuk's enduring enigma turns out to be a key theme of *Night Work*. As Paul Martin puts it, the book "signals throughout that we will gain no singular, incontrovertible understanding of the man" (2018, 137). What we get, instead, is a multifaceted portrait of a great hockey talent who had what Red Storey, in "Big Dogs 1," describes as a "darkness in him from the start" (Maggs 2019, 63).

Framing the Question

Formally, *Night Work* has affinities with the "documentary poem" first defined by Dorothy Livesay in 1969. Livesay uses the term to describe longer poems, or poem sequences, "based on topical data" and containing a "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" (1969, 269, 267). *Night Work* doesn't use a historical figure as a double of the poet, in the manner of Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* or Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (classic early examples of the genre), but Maggs has a significant personal connection to Terry Sawchuk. Maggs and Sawchuk played on the same rinks in Winnipeg, and, for Maggs as a boy, Sawchuk's name "had all the magic of the game in it" (McCurdy 2010). *Night Work's* exploration of Sawchuk

is also an exploration of Maggs's relationship to hockey, as well as a way of looking indirectly at "the people and the age" in which Maggs grew up (McCurdy 2010).

In the McCurdy interview, Maggs describes the form of the book as "a kind of a collage" (McCurdy 2010). Indeed, *Night Work* contains a wide variety of elements: historical documents, photographs, prose, quotes from other poems, and poems in various styles from various points of view. Some of the poems are in a more historical or mythic mode, some convey the interior thoughts and perceptions of Sawchuk, and others are from the point of view of Maggs himself. The result is a kind of wide-angle/close-up effect, in which the mystery of what made Sawchuk tick is examined sometimes from a broader historical or social perspective and sometimes from a more interior, psychological perspective.

The book begins with a series of framing devices. The first is an epigraph from Robert Frost:

The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

These lines are from the end of "The Oven Bird," a sonnet that appeared originally in Frost's 1916 collection, *Mountain Interval*. Isolated from the rest of the poem, the lines take on new meaning, with the "he" seeming to refer to Terry Sawchuk. This identification is reinforced by the title of the first section of *Night Work*: "The Question That He Frames." Together, these elements stress not only the difficulty of knowing Sawchuk but the importance of questioning itself. Indeed, another way to summarize the project of *Night Work* is as an attempt to discover not so much the secret behind Terry Sawchuk as the questions that his story raises. The first epigraph also implies that these questions will tend towards tragedy, towards diminishment rather than glory.

When the lines of the epigraph are read in the context of "The Oven Bird" as a whole, other meanings emerge. Frost's poem is in the long tradition of poems that draw a parallel between poets and

birds. Think of John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," Emily Dickinson's "The bird her punctual music brings," and Earle Birney's "Loon about to Laugh," among many others. The choice of bird is important: the song of the bird reflects qualities the poet imagines in his or her poetry. In "The Oven Bird," middle-aged Frost identifies with a bird who sings loudly in "mid-summer," whose song remembers spring and anticipates "that other fall we name the fall." Oven birds are not known for musicality, which, to Frost, is appropriate, since the bird's song, like his own poetry, is not about an ideal of beauty. Instead, by "singing not to sing," the oven bird acknowledges the inevitable passing of all things. The oven bird's song, according to the poem, reminds us that "the highway dust is over all" (Frost 1969, 119–20).

The epigraph from "The Oven Bird" is a reminder that the story of Terry Sawchuk is not just about the personal difficulties of one man. Sawchuk, like every other human being, is subject to the aging and dying that is a part of life. Being a professional athlete seems to offer an escape from time. As I suggested in chapter 7 (agreeing with Michael Novak), great athletic achievements seem like "ritual triumphs of grace, agility, perfection, beauty over death" (Novak 1988, 48). Yet there is also a way in which being an athlete leads to a hyperawareness about time's passing. Since high level athletics are so much the terrain of youth, athletes must face a time when, although they are still young as human beings, they are old for their sports. Sawchuk's career, ended by death, offers an exemplary tale about the "dust" that haunts even the most god-like seeming athlete.

A second framing device is an excerpt from the autopsy performed on Sawchuk on May 31, 1970, which follows the epigraph. In a clinical-looking, old typewriter font, the excerpt describes the extensive network of scars on Sawchuk's face. This description operates as a companion to the photograph of Sawchuk by Mark Bauman that ends *Night Work*. This photograph, which appeared originally in 1966 in *Life* magazine, was touched up to highlight the scars on

Sawchuk's face. Key qualities of Sawchuk as a hockey player and person are hinted at by these linked elements: the risks of being a goaltender, especially in the days before the mask, Sawchuk's competitive nature (the photograph shows a steely-eyed gaze as intense as that of Maurice Richard), and a vulnerability that is simultaneously exposed and hidden by outward appearance.

The way in which the framing elements reveal and conceal Sawchuk hints at the method of the book as a whole. Take the photograph. The scars on Sawchuk's face seem to map his history, each violent impact leaving its mark directly on his skin, but when you know that the image was touched up, the scars are revealed as fiction. The act of touching up is like the act of poetry itself, which consists of touching up subjects in the service of a truth that is not literal. The same quality of revealing and concealing can be seen in the autopsy excerpt. In one sense, this excerpt, as a historical document, offers evidence about the real Terry Sawchuk. Like the photograph, however, it conceals as much as it reveals. Sawchuk did not die of a blow to the face. He died of a blood clot that formed from a lacerated liver that would not heal (Dupuis 1998, 264). Maggs's choice to select the part of the autopsy dealing with Sawchuk's face, rather than the part that deals with the blood clot, hides the literal cause of death to create an image that evokes, metaphorically, the cause of Sawchuk's death. Sawchuk, the excerpt implies, died from living the kind of life that would leave a face so scarred.

"The Question That He Frames," the short first section of *Night Work*, is the last of the framing elements. This section describes a visit Maggs made to Red Storey to talk about Sawchuk. Storey was an accomplished athlete, particularly in football, who became the senior referee in the NHL during the 1950s. He was also a renowned storyteller, in keeping with his name, and was an important source for *Night Work*. In "Neither Rhyme Nor Reason," the persona describes a Storey who, fifty years later, is still puzzled by a question

Sawchuk asked once during a game: “*What he came to me / wanting to know, Jesus. I thought he was joking*” (Maggs 2019, 25). In “The First Wife,” Storey articulates why the enigma of Sawchuk is so fascinating. “[Why] would you fret about Sawchuk?” the voice of Storey asks. “Jumping Jesus, what the guy could do” (27).

The question alluded to in “Neither Rhyme Nor Reason” reappears in “Night Time,” “Big Dogs 1,” and “Big Dogs 2.” “Big Dogs 2” fills in the details. In it, Storey recounts how Sawchuk and some other players had a party in Storey’s hotel room. They drank his beer and made a mess, but Storey was fine with this, since he was the same way when he was young (117). Next game, however, when Storey pulled players off Sawchuk after a pile up, and asked if he was alright, Sawchuk replied, “Why don’t you go fuck yourself, you drunken son of a bitch” (117). After Sawchuk repeated the insult, Storey gave him a misconduct. Then, a few days later, before another game, Sawchuk skated up to ask the infamous question: “Last game there, what the heck did you give me that misconduct for?” Turns out that Sawchuk had forgotten not only about drinking Storey’s beer, but also about the insult. When Storey reminded him of it, he replied, “I don’t remember any of that” and turned away (118).

After the buildup of the previous poems, the actual content of Sawchuk’s question might seem anticlimactic. Yet the implications are profound. One implication is that Sawchuk’s drinking had become extreme enough to trigger amnesia. Another is that his personality had fragmented, from a combination of trauma and addiction, to the point that his “hockey self” was no longer in touch with his self away from the rink (including the self who drank). The obvious projection involved in Sawchuk’s denouncing Storey as a “drunken son of a bitch” is further evidence of this fragmentation. In either case, the question hints at a darkness within Sawchuk that is both mysterious and fundamental. Is hockey the cause of this darkness? Or did hockey only draw out a darkness that, as Storey suggests in “Big Dogs 1,” was already there from the start?

Desperate Moves and the Canadian Dream

Terry Sawchuk was born in Winnipeg in 1929, to an ethnic Ukrainian father and a Polish mother. Sawchuk's father was a tinsmith, first with the MacDonald Sheet Metal Company, then in business for himself (Dupuis 1998, 2–5). His mother was a strong, sometimes domineering woman, with whom little Terry frequently “clashed” (4). There were five children in the family, four of them boys. Terry, third oldest, started to skate on outdoor ice at the age of four, and according to Dupuis, his “love of hockey was immediate” (4). During his earliest years he played from dawn to dusk with his brother Mitch, who was seven years older.

“Kings and Little Ones,” the second section of *Night Work*, opens with five poems about these early years. “Initia Gentis” (“First People”) stresses Sawchuk's passion for the game (Maggs 2019, 31–32). The poem conveys this through the wonderful image of Sawchuk, as a boy, sitting at school in his hockey gear in order to spare precious minutes of after-school playing time. The young Sawchuk wills the clock to move ahead (a form of magical thinking I remember from my own childhood), a ritual that resonates with the opening line of the poem: “Begins in school the trouble / with time.”

Other poems fill out the portrait of the Sawchuk family. “Sheet Metal” describes Louis Sawchuk, Sawchuk's father, and his work at MacDonald Sheet Metal. The poem describes Louis as a “connoisseur of cuts and wounds,” which hints at an affinity between father and son, and creates an evocative parallel between the physical risks of work as a tinsmith and of a hockey goalie (33–34). The next poems offer glimpses of Sawchuk's mother and sister. Then, in “The Famous Crouch,” comes this description of the death of Mitch:

He clasped his hands behind his head (they said),
behind his desk at work that day and stretched and yawned,
content (he'd shut out St. Vitale the night before and he'd seen
Corinne Wynick in the crowd), and smiling, cocked

his head to make a final point (they said),
half rose, and then pitched forward on his face. (37)

Mitch Sawchuk's death of a heart-attack, at age seventeen, had a profound impact on ten-year-old Terry. Dupuis suggests that Terry's world was "shattered" and that the death compounded his problems with his mother (Dupuis 1998, 6). The trauma was made worse by the fact that Terry's other older brother, Roger, had died of scarlet fever when Terry was a baby.

