CASH, CULTURE & VIOLENCE
The Spell of Hockey in North American Literature

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vorgelegt von
Wolfgang KANDUTH
am Institut für Anglistik
Begutachter: Ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr.phil. Martin Löschnigg

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INTRODUCTION

When deciding on the topic of hockey in North American literature for my thesis the first things that came to my mind were stories about toothless Canadian hockey players who drink and gamble and make a remarkable living by chasing pucks and slamming into boards in a full-contact sport that counts to be the fastest and toughest ever to have been developed on this planet. In case it needs to be mentioned, I'm talking about ice-hockey.

Besides numerous people's individual histories and backgrounds of childhoods spent in local national hockey teams, Austria was never as nationally and internationally associated with that sport as Canada. Hockey is, universally acknowledged, the Canadian sport, as even all the youngsters today will tell you. Our heroes in the nineties were Canadian hockey players, like Wayne Gretzky, our parents' idols of the 1970s players like Bobby Orr, and even today the kids look up to Canadian players, like Sid Crosby.

The kinds of winter sports most celebrated, promoted and exported in Austria, are the alpine ones: skiing, ski jumping, even bobsledding and snowboarding are broadcast regularly on Austrian TV, rather than hockey. Anyway, hockey has its tradition and heritage even in our little country, especially in the province of Carinthia with its rival hockey cities Klagenfurt and Villach, who drew a remarkable 30,500 people to watch the Derby on an open-air soccer stadium's ground on January 9th, 2010, a record attendance of European outdoor hockey games. The EC-KAC was established in 1923, when hockey was played on the many frozen Carinthian ponds in winter, on steel blades strapped to leather boots and soccer sweaters for dresses, almost fifty years after the first official hockey game in Montreal, Canada, on March 3rd, 1875, took place.

Back then Canada, the home of ice hockey, was a place far away, across the big pond, and not only the birthplace of the sport that would come to be so adored all over the wintry regions of the Earth, but also the producer of many and most of the legends, heroes and idols of the game.

As I went through my first readings of short stories in Doug Beardsley's *Our Game: An All-Star Collection of Hockey Fiction*, not all, but most of my anticipations on this topic, as mentioned in the first paragraph, had been confirmed. Furthermore, I discovered that writers who produced texts about hockey share a deep and emotional
relationship with the sport and all that surrounds it. From people who grow up playing the game, *their game*, to talented athletes that make it to a professional level to become millionaire hero figures, and fans that urge the desire to follow the game everywhere at any time and any cost. These issues reflected in literature are going to be the main concerns from the cultural and literary point of view in this thesis.

I chose the heading *Cash, Culture & Violence* because these three topics are frequent among stories about hockey in the literature I could find. The fact that hockey developed from a recreational pass time activity in wintry Canada in the nineteenth century to a mass spectacular making billions of Dollars in ticket sales and revenue and providing its *professional players* with million Dollar contracts remain highly controversial topics within hockey discourse; with the 1988 trade of Wayne Gretzky, NHL hockey changed the fiscal policy of professional sports. The rise of such incidences exemplifies how hockey, once on a financially level playing field with other sporting industries, moved to the summit of capital gain.

Hockey as a popular sport, a social game and a national identity are the cultural aspects I want to pick out as essential themes in writings about hockey, which are dealt with also in a lot of works of non-fiction, prose and poetry, and had a highly visible effect on Canadian literature. I will draw on the work of Jason Blake, who recently published his work *Canadian Hockey Literature: A Thematic Study* in the summer of 2010, and whose 2007 PhD dissertation about *Ice Hockey as a Cultural Symbol in Canadian Prose* I gratefully took to for this thesis. In addition to that, I will also quote and refer to Helen Patricia Hughes-Fuller and her elaborate dissertation study *The Good Old Game: Hockey, Nostalgia, Identity*.

Coming down to the basic satisfaction of the game, to someone watching it for the first time, as I have noticed plenty of times myself, what people observe first - besides the quickness of the game and the difficulty to follow the puck for an untrained eye - is the peculiar violence on the ice, the frequent body checks, speedy board crashes and occasional player against opponent fist fights that constitute the essence of Canadian hockey.

Ever since the first game of hockey on March 3rd 1875 in Montreal, Canada, people have been following the game, thinking about it, talking about it, writing about it, perfecting it and developing it to an internationally successful business. It has become the centre of attention of many people’s lives and created extensive public awareness in
Canada, where hockey is played, watched and debated more than anywhere in the world. In Vancouver, a 60 meter hockey stick was installed to symbolize the common denominator of all things Canadian at the Expo of 1986, it “was an all-too concrete example of how hockey is put on display, how it is used to perform Canada” (Blake 2010: 32), which demonstrates that country’s unique relation to that game.

It seems that to Canadians the world is still round and flat, and made of vulcanized rubber - and it is Canada where you find the most passionate, candid, authentic and conflicting stories about hockey and all its consequences.

The final line in my heading I took from Clark Blaise’s short story *I’m dreaming of Rocket Richard*. The narrator tries to describe his affiliation with the magic of hockey:

Something about the ghostly white of the ice under these powerful lights, something about the hiss of the skates if you were standing close enough, the solid *pock-pock* of the rubber on a stick, and the low menacing whiz of a Rocket slap shot hugging the ice – there was nothing in any other sport to compare with the spell of hockey. (Beardsley 1997: 32)

I want to divide this thesis into the following chapters: In the first chapter I want to discuss the evolution of the game in Canada in detail, finding clues to what made people so fascinated about that sport in the first place, and introduce the main historical characters of the game, such as Maurice “The Rocket” Richard, Gordie Howe, Eddie Shore, and also more recent legendary hockey players such as Bobby Orr and Wayne Gretzky which reverberate throughout hockey stories. I will draw on the stories of Paul Quarrington’s 1996 collection of short stories *Original Six: True Stories from Hockey’s Classic Era* and the CBC TV-documentary production *Hockey: A People’s History*, which was published in 2006 on 10 DVDs. It will also involve works published by Ken Dryden, Peter Gzowski and Jason Blake.

