

Hugh MacLennan and the Two Solitudes of Hockey

Jamie Dopp

Volume 47, numéro 1, 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1095247ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1095247ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Dopp, J. (2022). Hugh MacLennan and the Two Solitudes of Hockey. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 47(1), 270–284.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1095247ar>

Hugh MacLennan and the *Two Solitudes* of Hockey

JAMIE DOPP

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* (285)

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

— Hugh MacLennan, “Fury on Ice” (75)

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER it was first published, *Two Solitudes* still occupies an important place in Canadian literary history. When it appeared on 17 January 1945, the novel was an immediate sensation, selling out the entire first printing of 4,500 copies by noon of that day (Leith 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.” 495). 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” (19). Jeffery Vacante, in a more recent article, suggests that the decline of MacLennan’s reputation had less to do with his faults as a stylist than with “changing attitudes about who could legitimately write about French Canadians.” By the 1960s, according to Vacante, English Canadians who were interested in Quebec turned to “what they believed to be the province’s more authentic voices . . . usually French and often

influenced by the radicalism that was increasingly associated with the nationalist movement in the province” (44).

The historical reach of MacLennan’s novel is hinted at by the way that its title has passed into popular usage to denote the two main settler cultures of Canada. The title signals MacLennan’s intention to explore Canadian identity in an explicit way, as well as to offer his prescription for an identity that might serve Canada in the modern world of the Second World War and after. Excellent analyses of MacLennan’s project already exist. I think of studies by Elspeth Cameron, Robert Cockburn, George Woodcock, and others, in which both the strengths and weaknesses of MacLennan’s nationalist vision are well explored.

One aspect of *Two Solitudes* that has not been given much attention is its treatment of hockey. In one sense, this is understandable: hockey only appears on five pages of the novel scattered over four passages. Yet, in another sense, it is a strange gap: this is, after all, a novel about Canadian identity, published at a time when hockey achieved its tightest hold on the imagination of the country. It is hard to imagine that passages about hockey in such a novel would not be important. In fact, the brief passages about hockey in *Two Solitudes* operate as shorthands for the historical and social forces shaping Canada in the time period of the novel, and the different versions of the game portrayed mirror the divisions within the country 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 hockey myth itself, the hockey in *Two Solitudes* reveals as much about persistent fractures in Canadian society as it does about what holds the country together.

The French Game

The long 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. Athanase 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, who opposes French-Canadian participation in the war and also the building of a factory in Saint-Marc by

an investor named Huntley McQueen whom Athanase supports. For Beaubien, both the war and the factory are synonymous with exploitation by the English bosses and will lead to moral decline (147).

It turns out that Athanase, for a time, was 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 illustrates aspects of Athanase's character. The fact that the team he supports is professional subtly reinforces his commitment to creating greater economic opportunity — and working with characters like McQueen. That he enjoys hanging out with the players, drinking beer from a barrel “they broached . . . together,” suggests that he remains a man of the people despite his aristocratic background (64). The passage also reveals that he enjoys “the French style of hockey, a team with small, stickhandling forwards and defensemen built like beer barrels” (64), which implies that the team is a francophone one — reinforcing Athanase's pride in his heritage, and also how the francophone community was using hockey to express its own identity. That Athanase's investment ultimately fails, however, hints at economic complexities not at first apparent.

In the background of Athanase's investment is the early history of modern hockey. The origins of hockey are murky. 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 3 March 1875 in Montreal, for the way it set in motion a refinement of rules to fit the more controlled 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” (11).

Creighton's 1875 indoor game was followed by the rapid spread of hockey throughout the anglophone community in Montreal, and, for the next twenty years or so, hockey remained a preserve of the anglophone elite, so much so that, as Michel Vigneault has pointed out, francophones only managed to join after a “long and arduous” process (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” (Blake and Holman 7). For these reasons, there were few francophone players on Montreal teams even into the early twentieth century (Vigneault 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 NHL formed in 1917, leaving the Montreal Canadiens as the sole team with a francophone heritage. 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 (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, anglophone control of professional hockey reached another level, as 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 also points to a divide that opened in the early twentieth century between amateur and professional versions of the game. The first hockey organizations — such as 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” (57). The word “gentlemen” is crucial: the amateur ideal was highly class-specific — an important factor in the early development of hockey. Don Morrow cites the charter

of the Montreal Pedestrian Club from the early 1900s as capturing the amateur ideal of the period: “[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” (Morrow 203).