One theory about Sawchuk's competitive drive is that it was supercharged by the death of his brother. Kendall suggests that after Mitch's death, Sawchuk "seemed almost obsessed with the idea of succeeding in hockey—not just for himself, but for *both* of them" (1996, 7). There is a pleasing symmetry to this idea: Mitch, after all, was also a goaltender. Dupuis, who had access to Sawchuk's family, reports that over the next years Sawchuk "often took Mitch's pads and put them on in memory of his dead brother" (1998, 7). Mitch's death must have had a profound impact on Sawchuk. It would be simplistic, however, to draw a straight line between the death and Sawchuk's motivation and later problems with alcohol and depression. One of the strengths of "Kings and Little Ones" is that it doesn't simplify. Instead, it dramatizes a series of possible origins for Sawchuk's competitive drive, beginning with the pure joy he felt in play, as evoked by "Initia Gentis." Sawchuk's early demonstration of talent, his working-class background, and his Ukrainian heritage are also likely factors. His character, in fact, has affinities with the fictional Felix Batterinski from *The Last Season*—the big, athletic, immigrant boy, sensitive about fitting in ("Initia Gentis" says that he "never hears a word of English" at home), who, because of geographical and historical circumstance, sees in hockey a way to get ahead in the world.

One other parallel with Felix Batterinski is worth noting. "Initia Gentis" combines its portrait of Sawchuk as a young lover of hockey with his first stirring of sexual desire. The day portrayed in "Initia

Gentis,” in which Sawchuk wears his equipment at school, is also the day his teacher, Miss Nelson, wears “the famous blouse” (Maggs 2019, 31). The last stanza of this poem tells of Sawchuk and his friends heading home after their game. The boys are “twelve years old and troubled by . . . difficult names / and dreams (the blouse that made your hair stand up)” (32). The connection between sexual desire and the yearning for some larger meaning or satisfaction in life is made explicit in the poem’s last lines, which describe the boys as “like lonely riders / with their cattle in the rain, or cousins on barren farms / in the old country, imagining [a] green / and perfect garden” (32). Humans have a strong yearning to achieve something like a return to the Garden of Eden. The yearning is not so mysterious if you consider what a “perfect garden” might represent: peace, prosperity, wholeness of self, and love (both human and divine). Some people—traditionally boys, from places like Winnipeg—have seen in hockey a way to satisfy the yearning for such a place.

The rest of the poems in “Kings and Little Ones” explore episodes from Sawchuk’s early career. “Writing on the Walls,” from which the section title comes, describes young Terry riding a train, possibly for the first time, and being seduced by a card game. At first he wins, but then he keeps playing and loses all his money. The episode predicts two aspects of his character: how his competitiveness is so intense that it blurs into addiction, and how, in a literal and metaphorical sense, he “didn’t know how / to get out ahead of the game” (39).

Luck is a key theme in these poems. “Hole in the Hat” tells of an injury Sawchuk suffered on December 28, 1947, his eighteenth birthday, while playing for the minor league affiliate of the Detroit Red Wings in Omaha. According to Dupuis, there was a scramble in front of the Omaha net, Sawchuk reached for the puck, and “the stick of Houston forward George Agar unintentionally flew up . . . [and] struck Terry in his right eyeball.” The doctor at the hospital said he might lose sight in the eye—or even, if an infection set in, go completely blind (Dupuis 1998, 16). Turns out that a brilliant eye surgeon, “Sir This or That,” was stranded in Houston at the time, and he

performed a delicate operation, removing the eyeball, stitching it, and putting it back in, and Sawchuk woke up the next morning to “a promising haze” (Maggs 2019, 41). Two weeks later he was back in goal, went on to win 24 of 27 games in Omaha, and was on the fast track to the NHL.

The eye episode is part of a larger network of chance and circumstance that shaped Sawchuk’s career. “Hole in the Hat” opens with another one, when an anonymous voice states what many people would have said to young men of Sawchuk’s age in 1947: “*Lucky boy . . . you missed the war*” (Maggs 2019, 40). Hard work and talent are required to be a hockey star, the poem implies, but luck, in the form of personal and historical circumstance, is also required.

Luck was particularly crucial for NHL goalies of the Original Six era. Poor equipment, and a lack of masks, meant that a career-ending injury was a threat each time a goalie stepped onto the ice. In the early years of Sawchuk’s career, teams also only carried one goalie, which meant that there were only six goaltender jobs in the league. Other poems in the “Kings and Little Ones” section explore the uncertainty created by these facts. “The Question for Harry,” for example, imagines how Harry Lumley, the goaltender for Detroit in 1950, felt about the rise of Sawchuk. There is a camaraderie among goalies, the poem implies, that goes beyond the competition for jobs, but one injury, and the bad luck of having Sawchuk behind him on the depth chart, turned Lumley into an old man at twenty-three (48). “Let’s Go Dancing” tells of a night Sawchuk took a shot in the mouth, lost his teeth, got stitched up with no anaesthetic, and was back in the net in twenty minutes. Already he is “sick of the life,” but he remembers how he supplanted Lumley because of an injury, and realizes that Glenn Hall, the next goaltending phenom, is waiting “back in Edmonton, freezing his ass” (61).

As I explained in chapter 10, luck has a powerful mystique in sports and adds a layer of complication to what might be known as being “in the zone.” Are great plays the result of an almost mystical level of excellence, as when a player is in the zone, or are they a result of luck? The difficulty in deciding this question is captured by the last

poem in the section. “Desperate Moves” recounts an after-game interview between Sawchuk and Jacques Plante. Plante tries to compliment Sawchuk on “The greatest save I ever saw,” but Sawchuk replies, “It’s better to be lucky than good” (Maggs 2019, 70–71). On the play in question, Sawchuk, seeing Dave Keon wide open, “stuck up a leg,” and Keon’s rising shot hit Sawchuk’s pad. If Keon has simply slid the shot along the ice, it would have been in. After some further back-and-forth, Plante says to Sawchuk, “So . . . what you made was a desperate move,” and Sawchuk agrees. The ending of “Desperate Moves” provides a powerful image to sum up a key question raised by Sawchuk. Was his career a result of “greatness” or “a desperate move”?

A Place That Can Teach You Something

The spring of 1955 was a time of triumph for Terry Sawchuk. This was the same spring in which Rocket Richard was suspended for punching linesman Cliff Thompson, leading, ultimately, to the Richard Riot. Whether Richard’s absence in the playoffs was the deciding factor or not, Detroit beat Montreal in seven games to win the Stanley Cup. This was the fourth Cup for Detroit in six years. Sawchuk, at the age of twenty-five, had been the starting goaltender in five of those years, winning three Cups. In 1955, he also won the Vezina Trophy for the third time as top goaltender in the league.

Then he was traded to the lowly Boston Bruins. Jack Adams, the General Manager of the Red Wings, offered this rationale for the trade: “We let Sawchuk go because we found ourselves with two top goalies. [Glenn] Hall is more advanced now than Sawchuk when he joined us. . . . It was a case of trading one of them and Sawchuk . . . brought a better offer” (quoted in Dupuis 1998, 105). Behind the scenes, however, rumours were that Adams was eager to get rid of Sawchuk because of his “temperamental nature” (Kendall 1996, 115) and because injuries had made him “damaged goods” (Marcel Pronovost, quoted in Dupuis 1998, 105). Trading Sawchuk and other

veterans also substantially reduced the team payroll (Kendall 1996, 114).

The trades of the summer of 1955 remain one of the darkest episodes in Detroit Red Wings history. Even the famously circumspect Gordie Howe mentions them in his autobiography. By that summer, Howe writes, the Wings had all the ingredients in place “to form one of the greatest dynasties in hockey history,” but “Trader Jack” spent the off-season “dismantling the team” for reasons that “defy explanation” (Howe 2014, 147). About his own trade, Sawchuk was diplomatic in public in the way expected of a professional athlete. Privately, however, he was devastated. Dupuis quotes Pat Sawchuk, Terry’s wife, as saying it was “the darkest day of Terry’s life. . . . [It] just ripped him apart. He gave everything for that organization and he felt like a piece of meat afterwards” (Dupuis 1998, 105). The psychological impact of the trade accelerated Sawchuk’s self-destructive behaviour, especially his drinking.

Sawchuk played well on a bad Boston Bruin team in 1955–56. The Bruins were surprisingly competitive for much of the season but collapsed near the end to miss the playoffs by two points. Afterwards, the team management tried to make up for a lack of playoff revenue by sending the players on an exhibition tour of Newfoundland.

The little-known 1956 tour of Newfoundland by the Boston Bruins is the subject of “Two Goalies Going Fishing in the Dark,” the third section of *Night Work*. Poems in this section offer nuanced meditations on the give-and-take that occurred during the tour between the local players and the NHLers. Sometimes the emphasis is on the pleasure of the locals in rubbing shoulders with the pros; other times, it is clear that the pros, especially Sawchuk, are getting as much out of the encounter as they put in. The tour is portrayed as an example of the economic vulnerability of NHL players at this time, and also as part of a larger journey in which the meanings of the game and the meanings of human existence are complexly intertwined. As “Solid Ground” says about Newfoundland, “This

was a country that could show you things, / but you had to be in a decent mood, / and looking” (Maggs 2019, 76).