As far as the “spell” of hockey is concerned, chapter II is going to look for traces of the topics of money and the sport, how the game’s market capitalization is being treated in the texts, and what effect this historical evolution has on the characters and protagonists in the stories discussed. I will begin by looking at young players’ attitudes towards their career in the game, their dreams of making it in the big leagues and present stories of the ones who had actually made it to a ‘professional player’. It will also include first thoughts on the violence of the game and give examples from various short stories. To round up this chapter II the last parts will deal with the claim of the
game as art or play, and what makes it a hit. I will quote the work of Ken Dryden and Peter Gzowski as well as Dave Bidini, Jason Blake and Ken Baker.

Chapter III will look at the cultural development of the game of hockey, rather the world of hockey being a 'world apart', and how it effects the daily life, families, society and the collective identity in Canada. I will look at Patricia Hughes-Fuller’s 2002 dissertation and of course again the work of Jason Blake and give a few examples of short story texts that I found particularly interesting in this context.

The last chapter IV will deal with the depiction of the violence of the game, the way fans, players and writers experience and think about it, and the dubious spectacle it had become. Besides examples from short stories and Ken Baker’s autobiographical book They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven I will also include quotations of the real tough guys in hockey to portray their mentality and attitude towards their role in the game, as enforcers, intimidators and so-called “goons”, from Stan Fischler’s Ultimate Bad Boys.

A brief conclusion will render my initial thoughts on hockey in literature and point out the results of my research on the topic.
I.1) EVOLUTION OF A CANADIAN GAME

A toddler's progression from dry land to ice is a passage from one stage of social existence to another. Symbolically speaking, he grows into being Canadian. (Blake 2010:170)

As in the case of many original things that turn out to become highly esteemed and financially successful on an international level, it's likely someone will claim to have found out about it or even to have invented it first and stayed with it the longest. Just like the first fan of U2 or something. In the case of sports, and here we will look at hockey, it's not quite so easy to really trace it back to the true origins and first appearances of stick and ball games. Such games have been around since the time of ancient Greece, as reliefs carved into the Pantheon's stones in Athens show (cf. Episode 1, Hockey: A People's History). Demonstrably, hockey, or rather the early game of “Shinny”, or “Colf”, had been played on frozen ponds in Europe for at least 450 years, as Pieter Bruegel's painting “The Return of the Hunters” of 1565 attests, depicting people skating with sticks and curling on ice (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Return_of_the_Hunters).

In hockey literature, the proposition that it is a Canadian game is never really disputed, rather assumed to be self-evident, also because the writers are Canadian for the largest part. Furthermore, it is a historically proven fact that the first game of hockey actually took place in Canada. Ken Dryden includes a newspaper quote on this event in his book The Game:

Its first 'public' exhibition was held on March 3, 1875, in Montreal. The Gazette
A game of hockey will be played at the Victoria Skating Rink this evening between two nines from among the members. Good fun may be expected, as some of the players are reputed to be exceedingly expert at the game. Some fears have been expressed on the part of the intending spectators that accidents were likely to occur through the ball flying around in a too lively manner, to the imminent danger of lookers-on, but we understand that the game will be played with a flat, circular piece of wood, thus preventing all danger of its leaving the surface of the ice. (Dryden 2005: 242f)

That day in Montreal 136 years ago counts as the first recorded happening of this newly invented game called ice hockey, that would go on to conquer so much of Canadian identity and give a whole nation a common denominator. Even if there was still a long way ahead for the game to evolve, what people saw and experienced that day in these times left them astonished and highly motivated to carry on working on the conditions, equipment and rules of this kind of sport. It was a time of the young, independent Canada and the pioneering spirit was still a key factor in many things that concerned the everyday lives of young and wealthy European settlers and First Nation inhabitants. Besides many accomplishments in industrial sectors and economic progress, also pass-time activities were given more attention and became contrived in order to find something new to cling to and make use of their natural surroundings.

The CBC TV-documentary *Hockey: A People's History* traces back to the earliest occurrences of hockey, like to Nova Scotia, the place where Starr-Skates were being manufactured, “a revolutionary new skate, an ingenious design that clamps firmly to your boot with a round blade for better maneuverability.” The plant started in 1863 and sold millions of pairs from then on. “For the next century Starr-Skates are the gold standard around the world. The company also produced the first hockey sticks, from honey bean or stink wood. The forest industry was the first industry in Canada out of which rooted what had become Canada's symbol, the hockey stick.” (Episode 1, *Hockey: A People's History*). Games such as the French La Crosse or English Hurley could now be moved to the ice and played in different conditions and at higher speed, but rugby gave the new game it's biggest influence at first. Even the Natives had developed their own kind of stick and ball game called “Little Brother of War” - a game designed to prepare their young men for battle. In the culmination of all those influences *hockey* came into existence. “It's the stick that gave the game its name. Perhaps from Old French *Hokè* which means *Shepherd's Crook*, or maybe it's from the Iroquese *Hoki*
meaning tree-branch; wherever it came from – it stuck.” (Episode 1, *Hockey: A People's History*).

The European settlers in Canada brought with them a wide range of games, activities and contesting traditions. “The early inhabitants of what became Canada played all manner of games in the course of what were for the most part remarkably physically active lives. The peoples of the First Nations were accomplished runners, climbers, swimmers, and canoeists, and they enjoyed many games and tests of skill and strength. The European explorers, entrepreneurs, and settlers brought their own amusements and tried the Native ones. By the nineteenth century, Euro-Canadians were engaging in a wide variety of athletic contests, though there was considerable difference in what was played.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 22)"

Hockey just seemed to be the best-fitting leisure activity for the young Canadians because it combined the things they could find directly outside their doorsteps: “The game requires a communion of two fundamental Canadian realities: water and the cold. The many lakes and rivers were the original passageways into the interior of Canada, and winter was the original nemesis. The freezing of water and cow dung is a natural process; playing hockey on ice or using dung as a puck (not a fictitious example) is not.” (Blake 2007: 34).