Professional hockey, by contrast, emerged in response to the commercial potential of the game 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” (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 hockey is illustrated in the second half of *Two Solitudes*. The hockey references in this half relate to Athanase’s son, Paul. 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 (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 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 Thomas Hughes based *Tom Brown’s School Days*. Colin Howell points out that all private schools in Canada during this era had their boys participate in “manly” games, and “endurance and toughness fashioned on the field of play . . . were prized as much as literary and mathematical skills” (32). This environment, in turn, was governed by the amateur ideal of competition between gentlemen. The “elite” 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 above, there would be no “laborer or Indian” 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). Afterwards, Paul must leave the private school and enroll in public school in Montreal. At such schools, the novel explains, “[no] games were provided” (221).

Despite the English public school-like values ascribed to it, the hockey at Frobisher is also a specifically Canadian activity that distinguishes the boys from their English masters. This is consistent with the meanings attached to hockey as it was adopted into Canadian society in the years after 1875. This period was a time of intense concern about Canadian identity. A popular way of distinguishing newly Confederated Canada from either England or the United States was by its northern location. According to Carl Berger, in his aptly titled article “The True North Strong and Free,” 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 (see Berger). Daniel Coleman points out that, in this time period, “the Northern myth” was used to characterize Canada “as a testing and improving ground for effete European manhood,” in which “the rigours of life in a stern, unaccommodating climate demanded strength of body, character, and mind while it winnowed away laziness, overindulgence, and false social niceties” (24). Hockey, as it swept the nation in the 1880s and 1890s, must have seemed ready-made to support this kind of thinking.

One other characteristic of hockey is worth noting here: hockey was identified early on as a modern game, in comparison to inherited old-world games like cricket, rugby, or English football. This is evident in the earliest extended description of hockey in a Canadian novel, the one that takes up the last third of Ralph Connor’s *Glengarry School Days* — a 1902 novel that, as the title suggests, explicitly echoes and rewrites *Tom Brown’s School Days*. *Glengarry School Days* makes clear that part of the attraction of hockey is how it blends old- and new-world elements. The game described is akin to rugby and the fact that the players use “clubs” to hit a ball is out of field hockey — both old-world elements. But the schoolmaster who runs the game, John Craven, uses his knowledge of lacrosse (a specifically Canadian game stolen from Indigenous people) to develop strategy, as well as 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) (Connor 296, 304). The mix of old and new elements positions hockey as a more modern contest in keeping with the emerging modern character of Canada — a game that updates old ways of doing things, even as it incorporates the best elements from the old ways within it. Implicitly, behind the portrayal of the hockey in *Two Solitudes*, are these kinds of associations. Not coincidentally, these are the associations also embedded in MacLennan’s vision of modern Canadian identity.

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. Leith, for example, describes him as “loaded with heroic qualities” (51). 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 portrays Paul as a brilliant student of classical literature, a labourer, a sailor and world traveller (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 they meet again (they spent time together as children) Heather’s friend Alan tells her what he has heard about Paul, that he had played varsity hockey, then on a “semi-professional team,” a “tough outfit” made up of “garage hands and factory workers” who played “for the money they could make” (237). Paul was so good, Alan says, that there was talk of his making “a club in one of the major leagues” (238). Later, when her grandfather reintroduces Heather directly to Paul, he points out that Paul was “a big-time hockey player,” which causes Heather to look at Paul with “shyness” (266). Paul claims to have only been “medium” good, but Heather

tells him what Alan had said, 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 Paul 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 is “an old man” and his playing days are over. He stresses, in the passage that is the second epigraph above, that he played professional hockey because he “needed the money” (285).