“Nothing but Moonlight Here” reinforces the key themes of the section. In this poem, Sawchuk is taken ice fishing by the Corner Brook All-Stars goalie after an exhibition game. The poem is a companion to “Fair Trade,” which tells of how the goaltenders switched teams during the game. Together, the two poems emphasize how the goaltenders are alike, despite their wildly different hockey talents and worldly success. Not only are they both members of the fraternity of goaltenders, but they are both men, both human beings, with similar desires and fears. While out fishing, Sawchuk tells “a thing or two” that the other goaltender decides to keep to himself (81). The other goaltender, in turn, feels “a chill” and thinks about his wife and his own life.

The section about the 1956 tour is shot through with an irony: the Boston Bruins players are “privileged” athletes, famous and relatively well paid, and yet during a period of the year that is supposed to be their off-season, they are stuck, away from their families, working to make money for their employer. Maggs portrays Sawchuk as highly aware of this irony. Sawchuk in this section feels isolated and exploited; at various points he revisits the trauma of the trade. The affinity between the Bruins players and the residents of Newfoundland hints at what “this place” can teach: that although there are material differences in the way people live, there are challenges that all people share. What does it mean to find “solid ground”? What uncertainties are revealed when the lights go out and two goaltenders go fishing in the dark?

Regulation Tie

Sawchuk played another half-season with Boston. His performance was hindered by mononucleosis, from which he returned too quickly.

Then, citing a combination of physical and emotional exhaustion, he quit the Bruins in January 1957 (Dupuis 1998, 116). The next summer he was traded back to Detroit. Ironically, his return was driven, in part, by the determination of Jack Adams to crush the fledging players' association, one of whose strongest supporters was Glenn Hall, the young goalie brought in to replace Sawchuk (Kendall 1996, 144). Hall was traded out of Detroit along with Ted Lindsay, the former Red Wings captain. The team, by this point, was a pale shell of the one that Gordie Howe thought could be a dynasty in 1955. Sawchuk played seven seasons during his second stint with the Red Wings until he was claimed in the intra-league draft by Toronto in the summer of 1964. This set the stage for one of the most celebrated feats in NHL history, the unlikely win of the Stanley Cup by the Maple Leafs in the spring of 1967, to which Sawchuk was a major contributor.

The second half of Sawchuk's career has the makings of a Hollywood redemption story: the twice-discarded goaltender, past his prime, leads a ragtag team of has-beens and also-rans to an unlikely Stanley Cup. Sawchuk made 41 saves in the deciding game and allowed just one goal. To add to the mythic aura: the 1967 NHL Final was the last of the Original Six era and was a Montreal-Toronto match-up played during the nationalistic fever of the Canadian Centennial. Toronto has not won a Stanley Cup since (fifty-seven years and counting, as I write this in 2024).

Night Work only glances at the highlight reel version of Sawchuk's later career. Like *Twenty Miles*, the collection suggests that what is important lies elsewhere. The later sections of *Night Work* stress the physical and mental costs paid by goaltenders in the pre-mask era. What most distinguishes these years for Sawchuk, the "Hurt Hawks" section suggests, is the increasing damage to his body, along with the growing sense that his days as a player are numbered. The photograph that begins the section shows Sawchuk clutching his shoulder after being struck by a Bobby Hull slapshot (Maggs 2019, 150).

Another photograph has Sawchuk with his arm around his goaltending partner, Johnnie Bower, after the 1967 win. Sawchuk is smiling and savouring the moment. What is most striking, though, is how emaciated he looks: his open undershirt reveals a washboard line of meatless ribs (171).

“Tidal Fears,” the final poem in “Hurt Hawks,” asks the question posed by Sawchuk’s later career: “What was it kept him going?” (169). The poem stresses how much he suffered, physically and mentally, by continuing to play: “His back was bad, the famous crouch had left its mark, / two ruptured vertebrae, he couldn’t straighten up. He couldn’t sleep two hours at a time” (169). The poem also wonders if Sawchuk, like the players in Purdy’s “Hockey Players,” was self-conscious about the arrested development involved in continuing to play:

You’d think at forty you’d feel silly
getting dressed with thirty other guys, buckling on
a flaccid garter belt and wearing regulation ties and making
wisecracks on the bus. (169)

As always in *Night Work*, however, the poem offers no easy answers.

What “Tidal Fears” does offer is four possible reasons for Sawchuk continuing to play. Perhaps he needed the money, the poem suggests, with his seven children “who needed shoes” (170). Perhaps retiring would force him to face mortality in a way that terrified him (“A tidal fear of being swept to sea?”). Perhaps, although he often played like “shit” in his later years, he still had moments of the old magic, as in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final, and those moments made him believe he could “play this game forever” (170). Or perhaps it was just habit. Perhaps, like Felix Batterinski and other Faustian hockey characters, the singular devotion required to excel in the way that he did had left him unequipped for anything else. As the epigraph from Mary Oliver that begins “Tidal Fears” puts it: “the mind clings to the road it knows” (169).

Twilight of the God

“The Last Faceoff,” the second last poem in “Hurt Hawks,” offers a vivid account of the deciding play of the 1967 Final. This was a faceoff to the left of Sawchuk with 55 seconds left, with the Montreal goaltender pulled, which turned rapidly—and somewhat miraculously—into a Toronto breakout that allowed George Armstrong to score into the empty net for a 3–1 victory. The poem describes how Sawchuk was toasted by his teammates afterwards (though a little cautiously, given his character), and how he must have savoured the moment: “What a feeling, oh my Jesus” (Maggs 2019, 168). Then it offers a tantalizing thought. What if this had been the last moment of Sawchuk’s career? No matter what came next in his life, the poem points out, “what a hell of a way to go” (168).

Sawchuk did not retire after the 1967 victory. Instead, he began a strange twilight period, in which he played for three teams in three years, ultimately ending up in New York. It was there, on May 31, 1970, that he died. What the investigations into his death revealed, as reported by Dupuis and Kendall, is that on April 29, 1970, Sawchuk and his Ranger teammate Ron Stewart were drinking at a local bar and got into an argument about unpaid bills in their shared rental house. Sawchuk became belligerent and tried to start a fight. The two of them were thrown out and drove separately back to the house. There, Sawchuk tried to fight again. Stewart backed away, tripping over a barbecue pit, and Sawchuk fell on top of him or onto the pit. The fall caused internal injuries, especially to Sawchuk’s liver. Over the next month, Sawchuk was in hospital, undergoing various procedures to try to stem his internal bleeding, but ultimately, he died of blood clots to his lungs (Dupuis 1998, 252–64; Kendall 1996, 233–38).

The last section of *Night Work*, “No Time Left on the Clock,” explores this last period of Sawchuk’s life. Maggs treats the death only indirectly. He offers no dramatic re-enactment, nor does he

attempt to answer the many questions left by the investigations. Instead, the section's first poem, "The Season of Wayward Thinking," reintroduces Maggs's persona: "I take a long walk, thinking of Terry after all the years" (Maggs 2019, 175). Walking in autumn reminds Maggs of a story about Bill White, a stay-at-home NHL defenseman whose career overlapped with Sawchuk's. White was asked during exhibition season once what was on his mind, and, apparently, replied: "Burning leaves . . . it always makes me think of home." This, according to Maggs's reimagining, causes the ears of the "young wolves" trying to make the team to "[prick] up," and leads the coach, Billy Reay, to think he should "keep an eye / on Bill for a game or two" (175).

This first poem reinforces the theme implied by the epigraph to the section: "Think of the long trip home. / Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?" These lines, from Elizabeth Bishop's "Questions of Travel," pose the question that haunts the premature death of Sawchuk. Would it have been better for him not to have "travelled" to the NHL? Was the price of success too great? The anecdote about White also stresses how time, in more ways than one, is the enemy of hockey players: every fall brings a new crop of young "wolves" ready to take your spot on the team. Did the pressure make Sawchuk like Bill White in the poem? Did he too engage in the "wayward thinking" of home?

Four poems make up the rest of "Last Minute of Play." The second poem, "Tunnel to Windsor," takes place during Sawchuk's third stint with the Red Wings, from the middle year of his career's twilight. In the poem, he is in a taxi under the tunnel from Detroit to Windsor. In the dark of the tunnel, he recalls that his wife, Pat, came to the game he had just played, and remembers with regret how she used to "brush my face, / the ridges of scars" (Maggs 2019, 178). Behind this line is the biographical fact that, during the 1968–69 season, Pat served divorce papers on Sawchuk because of his long-time drinking and abuse of her and their children (Kendall 1996, 228). Trapped in the literal and metaphorical tunnel, Sawchuk reflects that

“At some point, it’s just too late / to turn back” (Maggs 2019, 178). He realizes that he had not become the man he “hoped to be.” Then the taxi driver looks in the mirror and reinforces the harsh reality of his almost finished career. “*So, Mr. Goalie,*” the taxi driver says, “*the word’s out that you’re leaving town / again, what does it feel like to be a three time loser?*” Sawchuk, it turns out, is the holder of another record: he is one of the few NHL players, perhaps the only one, to have been traded away three times from the same team. In the summer of 1969, he was dealt from Detroit to the New York Rangers, where he played his last, fateful season.

The next two poems, “Bachelors” and “River of Ponds,” report on conversations Maggs had with players who knew Sawchuk. These conversations contain subtle allusions to the circumstances of the death. In “Bachelors,” Orland Kurtenbach describes the house Sawchuk rented with Ron Stewart in his last year. His description contains a sinister detail: “the toppled barbecue behind the house” (179). As reported in the poem, Sawchuk and Stewart often visited the Kurtenbachs, and Sawchuk, apparently, was moved by the presence of the children, presumably missing his own. One much debated topic has to do with how much the breakup of Sawchuk’s marriage contributed to his self-destructive behaviour. Kurtenbach says “I think he felt like he was in a trap. Seven kids to feed / and what would he do with the rest of his life? Then the talk / of a divorce again” (180). Kurtenbach, like Maggs, admits that the full truth about Sawchuk’s motivation will never be known.