What they had was the frozen water and dung, and trees to cut sticks from, so all the initials were there, plus there was the excitement of making something out of the year's deadliest season, winter, of which Canada definitely had among the roughest. To settle in Canada meant to be tough and able to work with and live in wintry conditions, which must have also contributed to the game of ice hockey as something perfectly cut out for a “real Canadian”. Now they had an outdoor game played on “their” ice in a “lively” manner almost all year long. Adding to this, the regulations had at first been adopted from English rugby and football, the roughest games there were before hockey; “The rules of hockey are relatively simple, and the game belongs to the same family of sports with a goal, meaning that no drastic change to the athletic-field world-view is required. It is therefore an easy way of integrating or assimilating into the sporting aspect of the New World.” (Blake 2007: 218).

This New World needed a sporting aspect common to its people, something that made
it original and confirmed their independence from former colonizers. It can be seen as a natural force behind developing games in a society. “As activities (...) sports and games are very old and, according to some, they reflect a spirit of playfulness and creativity common to virtually all human societies (Huizinga, cited in Gruneau and Whitson, 12-13)” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 17). Ice hockey came just in time to the people of Canada, as “The nation was created when the game was created” (Episode 10, Hockey: A People's History). I want to include, here, the opening lines of the CBC Documentary Hockey: A People's History, because it describes, very lyrically, the entitlement of hockey becoming an authentic Canadian sport:

A game of survival played against winter, the promise of life in the season of death. Hometown dreams born on frozen ponds, and epic journeys in the quests for glory. The story of miners and mill-workers, on a winter stage where any man can be king. Of the strife of women struggling for their place in the game. Hockey stories span two centuries in a vast country coming of age. A story of hucksters and heroes, of victory and betrayal, a game that divides us and unites us, like nothing else can. Canada's gift to the world and a measure of our place in the world. The game of our kids, the game of our lives, a game that tells the story of a nation. (Episode 1, Hockey: A People's History)

These lines make no pretension whatsoever that the discourse of hockey in Canada was not emotionally affected, as many aspects of a national identity are, such as the Waltz in Austria or Whiskey in Ireland. That every Austrian thus knows how to do the Waltz or every Irish person drinks may of course be concluded too ignorantly, but in the case of Canada, “Hockey is constantly exported from a private game community with its internal rules and logic – that is, from the ideal of a world of enclosed, intrinsic play – and transformed into a manifestation of Canadianness.” (Blake 2007: 151). Jason Blake also states that “in literature the Canadianness of the game is often more questioned than affirmed” (Blake 2007: 8), which might seem controversial here, but is also a basic topic in hockey literature when it comes to points of departure from what is taken for granted. “As a result ‘of its apparent naturalness, its sheer ubiquity, and its history’ hockey maintains ‘a powerful grip on the imaginations and collective memories of Canadians’ (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 3)” (Blake 2007: 16). Hockey had become a “line of communication” and Blake mentions that “hockey's universality for Canadians is the red thread of non-fictional writing on the game.” (Blake 2007: 33).
The story of hockey in Canada is truly a “People's History”, as the CBC documentary's title anticipates. The stages of its evolution and its success can be directly linked to the land and the people living in it, the claim of the game as a big influence on the national identity in Canada is thus just fair. Hughes-Fuller concludes, “that attempts to preserve some kind of (admittedly reconstructed) past are a necessary part of both establishing a sense of self (identity is intimately connected to memory) and imagining a possible future. In a symbolic sense hockey enables us to do this.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 10).

When in 1883 the Winter Carnival was set in Montreal, sports were the main attraction, and people from all over the country gathered in the city to find out about the newest spectacle: ice hockey. For the first time the game had a stage to be played on and the attention of business men and newspaper reporters. P.D. Ross wrote for his paper: “This morning the carnival of sports opened with the first of the hockey matches on the river. The Quebec and Montreal teams were playing against each other. The game was one of the finest and fastest on earth.” (Episode 1, Hockey: A People's History).

The British freemason and Earl of Derby Sir General Frederick Stanley was one of those men looking for new things to invest in and build traditions from and, for him in 1888, hockey seemed to be just the right thing to pursue. “He's a sports loving man, who likes to hunt, loves race horses and has a passion for fishing” is how he's characterized in the documentary.

He'd never seen a hockey game until that first winter in Canada, but all it took, was one. From that day, hockey took it's residence on the outdoor rink at Rideau Hall. His lordship isn't much of a player himself, but his kids take to it like naturals. His daughter Isabel is in the line up for the government house team that wins the first women's hockey game ever played. Edward and Arthur, Stanley's sons, and James Crayton are on the men's team. The man who brought hockey to Montreal is now a law-clerk to the Senate and still a King player. They call themselves the Rideau Rebels, because it all started as a bit of a lark. They take hockey on the road, giving it the kind of exposure only royalty can attract. Before the family returns to England in 1892, the Stanley boys condole their father into a fifty dollar investment with a London Silversmith, a modest little cup that any team in the dominion can challenge for and none can keep. Hockey has its greatest prize. (Episode 1, Hockey: A People's History)

The Stanley Cup – even today still the greatest prize in hockey, and since 1926 the world's best players in the best league on this planet compete for it in the NHL – was the challenge cup that new formed teams from cities and towns all over the country, such as
Winnipeg, Hamilton, Victoria or Regina, competed for. “The Stanley Cup competition unites the country in a national pursuit. Hockey had become Canada's game” (Episode 1, *Hockey: A People's History*). In the early 20th century the coming of the telegraph and emergence of radio broadcasts brought the games into the people's living rooms and soon the whole nation could follow the matches.