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 what scholars, in recent years, have called “the hockey myth.” Michael J. Buma has defined that myth as “the accumulated pool of cultural meanings and significations that have become attached to hockey in Canada” (5). A core aspect of the myth, as Gruneau and Whitson have pointed out, is the idea that hockey is “a ‘natural’ adaptation to ice, snow, and open space” (*Hockey Night* 132) — an idea repeated in endless popular representations of apple-cheeked children playing on frozen ponds and exploited in commercials such as the Molson’s “Made From Canada” beer ad, with its images of rugged Canadian landscapes intercut with scenes of hockey. The mythic association of hockey with Canada’s northern geography bonds the game with the Northern myth, and 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.

MacLennan’s choice to add hockey to Paul’s list of heroic activities suggests how strong the hockey myth had become in Canada by 1945. 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” (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 as telling as 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, 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 10; Cockburn 13). Making Paul a tennis player, however, would have conflicted with MacLennan’s 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 subtly 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. Hockey is also portrayed as creating social bonds, be it the bond between Athanase and his players, or 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 — and what they stand for in Canadian society — can be brought together in the game. 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, along with Billy Boucher — the lesser-known left-winger on the Morenz, Joliat, Boucher line (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 of masculinity 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” (*Hockey Night* 191).

That Paul is associated with an aggressive masculinity is especially important because his true vocation is to become a writer of Canadian stories — perhaps, ultimately, to write a novel like *Two Solitudes*. 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. (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 being 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 Canadian armed forces to fight in the Second World War (368).

Paul’s masculinity affects the novel’s 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 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 admirably through the years in which Paul is off out-doing 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" (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 the First Nations in the modern Canadian identity proposed by the novel — makes *Two Solitudes* feel dated in 2021, but is instructive of where Canada was at in 1945. Heather's Penelope-like waiting while Paul spends years finding himself through various male-only activities is consistent with the restricted role women have been limited to in traditional hockey culture. As Jason Blake has put it, females in hockey have been mainly notable for their absence, or have been limited to "supportive roles" (208).

Much has changed in Canada — and in Canadian hockey — since 1945, but tensions still remain about the place of women in the game. As recently as August 2020, NBC announcer Brian Boucher suggested that the isolation of players in the NHL COVID-bubble was "terrific" for players "who enjoyed the focused experience of being with their teammates 24/7." This comment was seconded by another announcer, Mike Milbury, a former NHL player, who said, "Not even any women here to disrupt your concentration" (Houpt). 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), but the comments pulled the curtain aside on lingering misogyny at the highest levels of the game. Hockey culture, it seems, is still significantly lacking when it comes to bridging the solitudes of gender.

The Persistence of History

The hockey myth in Canada stresses how the game brings people together in the way Roy MacGregor and Ken Dryden describe in *Home*

Game: Hockey and Life in 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, where we need every one we have. . . . 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)

Building community, indeed, 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 of community a 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.

Two Solitudes enlists aspects of the hockey myth to help create its model for a modern Canadian identity. The extent to which hockey actually plays a unifying role in Canada, however, is an open question. In addition to the lingering gender issues I described above, there is a sense, as Jason Blake has argued, that hockey promotes “fleeting acquaintance or fair-weather friendship” among fans, and not a deeper understanding of cultural differences (137). In *Two Solitudes* traces of the historical conflicts from which the myth emerges can still be seen. Despite the portrayals of hockey's ability to build community, Athanase's failed investment hints at a division between English and French Canadians 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 and racist nature of the amateur ideal that influenced one important definition of “Canadian” ascribed to the game.

The novel does express scepticism about certain aspects of the myth. Once the hockey myth takes hold in Canada, professional hockey

becomes a “field of dreams” for many young Canadian boys and men. The NHL itself, as Whitson and Gruneau point out, assumes the character of “a prominent Canadian institution” despite the fact that most teams and team owners are American (“Introduction” 4). *Two Solitudes* downplays the 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 hints at the physical cost of his having made this decision. Paul’s scarred body, the text implies, is a result not of his schoolboy play but of professional hockey, and the physical costs of this game have dulled his earlier, more spontaneous and joyful, experience of the sport.