“River of Ponds” recounts a meeting between Maggs and Eric Nesterenko. Nesterenko was a tough-nosed, two-way forward whose long career, mostly for the Chicago Blackhawks, overlapped almost exactly with that of Sawchuk. Like Sawchuk, he was of Ukrainian descent and came from a working-class family in Manitoba. Though not a star player of his era, Nesterenko is honoured in hockey circles for his articulateness and intelligence. A good example of his thoughtfulness is the Studs Terkel interview in *Working*, in which he says that his fondest memory of his hockey years is the pure joy he

experienced skating (Terkel 2004, 386). Fans during the Original Six era also seemed to love the ring of his name, which is perhaps why it leaps to the tongue of Draper Doyle in *The Divine Ryans* when he is caught buying underwear. The Hockey Hall of Fame interview with Nesterenko is still available on YouTube and is excellent viewing. After hockey, Nesterenko retired to Vail, Colorado, where he became a ski instructor.

In “River of Ponds,” Maggs has travelled to Vail to talk to Nesterenko about Terry Sawchuk. Despite his reputation as a talker, Nesterenko will not reveal any details about the death. “Some guys had a hard time at the end,” he admits, but “you can find a way to save yourself.” His last reported words are as unrevealing as they are suggestive: “You have to want to, though. I won’t say more” (Maggs 2019, 181). Nesterenko’s words help to close the circle with the opening excerpt from the autopsy report, which raises the question of why someone would submit to such abuse (was there something self-destructive in Sawchuk?), while stressing the difficulty of knowing the truth that is dramatized throughout *Night Work*.

The final poem, “New York Hospital: I.C.U.,” is side-by-side with the touched-up photograph by Mark Bauman. This reinforces a formal similarity between the two. Each works by “touching up” the documentary evidence about Sawchuk to get at a deeper, but more elusive, truth. The poem opens with Sawchuk opening his eye in a hospital bed (182). The scene resonates with other scenes of Sawchuk injured and in hospital because of hockey, a resonance invited by the references to his current trainer (“Lefty”) and coach (“Emil Francis”). This hospital stay, however, is not because of hockey but because of what William Cahn, the district attorney at the inquest into Sawchuk’s death, called a “childish and senseless verbal argument, with a lot of pushing and shoving” (Cahn in Kendall 1996, 242). The reference to Sawchuk’s “withered arms” subtly references his words to Shirley Walton, wife of journalist Stan Fischler, who snuck in to interview him. When Walton mentioned him coming

back, he “raised a pencil-thin arm” and said that he could never “come back from this” (Dupuis 1998, 260–61).

The poem ends with Sawchuk anticipating death:

Fear what was on the way?

What could there be about fear he didn’t know?

Open the door.

Infinity is just another fucking number. (Maggs 2019, 182)

The last line echoes the opening of “Initia Gentis” about Sawchuk’s boyhood “trouble / with time” (31), as well as other places in *Night Work* in which time is an important theme. The image of time contains a doubled significance: it evokes the significance of the game clock for hockey goalies, as explored in “Different Ways of Telling Time” (among other poems), but also the existential significance of time for human beings. Is the last line an example of the toughness of Sawchuk, one last refusal by him to fold under pressure? Or is it an example of false bravura, an expression of his despair in the face of death? The text, as *Night Work* consistently does, leaves the question open.

Faustian Time

The ending of *Night Work* is steeped in Faustian motifs. Time, as my epigraph suggests, is a key issue in the original *Dr. Faustus*. Once the Doctor makes his deal with the devil, he becomes acutely aware of time. Scene by scene, as the twenty-four years of the deal go by, he becomes more frantic about time passing, until the famous climactic scene in which he watches the last minutes go by while hopelessly willing the clock to stop. Faustus’s obsession with time is ironic, since his motivation for bargaining with the devil is rooted in time. At the beginning of the play, Faustus is revealed to be a talented but restless man. He rejects a series of possible careers—theology, law, and medicine—because they promise only limited rewards. His reasons for rejecting medicine hint at what he ultimately desires:

Couldst thou make men to live eternally,
Or, being dead, raise them to life again,
Then this profession were to be esteeme'd. (Marlowe 1933,
1.24–26)

What Faustus sees in magic, the art that leads him to the devil, is the possibility of becoming “a mighty god” or “a deity”—that is to say, one of the immortals (1.60–61). Once he makes his deal, however, his mortality becomes an even greater issue for him than before. Trying to escape death turns every waking hour into a nightmare-like reminder of death.

The tragedy of Terry Sawchuk, as conveyed in *Night Work*, is not just that his demons led him to an early death, but that they often turned the time he had while alive into a nightmare. This is why, at the end of “New York City Hospital: I.C.U.,” Sawchuk doesn’t fear what’s “behind the door”: he has already experienced the worst. Faustus’s tragedy is compounded by the fact that the power he receives in exchange for his soul turns out to be “illusory, merely theatrical” (Worthen 2007, 256). The most famous example of this is when he orders up Helen of Troy to be his “paramour.” Helen’s appearance inspires these famous lines:

Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. (Marlowe 1933,
13.112–14)

When Helen kisses him, however, her lips suck out his soul. What has appeared by his conjuring is not Helen but a devil in disguise.

Are the rewards and accolades received by Terry Sawchuk the equivalent of the Helen demon in *Dr. Faustus*? *Night Work* doesn’t answer the question definitively. What the book implies, though, is that the rewards of hockey seemed more and more inadequate to Sawchuk as the costs of those rewards accumulated. Sawchuk’s betrayal in 1956 haunted the rest of his career. The stark truth that, as an NHL player,

he was ultimately just a piece of meat, tainted any satisfactions he later experienced. As he faced the challenges of being an aging athlete, he was also confronted by the fact that his singular focus on hockey had left him ill-equipped for a life outside. Eric Nesterenko is particularly eloquent on this point in his interview with Studs Terkel. “I know a lot of pro athletes who have a capacity for a wider experience,” Nesterenko tells Terkel. “But they wanted to become champions. They had to focus themselves on their one thing completely.” The tragedy of such a singular focus, according to Nesterenko, is that it ends up “dehumaniz[ing]” the person (Terkel 2004, 386). In “River of Ponds” in *Night Work*, Nesterenko implies that Sawchuk was one such athlete.

Sawchuk’s life and career are not simply tragic. Despite his demons, Sawchuk remains not just a fascinating character, but, as *Night Work* illustrates, an attractive one as well. Unlike Marlowe’s Faustus, Maggs’s Sawchuk retains his ambiguity until the end. When death’s door opens, Marlowe’s Faustus collapses in despair; Maggs’s Sawchuk mixes resignation with a last gesture of defiance: “infinity’s just a number” (Maggs 2019, 182). Sawchuk’s hint of defiance, I think, speaks to a lasting strength in his character, and also contains, perhaps, a subtly hopeful message about human resilience in the face of death. The level of achievement in Sawchuk’s life makes questions about the cost of his success so absorbing. It would be easy to say that the cost was too great if the rewards were self-evidently paltry. As it is, someone like Sawchuk challenges us to ask where we would ourselves draw the line—in hockey as in life. What kind of Faustian bargains are we willing to make for what kinds of possible success?

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Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* Reimagining the Home Game

"How are we gonna do this?" I asked.

"Gotta hit the post to call it a goal. No raising the puck."

"No, I mean with all these people. How are we gonna play the game?"

He smiled and tapped my stick with his. "Together," he said. "Like we shoulda all along."

—Richard Wagamese, *Indian Horse*

As we have seen, conservative imaginative responses to hockey tend to reproduce the hockey myth. An important part of the myth is the idea that hockey is a pathway to belonging in Canada. Hockey, so the myth goes, allows players to embrace the northern geography of the country as well as to acquire the characteristic national identity shaped by this geography. Hockey, then, is a way for players (and, by extension, fans) to embrace Canada as home, as well as to be embraced by Canada in turn. But what happens when the game is played by an Indigenous player? When the player is Indigenous, with a prior relationship to the land, what happens to the claims of the hockey myth about the game and Canadian identity?

Richard Wagamese explores this question, among others, in his 2012 novel *Indian Horse*. *Indian Horse* tells the story of Saul Indian Horse, an Objiway (Anishinaabe) boy from northern Ontario, who is separated from his family and sent to a residential school run by the Catholic Church. At the school Saul experiences and witnesses horrific abuse. Then, in what seems like an opportunity for salvation, he is introduced to hockey by a kindly-seeming priest named Father Gaston Leboutilier. Saul turns out to be a prodigy on skates. His rise as a hockey star, however, is hindered—and then halted—by racism in the sport. The racism Saul faces exposes a contradiction within the hockey myth. Sam McKegney and Trevor J. Phillips describe this contradiction as follows:

As hockey becomes reified as a natural by-product of the Canadian landscape, purveyors of the game promote senses of “Native Canadian” identity amongst those who play it, in the process erasing—or denying—differential senses of belonging among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who may or may not self-identify as “Canadian.” (2018, 170)

A key moment in the novel occurs near the end, in chapter 49, when Saul recovers his repressed memory of sexual abuse by Father Leboutilier. With this recovery, Saul discovers that, in addition to the racism visited upon him by the hockey world, hockey itself was used to groom him for the worst trauma he suffered in residential school. At this point, the logical response might seem to be to reject hockey. Instead, Saul recommits to the game and decides to return to the Indigenous community of Manitouwadge and work as a coach, in the hope of sharing his childhood joy in the game with Indigenous children (Wagamese 2012, 200). What Saul discovers at the end of his journey is that there is a quality in hockey that exceeds racist white society and the residential schools. Hockey, to echo the words of John Fowles from the introduction to this study, is not a machine but an organism, a living thing capable of growth and change. Hockey’s living quality comes from a mix of possibilities in the game and

how the game is continually reimagined by players and fans. The reimagining of hockey at the end of *Indian Horse* offers a particularly powerful illustration of the interconnections between sport, literature, and imagination, while suggesting a possible model for reimagining the Canadian nation.