The NHL was formed in 1917 of only four teams of the Eastern regions. By 1925 no other league's team ever managed to win the Stanley Cup. In the course of the early expansion and the foundation of leagues such as the Canadian Amateur Hockey League (CAHL, 1898-1905), the Canadian Hockey Association, (CHA, 1909-1910) and the National Hockey Association (NHA, 1909-1917), the people experienced the rise and fall of many teams from cities throughout Canada, until by the 1942-43 season there were only six teams left in the NHL, only two of which Canadian. The so-called Original Six consisted of the Montreal Canadiens, one of the longest lasting teams in hockey history, the Toronto Maple Leafs, the Boston Bruins, the first American team in the NHL, the New York Rangers, the Chicago Black Hawks and the Detroit Red Wings. Those six teams were competing for the Stanley Cup for 25 years. (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Hockey_League#Early_years](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Hockey_League#Early_years))

On October 1952 the first televised game on TV was broadcast from the Montreal Forum by the CBC. Television establishes the NHL as “the undisputed king of the hill, and turns hockey into a national obsession. ‘Hockey Night in Canada’ is the highest rated show of the 1950s, and remains the longest running show in the history of Canadian TV.” (Episode 5, *Hockey: A People's History*). As with the first radio broadcasts of the game, and the famous voice of broadcaster Foster Hewitt, who enthused his listeners with the famous line “He shoots, he scores!”, “hockey will become a source of inspiration and a breath of life that sustains the heart and spirit of a suffering nation. For a child the sharp bite of a winter day is what dreams are made of. For kids hockey makes a friend of winter” (Episode 4, *Hockey: A People's History*).

This introduction to the evolution of hockey as a Canadian game is of course very brief and panoramic, but a lot of the historical events will eventually come up in the following chapters, especially the industrial factors and capitalist features as well as cultural influences and critical confrontations with the spectacle of and violence in hockey games. Ken Dryden, for instance, depicts the rapid expansion of the NHL in his book *The Game*: “There were 6 teams in 1967, one league, one hundred and twenty
players, six coaches, six managers, six owners. Eight years later, there were thirty-two teams, two leagues, six hundred and forty players, thirty-two coaches, thirty-two managers, thirty-two owners. The quality of play, the style of play, the administration and stability of the game, have been predictably affected.” (Dryden 2005: 238)

Dryden also discusses many elements of the Canadianness of hockey in his work, when he asks these questions concerning the long tradition of the Montreal Canadiens to the younger teams from other places in the world, like the Soviet Union in the seventies, who are excelling at the game: “But what can we do now? This is no public enterprise. Why should we think of hockey as a national possession? Why should we think of the Montreal Canadiens as ours? If we buy a car, we don't think of General Motors as ours. So why is hockey any different? But it does seem different. The Canadiens do seem ours. We cheer them as if they are ours, and boo them the same way.” (Dryden 2005: 264)

Hockey became a national obsession in Canada. The players were heroes and idols to the young people, men and women who could become something, Canadian, on the ice. “We were young enough that whatever we saw was sort of magic, and anything coming over a television screen was magic anyway. It's not just the player on the ice, but it's seeing the lines, it's the logos, it's hearing and connecting to the voice of Foster Hewitt while the game was going on” (Ken Dryden, Episode 5, Hockey: A People's History). Marsha Mildon writes about a woman's first practice with a hockey team in her short story Number 33, “I was overwhelmed with a rush of tenderness for these tiny-helmeted companions of mine, all of us struggling to become real Canadians – hockey players. (...) we felt that each cut of each blade carried us deeper into history, farther into the line of Canadians who yearned and learned to play hockey” (Kennedy 2003: 205). The trivial game is at the same time the cultural emblem of a nation and in literature it is the task to find stylistic means to bridge the gap between that (cf. Blake 2007: 159).

“It turns that formidable icy surface that Europeans think of as nothing but death into a field of play. It brings together English, French, Native traditions, and then it produces a longer tale, a longer story across the generations that begin to play. We were the nation that was created when the game was created.” (Richard Harrison, Episode 10, Hockey: A People's History)
I.2) GREAT TEAMS, GREAT NAMES

“...and then came the great teams, the great names, and the big gates, and when a boy was good at the game no one asked whether he was a new Canadian, a Frenchman or an Anglo Saxon; he just put his nose up, and any boy who is a national hockey star is a pure-bred Canadian and no one can tell him or the world otherwise.” (Kennedy 2003: 27)

From the very first beginnings of writings about hockey in Canada, which were non-fictional game reports and articles for the most part, there was great interest in the characters involved on the ice. It was a rough game from the start, the players were moving fast up and down the field, with sticks in their hands, shooting pucks, and running into each other at great speeds, fiercely and frequently. The games took on greater momentum as the players improved their style and brawls and even fist-fights became part of a game's routine. The teams of the Original Six all had their own traditions of miners, mill and factory workers, tough guys in their rows, characters who would shape the way hockey players would behave and look, creating a disputed lifestyle and reputation that would stick for a long time. In this part of chapter I will introduce a few of the most remarkable stories about teams and players that have gone down in hockey history and tend to reappear in hockey literature.

Eddie Shore is one of those names in hockey history that arises almost naturally in discussions about aggression, stamina and attitude in the game. He was a defender for the Boston Bruins from 1926 to 1940, made himself a reputation as being extraordinarily ruthless and rough, and today is considered one of the representatives of "Old-Time Hockey", along with a few other names. In the movie Slapshot his name comes up when the Hanson brothers are put in jail for violent behaviour on the ice and their manager tells the police “I knew Eddie Shore”, in order to dismiss them in comparison with a real tough guy.