The novel’s ambivalence about professional hockey has to be read against the celebration of rugged masculinity in Paul. *Two Solitudes* is not a critical response to professional hockey in the manner of important later works such as Al Purdy’s “Hockey Players” or Roy MacGregor’s *The Last Season*, where the cost of professional success is shown to far outweigh the benefits. The novel’s view of the game is in keeping with MacLennan’s 1954 essay “Fury on Ice,” which reproduces all 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 (79). Yet 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, in texts with and without explicit reference to Canada’s national game, will read these traces in a way that exposes some of the history obscured by the formation of the hockey myth.

WORKS CITED

- Berger, Carl. "The True North Strong and Free." *Canadian Culture*, edited by Elspeth Cameron, Canadian Scholars Press, 1997, pp. 83-102.
- Blake, Jason. *Canadian Hockey Literature*. U of Toronto P, 2010.
- Blake, Jason, and Andrew C. Holman. Introduction. *The Same but Different: Hockey in Quebec*, edited by Jason Blake and Andrew C. Holman, McGill-Queen's UP, 2017, pp. 3-13.
- Brown, E. K. "The Problem of a Canadian Literature." 1943. *Masks of Fiction: Canadian Critics on Canadian Prose*, edited by A. J. M. Smith, McClelland and Stewart, 1961, pp. 40-52.
- Buma, Michael J. *Refereeing Identity: The Cultural Work of Canadian Hockey Novels*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2012.
- Cameron, Elspeth. *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life*. U of Toronto P, 1981.
- Cockburn, Robert. *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan*. Harvest House, 1969.
- Coleman, Daniel. *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. U of Toronto P, 2006.
- Connor, Ralph. *Glengarry School Days*. Westminster, 1902.
- Dryden, Ken, and Roy MacGregor. *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*. McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- Gruneau, Richard, and David Whitson. *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*. Garamond, 1993.
- Holman, Andrew C. "A Flag of Tendons: Hockey and Canadian History." *Hockey: Challenging Canada's Game / Au-delà du sport national*, edited by Jenny Ellison and Jennifer Anderson, Canadian Museum of History and U of Ottawa P, 2018, pp. 25-44.
- Houpt, Simon. "The Mike Milbury Mess Shows Hockey's Inherent Problems Are Still Prevalent." *The Globe and Mail*, 23 Aug. 2020, www.theglobeandmail.com/sports/hockey/article-the-mike-milbury-mess-shows-hockeys-inherent-problems-are-still/.
- Howell, Colin. *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada*. U of Toronto P, 2001.
- "I. M. S." Review of *Two Solitudes*. *Queen's Quarterly*, no. 52, 1945, pp. 494-96.
- Leith, Linda. *Introducing Hugh MacLennan's Two Solitudes*. ECW, 1990.
- MacLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1945.
- . "Fury on Ice." 1954. *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan: Selected Essays Old and New*, edited by Elspeth Cameron, Macmillan, 1978, pp. 69-82.
- McKinley, Michael. *Putting a Roof on Winter: Hockey's Rise from Sport to Spectacle*. Douglas and McIntyre, 2000.
- Morrow, Don. "A Case Study of Amateur Conflict: The Athletic War in Canada, 1906-08." *Sports in Canada: Historical Readings*, edited by Morris Mott, Copp Clark Pitman, 1989, pp. 201-19.
- Vacante, Jeffery. "The Decline of Hugh MacLennan." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 1, 2016, pp. 43-68.
- Vigneault, Michel. "Montreal's Francophone Hockey Beginnings, 1895-1910." *The Same but Different: Hockey in Quebec*, edited by Jason Blake and Andrew C. Holman, McGill-Queen's UP, 2017, pp. 36-61.
- Whitson, David, and Richard Gruneau. Introduction. *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture, and Commerce*, edited by David Whitson and Richard Gruneau, Broadview, 2006, pp. 1-25.
- Woodcock, George. *Hugh MacLennan*. Copp Clark, 1969.