White Glory

Saul's discovery of hockey at St. Jerome's is revelatory. From Father Leboutilier's books about "hockey gods" like Béliveau, Mahovlich, and Richard, Saul gets the idea that "hockey had an alchemy that could transform ordinary men into great ones" (Wagamese 2012, 57). That hockey has such a power is, of course, deeply rooted in Canadian popular culture; it reflects the idea that hockey can be a "field of dreams" for young Canadian boys and men, turning zeroes into heroes, and bringing fame and fortune (see Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 131–33). In the context of *Indian Horse*, it is important to stress the religious nature of the "alchemy" that hockey appears to have for Saul. Saul, when he is sent to St. Jerome's, is forcibly separated from his Anishinaabe heritage, and thus from the stories that would give value and meaning to his life. The religious aura of his discovery of hockey suggests that hockey is a compensation for this loss. The extreme quality of his emotional response also hints at an impossible desire: he craves from hockey the alchemical power to heal the traumas of his life.

The first time Saul sees a real game he is struck by the beauty of it: "I will never forget the first time I watched the older boys play. The white glory of the rink." (Wagamese 2012, 57). The words "white glory" in this passage carry a heavy symbolic weight. "White" is associated with the outdoor ice upon which the boys at St. Jerome's play, thus tapping into the centrality of such ice in the hockey myth. Readers familiar with *King Leary* will remember the ice of the Ottawa canals upon which Percival Leary learns to skate, as well as the oval

rink kept by the Brothers at the Bowmanville Reformatory. In the hockey myth, outdoor ice is associated with purity, personal wholeness, and the innocence of childhood—all qualities that Saul craves. “White” also carries a hint of “whitewash,” a reminder that Saul is attracted to hockey to obscure the traumas of his life. And, in the context of a novel about an indigenous hockey player, “white” cannot help but carry racial overtones, which suggests a foreshadowing of what Saul will face when he encounters the “whiteness” of the hockey world.

The word “glory” is equally heavy with meaning. The word reinforces the religious aura of hockey for Saul, and also—whether Saul is conscious of this or not—gives a Christian overlay to this aura. Many passages in the Bible use the word “glory,” as well as many Christian hymns, and it is found in the closing lines of “The Lord’s Prayer” (“for thine is the Kingdom / the power and the glory / forever and ever / amen”). Hockey in the residential schools—like other sports and recreational activities—was framed by the larger religious environment. The underlying justification for the game at St. Jerome’s would have been the Catholic version of muscular Christianity: healthy bodies supposedly leading to healthy (Catholic) souls. This use of hockey is parodied in *King Leary’s* depiction of the slogan over the Bowmanville Reformatory: “To Keep a Boy Out of Hot Water, Put Him on Ice” (Quarrington 1994, 34). To Canadian readers, the setup for Saul’s career might also bring to mind Carrier’s *The Hockey Sweater*, with its depiction of the priest refereeing the boys’ outdoor hockey game.

The 2015 Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission paints a mixed portrait of the role of hockey in the residential schools. A number of witnesses reported that the few good memories they had of the schools had to do with athletics. Noel Starblanket, for example, reported that when he was forced to go back to his school after the holidays, the only thing he looked forward to was the sports (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015b, 189). Paul

Andrews reported that the gym “was a saviour for a lot of things because we were good at the physical stuff” (189). Sports sometimes offered a respite from abuse. There was also a sense of camaraderie that developed from being on a team. John Kistabish stressed this in relation to hockey. “I really liked to play hockey,” he explained. “I liked a lot because we helped each other, you weren’t alone” (190). Much depended on the coaches. Some coaches were as abusive as the priests were at other times. Pierre Papatie, another hockey player, reported that if his team lost games, the priest-coach would beat them with a ruler (190).

The residential school witness whose story most captures the complexity of hockey at the schools is perhaps Fred Sasakamoose, who became the first Treaty Indian to play in the National Hockey League. Sasakamoose attended residential school in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, where the boys “had the opportunity to skate every day” (193). Sasakamoose became the star player on a team that won a provincial championship. But he was also severely abused. He left the school at age fifteen, the earliest he could get away. A priest, trying to be helpful, brought a hockey scout to his parents’ home to talk to him. Sasakamoose hid in his room. Eventually he was talked into playing junior hockey in Moose Jaw and went on to play for the Chicago Black Hawks, but never felt that he fit into the world of professional sport. As he explained: “I didn’t want to be an athlete, I didn’t want to be a hockey player, I didn’t want to be anything. All I wanted was my parents” (193).

Vision/Hockey Vision

When Saul gets his chance, he reveals himself to be a gifted hockey player. Though he has significant physical abilities, what really defines his gift is his “vision.” He sees possibilities in the game that others cannot. “I can’t explain how it came to me,” he explains, “but I could

see not just the physical properties of the game and the action but the intent” (Wagamese 2012, 58). Saul’s vision extends from a Gretzky-like ability to read the play to an ability to imagine new moves for himself and then immediately execute them (64). In an important twist, Saul believes that his hockey vision is equivalent to the visionary abilities of the great teachers from his own community. With his hockey vision, he believes he has been blessed with the same ability as his great-grandfather Shabogeesick, who had a special gift of knowing where other animals would be because “[the] world spoke to him . . . [and] told him where to look” (58).

Saul’s description of his hockey vision is consistent with the mystical quality of “the zone,” that holy grail state aimed for by athletes in which excellence becomes easy. This is the state of mind/being Saul enters into when he plays. More significantly, the parallel Saul draws between his hockey vision and the vision of his ancestors creates a link back to the land. When Saul says of his great-grandfather that the “world spoke to him,” what he is pointing to is the fact that Shabogeesick’s visionary gift is rooted in his relationship to the land, and, especially, to sacred natural locations like Gods Lake in the heart of Anishinaabe country. Gods Lake is the “secret territory” of the Indian Horse family, where, as a child, Saul hears fragments of the Old Talk of his ancestors (23). Everything Saul has lost—his family, his culture, his sense of wholeness in himself—is embodied in his lost connection to this homeland. With his experience of vision in playing hockey, it seems that he has found a way to get back home.

But has he? Given the context in which Saul is introduced to hockey, as a sport played at a residential school (with all the horrors that that implies), it is hard not to read Saul’s account of discovering the game as ironic. The myth of hockey links hockey to the land—especially to northern land of the kind associated with the Anishinaabe. But when Saul asserts this link, as an Indigenous child in a residential school, it seems to be a wishful projection. The “vision” he experiences seems more likely an expression of his *desire* for reconnection than an actual reconnection with his homeland.

Setting up the Hockey Myth

The early part of Saul's hockey career seems drawn directly from iconic moments in popular sports/hockey literature. The episodes are so typical, in fact, that it might appear at first that Wagamese is naïvely repeating the hockey myth.

Here's a brief summary of Saul's career.

At first, Saul is too young and small to play on the St. Jerome's team, so he gets the job of caring for the rink. He gets up early every day to do so. Eventually, he steals a hockey stick from the team's supply, stashes it in a snowbank, and practices alone with horse turds while pretending to skate (Wagamese 2012, 61). Then he steals a pair of too large skates, stuffs them with newspapers, and teaches himself to skate. He practices in secret every morning before anyone else gets up. Then, one day, while he is watching the bigger boys practice, a boy on the St. Jerome's team gets hurt. Saul offers to go in for him. Father Leboutilier is surprised: "You skate, Saul?" Saul admits to having taught himself. So Saul goes in. He is smaller than any other player. The big boys laugh at him. But he turns out to be the best player of all (68). He is added to the team. When the team goes to play against other teams, the spectators mock Saul for his tiny stature: "The Indian school brought their mascot," they laugh (74). But Saul turns out to be the best player on the ice there as well. By this point Saul has gone through the classic stages of becoming accepted by the team: first he is treated as an outsider; then, after certain trials and rituals, he is accepted, and in this acceptance, he finds "another expression of the spirit of the game" (86). Next, his exceptional ability opens up opportunities for him to play at higher levels. During his second year, as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old, he plays in a nearby town for a midget team, made up of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, and is the best player. Then he plays for two years on an adult tournament team, the Manitouwadge Moose, for an Indigenous community—and is the best player. While he is playing for the Moose, a scout for the Toronto Maple Leafs sees him. As a

fifteen- or sixteen-year-old, he is invited to play for the Toronto Marlboros, the Junior A feeder team for the Toronto Maple Leafs. And, of course, he is the best player.

So many elements in this career echo episodes from hockey literature. Saul's small stature is reminiscent of Percival Leary from *King Leary*, another prodigy who overcomes smallness by a combination of will and natural talent. How Saul practices, alone and in the early hours, echoes Bill Spunski in *Scrubs on Skates*, as does his surprise insertion into the line-up (although Bill goes in for a player who is suspended), as well as his being "discovered" by a Toronto Maple Leafs scout. The initiation of a new player onto a team is almost an obligatory scene in sports fiction. Finally, Saul's progress through the ranks takes him on a geographical journey away from his northern, small town "home" towards the bigger southern cities where professional hockey is played. This is the journey that Percival Leary, Bill Spunski, Bob Bonaduce, and Felix Batterinski all perform.