One of the most famous and tragic stories about Shore is his confrontation with Toronto Maple Leafs player Ace Bailey, whose career he ended in Boston on December 12, 1933. Hughes-Fuller suggests that “he was responsible (he insisted, inadvertently) for one of the most serious hockey injuries on record” (Hughes-Fuller, 2002: 136):
That was the night he put Irvine ‘Ace’ Bailey out of hockey. Shore hit Bailey from behind during a stop in play and sent him high in the air and then face first back into the ice. His head was cracked at both temples, blood streaming down his face and neck as he was pulled limp as a pup from the ice. (…) How Bailey ever survived that horrible night in Beantown I’ll never know. (…) Shore leaned over to Bailey and apologized for the hit, at which point he sat up, smiled and said, ‘It’s okay, Eddie. It’s all part of the game.’ The little man got all goofy at death’s door. Something about that I like. (…) As you probably know, Bailey never played another game of professional hockey. Bloody Eddie Shore got five minutes for tripping. (Quarrington 1996: 23)

In another short story by Paul Quarrington, Eddie Shore is characterized as a man of little words, but witty and focused on his job. He was also famous for his denial of anaesthetics when his face had to get stitches or his ear sewed back on (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddie_shore#Playing_career). Obviously, such a player might get confronted with allegations as to whether he received proper education or would spend a lot of time reading or even studying, which this dialogue neatly brings up:

“Jesus, Shore, you don't say much, do you?”
“I don't talk as much as you, that's true. I'm not as frightened as you are.”
Nathan takes umbrage. “I think perhaps you just don't really comprehend what I'm saying. I'm talking about political systems, after all, and you're just an athlete.”
“Huh.”
“I don't suppose you read many books.”
“Is that what you don't suppose?”
“I read all the time. The great works of philosophy. Karl Marx. Hegel.”
(…)
I speak now as much to rest my arm, briefly, as to communicate with Nathan. “I, too, read all the time. But I read books of practical value.”
“Such as?”
“Such as medical books.”
“Oh, studying to be a doctor, Shore?”
“Studying so as to have as little to do with doctors as possible.”
“Oh, yeah.”
“Doctors deal with sick and diseased bodies. I want to learn about one that is strong and healthy.”
(Quarrington 1996: 107f)

Anyway, according to Hughes-Fuller, Shore was “by far the most memorable and most mythologized of hockey anti-heroes” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 134), a professional player and “Black Knight” who won two Stanley Cups with the Boston Bruins, a team that was among the first to strategically set value on a more aggressive, even violent
style in the game. About Shore people remember that “it was his toughness that made him legendary. According to one writer it was Shore's ‘...almost psychopathic urge to excel... and eerily inhuman lack of concern for personal safety.’” (Cruise and Griffith 169)” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 135).

The next person I want to introduce here is Howie Morenz, who was a star centre player for the Montreal Canadiens from 1923 to 1934, and won three Stanley Cups with that team. Peter Gzowski writes about him in his work The Game of Our Lives that “he was the definitive figure of the Roaring Twenties, pleased by the company of the fast and famous. There are pictures of him on visits to Chicago, waving from Al Capone's roadster, though no breath of gambling scandal ever touched his life” (Gzowski 2004: 118). Not only did Morenz inspire and win over the hearts of his fans for the sport, he was also a player who represented the kind of hockey that was just magic and fun. He would bring his ukulele along to the bus or railroad rides and play songs, join in when he saw kids playing a pickup game and even “when he went to nightclubs, as he often did, he would sit at a table for hours, moving salt and pepper shakers around to show anyone who would listen – and dozens would – how the game had gone that night.” (Gzowski 2004: 118).

An interesting anecdote about the teenaged Morenz trying to join the army for World War I comes up in Hockey: A People's History: “16-year old Howie Morenz enlists with the horse guards. His mother stops him last-minute. Ten of the best Hockey players in Ontario are in the battalions. By 1917, every senior officer in the sportsman's battery is dead or wounded” (Episode 3, Hockey: A People's History). His career in the NHL was exceptional, he made it to the Hall of Fame and was named the best hockey player of the first half of the 20th century by the Canadian Press. King Clancy of the Toronto Maple Leafs said, “He was the best. He could stop on a dime and leave you nine cents change.” (Gzowski 2004: 117).

In the fall of 1936, however, in a game against the Chicago Black Hawks, Morenz is checked, crashes awkwardly into the boards and breaks his leg. On March 8th 1937, he dies of complications with that leg. Hughes-Fuller argues about his death that “not only did Howie Morenz die at a relatively early age (thirty-five); he also died under tragic circumstances. Why tragic? Because – and this is of enormous symbolic importance – his injury (a leg broken in five places) would, in the 1930s, have ended Morenz’ ‘life’ as a hockey player. ‘Whatever the physiological causes (and to this day they are a
mystery)... there are still men who believe that what killed him was a broken heart’ (Gzowski 126). In sports mythology, meaningful existence ends when you can no longer play the game.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 111). “The funeral was the greatest outpouring of public grief the nation had ever expressed” (Gzowski 2004: 120), writes Gzowski, Morenz's coffin was accompanied by 200,000 mourning people through the streets of Montreal.

Howie Morenz died when **Maurice Richard**, the next person I feel obliged to mention in this context, was sixteen, and “so the torch was passed.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 115). He played for the Montreal Canadiens from 1942 to 1960, with which he won the Stanley Cup eight times, scoring 544 goals what made him the NHL's all-time leading top scorer when he retired. His wicked slap shot was among the fastest and most destructive of his era, and that's why he was soon universally called “The Rocket”. His shots could shatter arena glass, and generally everything he did, “he did with incomparable flair; he lifted us from our seats and brought our hearts to our mouths.” (Gzowski 2004: 122). Canadian author Roch Carrier writes in his short story *The Hockey Sweater*, about a young boy player and fan of the Montreal Canadiens:

> Through our daydreams it might happen that we would recite a prayer: We would ask God to help us play as well as Maurice Richard. We all wore the same uniform as he, the red white and blue uniform of the Montreal Canadiens, the best hockey team in the world; we all combed our hair in the same style as Maurice Richard, (…). We laced our skates like Maurice Richard, we taped our sticks like Maurice Richard. We cut all his pictures out of the papers. Truly, we knew everything about him. (Beardsley 1997: 15)

What Richard became most famous for though was the time in 1955 when he attacked officials and lines-men in a game and got suspended for that for the rest of the season that year. Hughes-Fuller calls his suspension by then-NHL commissioner Clarence Campbell the “second myth-generating moment” after Morenz's death, which led to his fans storming the streets on March 17th, 1955, a day that came to be remembered as the “Richard Riots” in Montreal (cf. Hughes-Fuller 2002: 116).

An adequate description of the situation in court I found in Quarrington's collection *Original Six*, by author Wayne Johnston, who also wrote the famous hockey novel *The Divine Ryans*, and added a story about the Montreal Canadiens:
Three days later, on March 16, the Rocket appeared in front of Campbell at league headquarters in Montreal. It was a classic case of worlds colliding. I was not there, of course, but the Rocket told me all about it and I have often pictured it. On one side of the desk, I see the son of a Gaspe machinist; himself a machinist by training; a mythically talented hockey player who is living out his lifelong dream of playing for the Montreal Canadiens; an authority-defying, discipline-abhorring temperamental renegade; a Catholic; a francophone. On the other side of the desk in his office on his floor, of the Sun Life building, towering symbol of English-dominated Montreal, I see an Oxford educated lawyer, a Rhodes scholar, a failed hockey player, a one-time referee, a former Nuremberg prosecutor, an authoritarian, a disciplinarian, a Protestant anglophone, the very epitome of urban rectitude and propriety; in short, a Thwart. They are so unalike, so opposite, I cannot imagine them speaking to each other. (Quarrington 1996: 44)

Some believe that francophone Maurice Richard also paved the way towards the Quiet Revolution in the sixties in Quebec, yet he considered himself to be more of an apolitical hockey player. "The Richard riot, as the events of March 1955 came to be called, was, if not the beginning of the Quiet Revolution that was to change Quebec society in the 1960s and 1970s, then at least an important event in its development." (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 116).

When the Rocket died in 2000, more than 110,000 people mourned his passing and his funeral was broadcast live across the whole country.

Another famous character of that era, who wore the same number as Maurice "the Rocket" Richard on his sweater, the famous number 9, was Detroit Red Wings’ "Mr. Hockey" Gordie Howe. He was another superstar in the game and frequently compared to Richard, who respected one another a lot, despite playing rough against each other on the ice. Howe won the Stanley Cup four times in the fifties and played 2,421 NHL games in his career altogether. (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordie_Howe)

Judith Fitzgerald included an analysis of the worst injury at the prime of his career in Quarrington's Original Six:

“We were playing the Maple Leafs in Detroit,” recalls Howe (in Years of Glory). “I was chasing Teeder Kennedy. He was coming down the left side of the rink, to my right, and I was going to run him into the boards. But my first thought was to intercept the pass I'd figured he'd make to Sid Smith, who was coming down the centre of the ice. I glanced back at Smith and put my stick down where I thought the pass might be going. What I didn't know as I turned back toward Kennedy was that, in the instant I'd turned away, he'd let the pass go, and now he was bringing up his stick to protect himself from my hitting him. I was still low, and the blade of his stick caught me in the face - tore my right eyeball, broke my nose and cheekbone. As if this wasn't bad enough, I then smashed into the boards, giving
myself a whale of a concussion. They took me to the hospital in an ambulance, and within minutes I was on the operating table and they were drilling a hole in the side of my skull to relieve the pressure. I was awake through all this; I could hear the drill against the bone. But what was really on my mind was that they'd shaved part of my head. I was at an age when I needed my hair, and I was thinking, ‘Oh, gosh, no, what am I going to look like?’” (Quarrington 1996: 67)

He was one of those players who could land and take punches and earned a lot of respect for their physical strength and rough attitude while also knowing how to play and score. The first encounter of Howe with Richards on the ice ended with “Mr. Hockey” punching “The Rocket” out, when Howe was still a rookie in the NHL. In 1979, almost at the age of fifty, he played in one line together with his 24 years old son Mark and 18 years old newcomer Wayne Gretzky in an all-star game for the World Hockey Association (WHA).

By his retirement his legacy included being ranked third in the List of Top 100 NHL Players of All Time, a bronze statue in the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit and the famous “Gordie Howe hat trick”, consisting “of one goal, one assist and one fight” (cf. Blake 2007: 91).

The teams wouldn't have become that great without those names and the accomplishments of the individuals of those teams, and Ken Baker writes in his autobiographical book They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven, “I miss eccentric hockey characters. The hockey world is filled with a lot of things – brutality, violence, sexism, alcoholism, machismo, danger – but one thing it definitely isn't lacking is a cast of colourful characters. Most hockey players come from small towns, and their lives have always centred on the sport.” (Baker 2004: 18). Another such colourful character is Canadian soldier, business man and sportsman Conn Smythe, who was not an active player, but founded the Toronto Maple Leafs and built Maple Leaf Gardens. Trent Frayne includes a nice anecdote about him in his story The Toronto Maple Leafs in Quarrington's Original Six, trying to remind the old and inform the young about his great achievements:

Accordingly, when Smythe died on a November morning in 1980 at the age of 85, Muldoon wrote a piece about what the Old Man had accomplished; owned a horse, Jammed Lovely, who won the Queen’s Plate; operated a hockey team that won the Stanley Cup seven times; became a prisoner of war and escaped twice; won the Military Cross; went to jail for slugging a Boston hockey fan; survived an airplane crash; stole a railroad locomotive; and caused a national crisis in his
native land. The latter happened when Smythe lay wounded on a hospital ship returning from the Second World War and, risking a court-martial, charged that replacements in France were inadequate – untrained men were being sent into action because the Canadian government, bowing to Quebec’s hatred of conscription, was refusing to send well-trained conscripted men overseas. In the uproar that ensued, the minister of national defence resigned. (Quarrington 1996: 123f)

Even the documentary *Hockey: A People's History* includes this story about him: “Ten of the best Hockey players in Ontario are in the battalions. By 1917, every senior officer in the sportsman's battery is dead or wounded. But not Smythe. He becomes a pilot, gets shot and crashes and is reported as missing in action.” (Episode 3, *Hockey: A People's History*).