Chapter 34, in which Jack Lanahan, the Maple Leaf scout, tries to persuade Saul to join the Marlboros, is worth special attention. Saul, at first, is reluctant to entertain the idea of leaving the Moose. He is all too familiar by this point with the racism in the hockey world, including a horrific episode in which members of the Moose are assaulted after they win a tournament against white teams (134). Lanahan tries to reassure him by saying that "The Marlies aren't Espanola" (149)—in other words, Toronto is more welcoming than the racist small towns of the north. Saul pushes back. "White ice, white players," he says. "You gonna tell me that isn't the case everywhere?" (149). Lanahan, then, changes tack. He admits that racism exists throughout the country but that the game is better than the country. "It's not a perfect country," he acknowledges. "But it is a perfect game" (150). He then goes on to extoll the virtues of hockey in highly romantic—even transcendent—terms:

[Every] winter . . . I go to hundreds of games in hundreds of dead-end little towns. The towns and the players are all different.

But the game is always the same, its speed and power. Hockey's grace and poetry make men beautiful. The thrill of it lifts people out of their seats. Dreams unfold right before your eyes. (150)

Lanahan's portrait of hockey as a social unifier is straight out of the hockey myth. The way he ascribes nearly magical powers to the game echoes Saul's initial belief in an "alchemy" that could "transform ordinary men into great ones" (57). Lanahan's final argument, that Saul has the potential to be one of the great ones, reinforces magical associations. The great ones, he says, harness the "lightning" in hockey, and are "conjurers" who "become one" with the game and so are lifted "out of their lives" (150).

Saul's mind isn't entirely made up until after chapter 35, which contains another near obligatory scene in sports fiction, in which the best friend (in this case, Virgil Kelly) prods the reluctant small town star to take a shot at the big time for all his friends back home. Still, it is Lanahan's pitch that sets up the hockey myth for a critical response in *Indian Horse*. With the pitch, the novel tempts its readers with the possibility that Saul's career will yet be part of a sports redemption story. Protagonists in such stories always encounter villains and bullies. Remember Jimmy Ben, the "cowardly blackguard" who slashes Hughie Murray in *Glengarry School Days*; Benny Moore and his goon-like behaviour towards Bill Spunaska in *Boy at the Leafs' Camp*; and Sprague Cleghorn, blood-thirsty arch-rival of Percival Leary in *King Leary*. Sometimes the villains are racists. Remember how Gord Jamieson gets suspended in *Scrubs on Skates* (giving Bill his big break) because he fights an opposing player who calls Benny Wong "a yellow Chink" (Young 1952, 185). The unfair play of antagonists in sports fiction tests the characters of the protagonists, who typically resolve to compete hard but honourably, in the manner of Bill Spunaska, who decides after Benny Moore to play "hard, strong, and forceful, but never dirty" (Young 1963, 246).

The chapters leading up to Lanahan's speech contain various warning signs that Saul puts too much emphasis on hockey as a way

to heal his life. Yet it is hard not to be moved by Lanahan's promise that Saul, as one of the hockey greats, could be "lifted out of his life" by the game. In this way, chapter 34 offers proof of how seductive the promises contained in the hockey myth can be. Can mastery of hockey truly be a pathway to belonging in Canada? Can the game overcome the racism that Saul has experienced? Chapter 34 tempts its readers with the hope that the answer to these questions could still be yes. What follows in *Indian Horse* is a stark demonstration of how naïve this hope is.

A Hockey Mimic Man

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that a key feature of colonialism is the demand for "mimicry" in the colonized subjects. Basically, imperial powers rationalize their colonial projects by asserting that the natives-in-question need to be civilized by the superior values of the colonizer; to be civilized is to become *like* the colonizer (for example, to learn English, to be educated in an English-style school, to develop similar moral and religious values). However, since the original rationalization for the project depends upon the *inferiority* of the native subjects-to-be-colonized, for someone to become *too good* at performing the identity of the colonizer is threatening. What is required, instead, is a mimicry of this identity that is not completely successful. Here's how Bhabha puts it: "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (2004, 122). From the point of view of the colonizer, the "not quite" in Bhabha's definition is crucial, since the failure of colonized subjects to becoming fully "civilized" justifies the continuation of the colonial project.

The demand for mimicry from Indigenous people is at the heart of the residential schools project. The idea was to assimilate Indigenous children into white culture, but only in a limited way. *Indian Horse* makes this clear in Saul's description of the educational program at

St. Jerome's. "We spent an hour in the classroom each day to learn the rudimentary arithmetic and English that would allow us to secure manual labour when we 'graduated' from the school" (Wagamese 2012, 79). There would be no doctors or lawyers coming out of St. Jerome's. This is consistent with the description of the educational programs of the residential schools in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. "The educational goals of the schools were limited," the report states, "and usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Aboriginal people. For the students, education and technical training too often gave way to the drudgery of doing the chores necessary to make the schools self-sustaining" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015a, 3-4).

Bhabha's concept is strongly applicable to Saul's hockey career. What intensifies the racism directed at Saul is that he is *so good*. Instead of being a hockey player in a limited, Mimic Man kind of way, and cultivating the subservient identity that would go along with this, Saul plays the game as if he was born to it. This triggers a blow-back from whites who believe that hockey belongs to them. It is telling that the horrific assault on the Moose players in chapter 31 comes after they win a tournament against white teams. As McKegney and Phillips suggest, "Because the men's belief in white superiority has been challenged by the Moose team's tournament victory, the men prove sadistically eager to reinscribe the colonial hierarchy of white entitlement and Indigenous inferiority onto the bodies of the Moose players" (2018, 175). Saul's individual success poses the same threat to white supremacy as the collective success of the Moose.

Breaking the Code

Lanahan's promises turn out to be not entirely false, but not true enough for Saul. Although Saul enjoys playing with elite teammates on the Marlboros, players whom he can trust to "go to the right place, make the right moves" (Wagamese 2012, 162), he is never fully

accepted by them. His teammates are not overtly racist, but they are not welcoming, and their “indifference” towards Saul is as hurtful as more explicit racism would be (163). The Marlboros, then, represent a disguised version of the racism that Saul has experienced from the non-Indigenous hockey world already. The team is part of an environment that will not allow Saul to just be a hockey player. At every turn he is reminded of his otherness, of the fact that he is “the Indian” (164).

Eventually, Saul’s hockey career is derailed. The derailing has to do with the demand that he fight. The demand reflects the stereotype of the savage, war-like “Indian” that is constantly projected at him. As part of this, and also partly in recognition of his dominating play, he is subjected to goon-like attacks from opponents. Because he won’t fight, he is shunned by his own teammates. Finally, he gives in and fights. Then it is as if the violence that he has suffered becomes what defines him; he becomes the “savage” everybody tells him he is. His “vision” disappears. He becomes a puck hog, a taunting, show-boating agitator, and his coach, finally, sends him home (165).

The end of Saul’s career strikes directly at one of the sacred cows of hockey culture: “the code.” The set of unwritten rules that is supposed to govern fighting in hockey is, as Jason Blake points out, as “subterranean and tangled” as any other social code. Still, the specific rules of the code can be understood as expressions of two underlying principles. The first is the idea that there are honourable and dishonourable ways of fighting, despite the fact that all fighting is, technically, “against the rules.” What defines honourable fights varies from context to context, but it always involves a measure of restraint. Blake puts it this way:

Fighting in hockey looks like a descent into warfare, into a battle for survival, but that is only part of the ritual. . . . Rules such as “no headbutting” or “sucker punches” are in place to protect the fighters in hockey, to control the violence, if only to let them fight again in the near future. (2010, 104–5)

The second principle has to do with how fighting in hockey has been justified. Though there have been various rationalizations over the years, the primary one has to do with the “catharsis” hypothesis, the idea that fighting offers an outlet for aggression that would otherwise manifest itself in worse behaviour on the ice. Related to this is the idea that fighting is a form of self-policing by players. Someone who acts dishonourably on the ice, so the theory goes, will pay a price in a fight that goes beyond mere penalty minutes, and so will be deterred from further bad behaviour.

The question of what is an appropriate level of violence in hockey has preoccupied writers since Ralph Connor’s (1902) *Glengarry School Days*, in which John Craven, after disavowing fighting, knocks out Jimmie Ben with one punch for his abuse of Hughie Murray. Knowing how and when to employ violence has historically been a key characteristic of the hockey player in Canada. The tough but restrained masculinity associated with the correct use of violence has also served as a model for the ideal Canadian man, as embodied in characters like Bill Spunaska in *Scrubs on Skates* and Paul Tallard in *Two Solitudes* (among others). The line from “the code” to the promise of Canadian identity in the hockey myth, then, is a direct one. In 1969, the year Saul plays Junior A (he was born in 1953, according to chapter 3), the code and the hockey myth in Canada were still largely unchallenged.

Hockey traditionalists in 1969 would consider Saul’s refusal to fight a dishonourable act. There is precedent for highly skilled players who refuse to fight to be protected by their teammates, as Saul was protected when he was on the Moose, but on the Marlboros he does not have the standing for this to happen. Instead, his refusal leads to further alienation: “When I refused to retaliate, my teammates starting leaving a space around me on the bench” (Wagamese 2012, 164). Here’s how Robert Faulkner, in his fascinating 1976 sociological study of violence in professional hockey, summarizes the situation Saul finds himself in:

A player is expected (indeed, morally required) to fight if he wants respect. . . . [A] man cannot give way to another without loss of manhood and dignity. And fighting or challenging the person who has wronged him suggests to teammates that the individual can be depended upon to behave in a manner which will not bring disgrace to the team, that he can be relied upon. (1976, 101)

According to the code, the obvious way for Saul to bond with his teammates is to stand up and fight for himself.

When Saul fights, however, his act does not have the effect that the code predicts it will. As Faulkner reports, one of the strongest moral imperatives in the code has to do with teammates supporting one another: “a [teammate] under attack becomes something of a ceremonious occasion for unhesitating support, for discharging one’s duties by keeping adversaries out of the action, and by coercive intervention if a teammate is being defeated” (1976, 103). But Saul’s teammates do not join in to protect him as the code requires. Their abandonment of him is anticipated by the incident that triggers his first fight, a cheap shot he receives after which there is “no whistle” and in response to which his teammates “laugh” (Wagamese 2012, 165). The implication is that Saul’s fighting only confirms his “savage” identity in the eyes of his teammates—an identity that had contributed to his alienation from the group in the first place.

The damned if he does, damned if he doesn’t situation Saul finds himself in with respect to fighting illustrates a key feature of oppression. The feminist theorist Marilyn Frye has argued that “[one] of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double-bind—situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation” (1983, 2). Frye offers as an example the double bind women have historically faced in Western cultures about sexual activity, in which a sexually active woman is “open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled or a whore” but a woman who refrains from sexual activity “is threatened with

labels like ‘frigid,’ ‘uptight,’ ‘manhater’ . . . and ‘cocktease’” (3). Saul experiences such a double bind about fighting and the label “savage.” The fact that he doesn’t fight at first confirms his “savagery” in the eyes of his teammates (since it signals that he doesn’t subscribe to the code that defines the true—that is, “civilized”—hockey player) but when he does fight it also confirms his “savagery” (since it offers proof of his inherently violent nature as an “Indian”). What Saul experiences with respect to fighting is a synecdoche for the double binds to which Indigenous people have been subjected in larger Canadian society. That fighting does not have the effect predicted in the code reinforces that the promises of the hockey myth (of which the code is a part) are not available to an Indigenous player.

Saul’s fighting exposes the false premises and promises of the code in another way as well. Rather than working as a cathartic release—as the code predicts it will—fighting turns out to be an emotional catalyst for Saul, supercharging the anger that he has, until this point, managed to suppress. The first blow he strikes is a sucker punch. Afterwards, he fights without restraint, any “questionable hit . . . [an] excuse for a tilt,” and his checks become not hard and clean like those of Bill Spunaska, but “hard, vicious, and vindictive” (165). Saul’s anger is not only a response to the poor treatment he has received from the hockey world, but an expression of all the unaddressed traumas of his life, including his sexual abuse by Father Leboutillier (of which he is still not conscious). Fighting, in a sense, pulls off the bandage that hockey has been for Saul, and puts him in a state similar to what Wagamese saw in his own family: “My family members were filled with bitterness from their residential school experiences, and that unhealed energy erupted often in drunkenness and violence” (Wagamese 2008, 241). The key words in this passage are “unhealed energy.” Fighting exposes Saul to his own “unhealed energy.”

After his career is lost, Saul becomes dominated by this “unhealed energy.” He drinks and fights until one day, as depicted in chapter 47, he ends up in the hospital and the New Dawn Centre. An important

point to remember is that Saul's addictive behaviour after hockey is not new behaviour for him. By the time his career ends, hockey itself has become an addiction; the end of his career only leads him to substitute one addiction for another. Gabor Maté, in *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, makes an important distinction between passion and addiction. "Addiction," Maté writes, "is passion's dark simulacrum and, to the naïve observer, its perfect mimic. It resembles passion in its urgency and in the promise of fulfillment, but its gifts are illusory" (2009, 110). Saul, from the beginning, clings to a fusion experience with hockey that seems to lift him up and out of his life. The effect, though, is temporary, and only masks the underlying traumas that haunt him. Maté suggests that there are two questions you can ask to distinguish a passion from an addiction: "Are you closer to the people you love after your passion has been fulfilled or more isolated? Have you come more truly into who you really are or are you left feeling hollow?" (109). Hockey, at times, gives Saul a sense of connection with others, particularly the Kelly family and the Moose, but it brings him no closer to who he truly is. Saul's denial of his own trauma through hockey makes any relationships he forms extremely fragile. To free himself from his "unhealed energy" he has to make a journey of self-discovery. This journey is the focus of the last chapters of *Indian Horse*.

Indian Hockey

As I mentioned in Chapter 8, Judith Herman identifies three stages of recovery for survivors of trauma: "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (1997, 3). *Indian Horse* follows Saul through these stages. The New Dawn Centre is a safe place for him to begin his healing journey. While he is at the centre, he is encouraged to tell his story. He resists at first, but then agrees to produce a written account, presumably the text of *Indian Horse* to chapter 47.

Chapter 48 begins with Saul's dissatisfaction with his initial account: "I thought I'd discover something new, something that would heal me" (Wagamese 2012, 191). He realizes he needs to make a physical journey to key places in his life. At White River, the location of the now closed St. Jerome's Residential School, he stands beside the hockey rink and remembers being abused by Father Leboutilier (198–99). Then he returns to Gods Lake, where he has a vision of his ancestors in which Shabogeesick tells him "You've come to learn to carry this place within you" (205). Finally, he returns to the New Dawn Centre, where he spends the winter telling his trauma story to his counsellor, Moses.

After his second stay at the New Dawn Centre, Saul begins the third stage of his recovery. He returns to Manitouwadge, and the Kelly family, and begins to reconnect with a community. As part of this reconnection, he returns to hockey. Fred Kelly points out that Saul is still only thirty-three years old, that the hockey world has become more Indigenous-friendly, and that the Moose would be excited to have him back (211). Saul declines to return to playing. What he wants to do, he explains, is to coach Indigenous children, so that he can share with them "the joy" he found in hockey when he himself was a child (212).

Indian Horse is silent about Saul's thought process before he announces that he wants to coach. His return to hockey, however, is wonderfully anticipated by two moon images. In chapter 48, during his first stay at the New Dawn Centre, Saul begins to take long walks into the surrounding forest. One night he goes too far to make it back to the centre, and so spends the night on the shore of a beaver pond. Here he has a vision of Shabogeesick and his other ancestors. This vision convinces Saul that he needs to make his journey to White River and Gods Lake. Afterwards, in the clear sky above him, Saul sees "the slender silver arc of the moon" (193). The significance of this image becomes clear only after Saul's return to Gods Lake, where he has another vision of his ancestors, then looks up to see that the moon is now full. Here is Saul's description: "The moon hung in the

air like the face of a drum. As I watched, it became the shining face of a rink, where Indian boys in cast-off skates laughed in the thrill of the game, the smallest among them zooming in and out on out-sized skates” (206). After this, Saul offers tobacco in thanks to “the lake where everything started and everything ended” and moves on to the next stage of his recovery (206).

If the new moon in chapter 48 implies that Saul must make a journey towards wholeness, the full moon in chapter 51 implies where wholeness might be found. What is particularly striking about the second image, I think, is the way the moon ends up symbolizing both Indigenous sacred ritual, in the form of a drum, and hockey, in the form of a rink. The image not only implies an affinity between these two things but a connection to the centre of life, the sacred place where everything begins and ends. The vision of children playing links directly to Saul’s desire to nurture a love of the game in Indigenous children. The image of “the smallest among them” adds a further element to Saul’s desire: by sharing the joy of hockey with other children he also cares for the “smallest” child—the boy—within himself.

The last chapters of *Indian Horse* stress that Saul’s healing journey will not be easy. Saul’s experience with the New Dawn Centre, in which he makes some progress, then has to leave, then returns for further treatment, implies how recovery is an ongoing process in which survivors often have to circle back to previous stages (see Herman 1997, 211). A key moment after Saul’s return to Manitouwadge is when Fred and Martha Kelly admit to their own horrific experiences at residential school and the challenges they have faced in rebuilding their lives. Fred then uses a hockey analogy to suggest a path forward. He tells Saul that he is not responsible for what happened to him, but he is responsible for his own healing. Knowing that about himself, Fred goes on, is “what saved me. Knowing it was my game.” Saul then jokes that it could be a “long game” and Fred replies, “So what if it is? . . . Just keep your stick on the ice and your feet moving. Time will take care of itself” (Wagamese 2012, 210).

The last scene of the novel has Saul going with Virgil to a pick-up hockey game. When he gets there, Saul sees again the “white glory” of a rink (220). The repetition of this image from Saul’s first discovery of hockey implies that he has come full circle. The image also implies that the spiritual promise of hockey remains, despite the terrible history that is also a part of the game. Saul warms up alone. First he skates in ritual-like fashion around the ice. Then he finds a ball of tape on the ice, which reminds him of the horse turds he used as a child, and snaps it “into the top corner of the net” (220). Eventually, others appear. Instead of the usual limited number of players, however, the old Moose players have come with “kids of assorted ages . . . [and] young girls and older women” (220–21). Everybody stays on the ice and Saul asks Virgil how they can play a game with so many players. “Together,” Virgil replies, “Like we shoulda all along” (221).

The Two-Eyed Game

In 2012, the same year in which *Indian Horse* was published, Cheryl Bartlett, in partnership with the ‘Mi’kmaq elders Murdena and Albert Marshall, suggested that reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous people in Canada could be aided by the concept of “two-eyed seeing.” They defined two-eyed seeing as “learning to see from one eye with the *strengths* of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the *strengths* of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012, 335).

Richard Wagamese was probably not aware of this concept when he wrote *Indian Horse*. “Two-eyed seeing,” however, captures very well the features of Saul’s healing journey in the novel—including his return to hockey. As I mentioned above, Saul’s journey takes him through the three stages of recovery described by Judith Herman, but each stage is redefined by Indigenous wisdom. The significance

of this is particularly evident during Saul's returns to Gods Lake and Manitouwadge. At Gods Lake he experiences the healing potential of his homeland and the feelings of wholeness and connection with his ancestors that this land can inspire. At Manitouwadge he rebuilds his relationship to community in a way that has particular resonance for Indigenous people. As McKegney and Phillips stress, Saul's healing requires him to "broaden his individualist focus" on the possibility of hockey transforming "ordinary men" into "great men," in order "to encompass the realities of living Indigenous communities" (2018, 182).