King Clancy, defence man in the NHL for Toronto and Ottawa from 1921 to 1937, is alluded to in one short story by Dave Bidini, depicting the state of the game some ninety years ago, and giving an idea of how different a player's job was back then, when even referees lost their temper and goalie's could get suspended.

In 1923, Frank Calder was the president of the four-team NHL. Babe Dye of the Toronto St. Pats won the scoring title and Lester Patrick announced his retirement. In a game between the Montreal Canadiens and the Hamilton Tigers, Bert Corbeau attacked Habs goalie (and ex-teammate) Georges Vézina and broke his nose with a punch. The next time the two teams played – for which Vézina dressed despite his broken nose – the Montreal crowd became unruly and littered the ice with lemons, hitting referee Lou Marsh in the face; Marsh attacked his assailant and landed a few blows. In the Stanley Cup final that year, King Clancy of the Senators played every position, including goal, which he was forced to occupy after netminder Clint Benedict received a penalty. In those days, goalies had to serve the whole two minutes in the box, so Clancy bravely stepped in and didn't allow a goal. (Urstadt 2004: 79)

King Clancy was one of the shortest players of his era, but fast and tough, and was described by TV sportscaster Brian MacFarlane as “one who started a thousand fights and never won one.” (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Clancy). In hockey history, stories about the little guy had an important place as well, concerning players of little size that could make up for their physical lack by athletic excellence on the ice, and players from lower class backgrounds who could become respected in their social community and even make an impressive salary. “Both hockey celebrity Don Cherry and author David Adams Richards use hockey to construct personas that rely on a
notion of the past as a time of power for ‘the little guy.’ The premise here is that populism, while politically incoherent and, in fact, often reactionary, can sometimes constitute a form of resistance” (Hughes-Fuller, 2002: 10).

The following player's story might demonstrate that.

Ottawa is also the scene of another, rather romantic tale about Fred “Cyclone” Taylor, one of the highest paid players of his era, making even more money than the prime minister of that period.

Ottawa is a working class town struggling to become a modern capitol. It's a town divided along class lines but the hockey rink is common ground. Fred Taylor took the offer of the Ottawa Silver Seven, for 500 dollars a season, plus a job in the civil service. It's 1908, Fred Taylor's first game. Earl Grey gives him his sticking name: Cyclone Taylor. Taylor vows to earn 10,000 dollars, before he can ask his love Ms. Cook to marry him. And he knows how to get that money. Senator M.J. O'Brien owns the Renfrew Team. He wants the Stanley Cup. The Rebel League National Hockey Association is founded by his son, who's rejected by the big league. He signs Taylor, for more money than any other athlete in any other sport. The cyclone of commercialism is started. The historic clash between French and English is the big rivalry. (Episode 2, Hockey: A People's History)

Here, the little guy from a working class family made it to the earliest professional player in history, and went on to make a noteworthy career of that.

In these previous paragraphs I introduced those names who stick out in the last century's stories about hockey; two names that you might have missed here are Wayne Gretzky and Bobby Orr. As far as Gretzky is concerned, there is such an abundance of literature on his behalf that I decided to add an extra part in this chapter to deal with that. In the case of Bobby Orr, well, I will leave it at this paragraph and maybe go into more detail in my next work. Summing up, he was named the top defence-man of all time and ranked second after Gretzky and before Howe of the greatest hockey players of all time. He was scouted by the Boston Bruins at age fourteen and revolutionized the defenders role in the game (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobby_orr). About Orr, author Stephen Brunt said, “he skated on ice like there were no boarders, he escaped to the horizon, and somewhere in doing that, he didn't see his own limitations, (…) why not carry the puck, why not just keep going?” (Episode 6, Hockey: A People's History). The Bruins of that era were the first team to use fighting as a game strategy. The coach Harry Sinden employed a team “of hit-men and backstabbers and preached ganging up
as a team philosophy. Unlike the current Bruins, this team won. The 1970 Bruins consisted of one legitimate tough guy in wildman Wayne Cashman, and many others who benefitted from the Bruins ganging up style of fighting.” (Fischler 1999: 230). In Orr's time in the NHL the league was very rough and his story was one of success but also injuries, with opponents purposely going against his weak knees. He was also known to be a very shy guy who didn't like to give interviews or talk much about himself, and up until today he did not authorize a biography on his behalf.

*Howie Morenz and Wayne Gretzky belong to the ranks of magicians and shapeshifters, while Maurice Richard embodies energy and passion.* (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 140f)

I.3) SERIOUS SERIES & EVENTS

*...the feeling seems to have changed to an awareness that the Russians have something going too.* (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 127)

In 1972, the most important and land-marking event in hockey history up to that time (and since then I don't believe any hockey event could claim to have left that sort of legacy and socio-political impact in Canada) took place: the Soviet Union competed with Canada in a series of 8 games for the hockey leadership on the global stage. This competition came to be called the Summit Series, and took place at the peak of the Cold War. The tensions and expectations of the Canadian public were so high that a reporter, Dick Beddoes, even wrote in the run-up to the series, ”Against our boys the Russians will be trounced. Either we will take every single game or I will eat this column shredded at high noon in a bowl of borsch on the front steps of the Russian Embassy.” (Episode 7, *Hockey: A People's History*). Team Canada was expected by their followers across the nation to perform their supremacy and win all of the games and obviously they underestimated their Soviet opponents. “For a hockey fan this is the ultimate confrontation, the bad guys versus the good guys. It just doesn't get any better than this.” (Episode 7, *Hockey: A People's History*).