The complexities of two-eyed seeing are also captured in the Indian Horse family name. The origin of the name is described in chapter 2, a stand-alone chapter between the opening account of Saul at the New Dawn Centre and the chapters detailing Saul's early life. Chapter 2 tells of how Shabogeesick, Saul's great-grandfather, brought a horse into the remote Ojibway community. Shabogeesick, from whom Saul inherits his gift of vision, tells a story about the significance of the horse. He explains that horses were brought into the land by the Zhaunagush (the White settlers) but that The People recognized a kinship with "these spirit beings" and adopted them for their own (Wagamese 2012, 7). The story of the horse is, for Shabogeesick, a parable for how Indigenous people must adapt to change. "A great change will come," he says. "It will come with the speed of lightning and it will scorch all our lives. . . . But we must learn to ride each one of these horses of change. It is what the future asks of us and our survival depends on it" (7). The family name is conferred by the men who come to force the Ojibway to sign the treaty register. These Zhaunagush are surprised to see a horse in such an isolated community. They ask where the horse came from, and community members point to Shabogeesick. The Zhaunagush, then, call Shabogeesick "Indian Horse" and it becomes the name of Saul's family from then on (7).

A fascinating aspect of the name story is that it is unclear whether the Zhaunagush meant "Indian Horse" as a racist epithet, a tribute, or a neutral descriptor. It is unlikely, given the historical times, that

the name was a tribute. It might have been intended as a neutral descriptor, a playfully chosen “family” name for the agents to use on the registry; but the act of a white official naming an Indigenous person in this manner is colonial by definition and brings to mind the forced conferring of “Christian” names on Indigenous children at residential schools (in *Indian Horse*, Lonnie Rabbit is forcibly renamed “Aaron” on page 45). Most likely, the name was intended as an insult, in the manner of derogatory terms in settler culture created by putting “Indian” in front of something.

Despite the fraught history behind the Indian Horse family name, the name is (also) a reminder of Shagobeesick’s teachings about the horse. These teachings, in turn, offer a way for Indigenous people to address historical change. The hockey game at the end of *Indian Horse* embodies Shagobeesick’s wisdom. Like the horse, hockey was introduced into the lives of Indigenous people by the Zhaunagush as part of a violent colonial process (if, by “hockey,” we refer to the organized game set in motion by the Montreal Rules of James Creighton in 1875), yet Saul and other Indigenous players recognize in the game a “spirit” with which they feel an affinity. This spirit, like the spirit of the horse, is related to the “speed of lightning.” The transformative possibilities Saul senses in hockey require a recognition of colonial history (in the same way that Saul recognizes what happened to him in the residential schools) and then a disentangling from that history. They require the bringing together of the strengths of Indigenous culture with the strengths of Western culture. From this two-eyed seeing comes a reshaped version of the game that illustrates not only how hockey can be part of a vital Indigenous culture, but how hockey can suggest a model for reimagining the Canadian nation.

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Conclusion

Return to the Moon

Before the moon
was a moon . . . [each] night
was the same night, and fell formlessly,
with no imagination,
and without you in it.

—Don McKay, “Before the Moon”

The alert reader will have noticed a few references to the moon in the chapters of this book. In chapter 5, I noted that Roch Carrier’s “The Hockey Sweater” was published originally in a collection titled *The Children of the Man in the Moon*. Though the moon doesn’t appear directly in “The Hockey Sweater,” Carrier’s afterword to the second edition identifies the boy in the story—himself—as one of the children from the book’s title. His relationship to hockey is affected by this identity (Carrier 1983, 166). In chapter 5, on *King Leary*, Percival Leary first sees the round rink at the Bowmanville Reformatory under “a full moon” that is “silver like a nickel” (Quarrington 1994, 145). At his death, Leary rejoins “the circle” of monks on this rink under “the big silver moon” (232). And in chapter 13, on *Indian Horse*, Saul Indian Horse’s readiness to return to hockey is marked by the phases of the moon. The new moon of chapter 48 hints at his need to revisit Gods Lake, while the full moon of chapter 51 suggests his

readiness. When Saul is ready to return, the moon becomes “the face of a drum” and then “the shining face of a rink” (Wagamese 2012, 206).

I was delighted to encounter these references. I can honestly say that I didn’t have them in mind when I chose my childhood fantasy as the organizing image for *Hockey on the Moon*. Their existence is a wonderful example of the vitality and unpredictability of the imagination.

The references themselves illustrate key aspects of the imaginative responses to hockey that this study has explored. In *King Leary*, the moon, in combination with the perfect circle of the monks’ rink, represents the idealism of the hockey myth. The moon, with its connection to the monks, links the “happy naturalism” in the myth to muscular Christianity—a belief system associated with hockey from its earliest days (as Ralph Connor’s *Glengarry School Days*, the focus of chapter 2, demonstrates). *King Leary* satirizes the virtues claimed for hockey by the myth, but the novel doesn’t dismiss these virtues outright: Leary’s wholeness at the end is signalled by his return to the round rink lit by the moon.

Indian Horse is harsher than *King Leary* in its treatment of the hockey myth but is also more optimistic, in the end, about hockey’s potential. Optimism is implied by the moon imagery. That the moon becomes first a drum and then a rink signals how Saul can reimagine the game to serve himself and his community. That the rink and the drum have “faces” reinforces the connection between self and other in this reimagining. We tend to attribute faces to objects and other creatures in whom we see a reflection of ourselves (as in the face of a clock). The moon imagery, then, reinforces how Saul’s embrace of “Indian hockey” is his way of caring for himself by caring for others. Saul’s decision to coach Indigenous children is a way to care for these children while also caring for the small child inside himself. Thus his return to Manitouwadge contributes to the ongoing vitality of that community while also representing a stage in his own recovery.

An important thing to stress about the end of *Indian Horse* is that the reimagined game is not a return to the “purity” implied by Saul’s original vision of the white ice at the residential school. Although he remembers the “white glory” of the rink when he warms up before the reimagined game, the original “white glory” is transformed by the needs of the present Indigenous community. The new game is not mythical but human. Remember that the line up of players for the opening face-off contains “five of the original Moose” but also “kids of assorted ages and sizes and young girls and older women” (Wagamese 2012, 221). What will follow the dropping of the puck in such a game will, needless to say, be messy—like life itself.

The Carrier reference is equally rich with implication. Carrier’s book title suggests that his boyhood belief in Maurice Richard was like his belief in the Man in the Moon. Growing up meant leaving these beliefs behind. The story of how he did this is found in *Our Life with the Rocket*. As I suggested in chapter 5, a key event for Carrier was the 1949 Asbestos Strike, when he discovered that all the parties to the strike were Montreal Canadiens fans. The strike taught him that hockey is not a timeless, mythical activity, but a passionate recreation that can be used by different people for different ends. This revised view of the game is paralleled with a revised view of Maurice Richard. In later life, Carrier realized that Richard was only a man, and that the Rocket as mythical hero was an imaginary creation, whose strength “belongs in the same category as that which drove Icarus to fly” (Carrier 2001, 258).

The power of myths—including the myth of hockey—is rooted in what limits them. Myths try to capture transhistorical truths, in the way that “The Hockey Song” tries to distill something like the essence of hockey. In seeking the transhistorical, however, myths obscure history (including the history that has made them). When the history obscured by a myth is made visible, disenchantment occurs. Sometimes this process is accompanied by disillusionment (a common synonym for “disenchantment”) but more often it just means that the myth is demystified, literally dis-enchanted, thus

losing its magical aura. This is what happened when Carrier became aware of the history obscured by the myth of the Rocket.

It is important to stress that although Carrier outgrew his naïve belief in the Rocket, his boyhood identification with Maurice Richard served a valuable purpose. As he writes in *Our Life with the Rocket*, not only did the identification allow the small boy he was to feel bigger, but the Rocket provided an inspirational model that helped him and his friends to be “better men” (2001, 292). The persisting value of Carrier’s identification is rooted in the fundamental mechanism of myth and religion. In a sense, we are all always small children before the biggest challenges of life (especially the fact of death) and looking for ways to feel “bigger.” Remember the passage from Karen Armstrong I quoted back in chapter 1. According to Armstrong, humans have always craved stories that “enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting, that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value” (2006, 2). Growing up makes Carrier self-aware about how he used Richard in this way.

Carrier’s evolving relationship with the Rocket illustrates the different responses to hockey that are at the core of this study. As a boy, Carrier believed whole-heartedly in the Québécois version of the hockey myth—a classically conservative imaginative response. As he got older, his responses became more critical. These critical responses were not simply about rejecting earlier beliefs (although Carrier does subject some of his childhood beliefs to harsh criticism) but about understanding those beliefs in relation to the history from which they emerged. Out of this understanding comes new possibilities.

Finally, about Carrier’s title *Les enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*. I have to say, I was particularly delighted when I discovered this title—and Carrier’s explanation for it. I am of the generation of Roch Carrier’s children. Like his daughters, I was raised in a more scientific time, a time in which humans built rockets to travel to the actual moon, thus putting paid to any beliefs about the moon being home to a balloon-headed man. But I am also a child of the Man in the

Moon. Like Carrier, I remember looking up as a boy to see if I could make out the moon's face. I probably did this while I watered my backyard rink. And, like Carrier, the search for this face stirred my imagination. I didn't know then that the moon is often associated with the imagination itself. How apt this association now seems. The association is a reminder that imagination thrives in the half-light, in the movements between wholeness and newness, and recovery and loss, that are embodied by the moon. Moonlight is a time of transformation.

The texts I have explored in this study all represent hockey in the half-light of imagination. In so doing, they reveal patterns in the game, and various meanings and associations, that perhaps could not be revealed (or as well revealed) by other means. How much of what is revealed comes from qualities in the game itself and how much is a projection by the one who imagines can never be fully determined. What can be determined, however, is that the interaction of imaginative tendencies is a dynamic process. Each hockey game tells the same story—as Iz suggests in *Twenty Miles*—but the story of hockey is never fully told. Hockey—as Bob Bonaduce discovers in *The Good Body*—is like life itself: empty and full of possibility.

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