Of the first 4 games held in Canada the home team only won one and tied another, and the Soviets demonstrated their skills and conviction to be at least equally potent to claim
the hockey throne most impressively, leading to great admiration of their style and power by the spectators and the press. Concurrently, Team Canada started questioning their status and the players got a lot of stick, they were even booed off the ice on their last game in Canada by outraged fans.

The remaining four games were held in Moscow, Russia, where the Canadians had to win at least 3 of the matches to make the series. They lost the first, which generated even more public and personal pressure on the Canadian players, because no more mistakes would be allowed, otherwise the blame would be enormous. Expectations were high, and, presumably, no Canadian, at that time of national pride and significance of that series, liked the thought of passing the hockey crown to the Russians. Canada was hockey's first nation, and the people expected no less than to see their team bring home that title. In a final effort, with the games tied over most of the three periods, the Canadians managed to fulfil those hopes in three rough games by an incredible winning goal in the last 35 seconds of game 8 by Paul Henderson (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summit_Series). Hughes-Fuller describes this also in her work, calling it the “third apocalyptic event and one that has, of late, proven to be especially susceptible to mythologizing (…). The series as a whole has been flattened out, reduced to a kind of teleological backdrop for one singular event: the game – and series – winning goal by Paul Henderson.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 122). Henderson, not the best player but on the ice for every game-winning goal of the last three games and scorer of the most important one, was immediately appointed a Canadian hero, along with Phil Esposito, goalie Ken Dryden and the rest of the team.

Anyway, the Russians' efficiency on the ice was a great surprise for the Canadians. After this tournament, the fact that Canada wasn't unbeatable became realized, and hockey, which was brought to Europe by Canadians during World War I and to Russia via Sweden and Czechoslovakia, was being cultivated in a lot more countries that had the winters and the ice. In the course of the Summit Series 1972 “the feeling seems to have changed to an awareness that the Russians have something going too. Now there seems to be an appreciation for discipline and passing and skating, and at the same time, there is a questioning of the old NHL standards of conditioning and preparedness. Both the Russian and the Canadians have an amazing amount to learn (Dryden FS 185)” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 127). This understanding is also shared by Ken Dryden:
In the 1972 series, we dominated those parts of the game to which our style had moved – the corners, the boards, the fronts of both nets, body play, stick play, faceoffs, intimidation, distance shooting, emotion. In the end, it was enough. But disturbingly, the Soviets had been better in the traditional skills – passing, open ice play, team play, quickness, finishing around the net – skills we had developed, that seemed to us the essence of hockey, but that we had abandoned as incompatible with the modern game. The Soviets had shown us otherwise. It would be unfair, perhaps incorrect, to say that nothing had come of it. Yet little has. What we didn't understand, what we don't understand now, is that body play, stick play, face-offs, intimidation, distance shooting, and the rest have become the fundamentals of our game; that the fundamentals of any game are the basic skills needed to play it, and our present game requires those. (Dryden 2005: 257)

Dryden was the goalie on the ice for four of the games, and actually witnessed the manner of play the two teams conducted. "It was our game played their way, a game exactly suited to their skills. Their smaller bodies were strong enough, tough enough, to stand up to the game, to wrestle for the puck, to get it and move it, if rarely to punish. Their short, choppy, wide-gaited stride was quicker to start up, quicker to change direction, quicker to gain advantage and keep it. And finally they had an opportunist's touch, a model transition game." (Dryden 2005: 260).

Every single minute of the game challenged the understanding of identity of the whole nation of Canada, every Russian goal was a disaster and every Canadian goal relief. In the end, Henderson's winning goal saved a great deal of Canadian self-respect. He "has received the official sanction of the myth-making machine (his image on a postage stamp) in a way, he too is a dubious candidate." (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 128). Dubious, because on the whole, the success should be accredited to the team and not a single player. Anyway, for the people at home he took a load off their minds. "I am so proud to be a Canadian, our character, our will, and our refusal to surrender is something I will remember for the rest of my life. This is our legacy" (Episode 7, Hockey: A People's History). Not many Canadians followed their team to the games in Moscow, but those who did “were fighting, not only for their hockey players, but fighting for their lifestyle, belief and how they live.” (Wayne Gretzky in Episode 7, Hockey: A People's History). The entanglement of a team sport like hockey and a national identity for Ken Dryden is "our fundamental dilemma. A game we treat as ours isn't ours. It is part of our national heritage, and pride, part of us; but we can't control it. Baseball has no similar problem, nor basketball or football, for there is no external challenge to bind a public together, to turn a league and a sport into a national cause. And there is no sport in the United States
that means the same as hockey means to Canada. So what is our future? How can we meet the Soviet challenge, and our challenge? It is to find a coincidence of interests. That point where the interests of the game and of those who own it are the same.” (Dryden 2005: 164).

One serious event that changed the way the game was played in the fifties and that is picked up also in a lot of stories in hockey literature is the story of Jacque Plante, the Montreal Canadiens goaltender. He was the first one to wear a mask on the ice, a decision he made after a puck hit him in the face during a game in Madison Square Garden in 1959.

Over the years pucks had fractured his skull, broken his cheekbones and jaw. On this night he had just taken another 13 stitches in the face that already carried scars of 200 others. He'd had enough. When he came back on the ice he was wearing a mask. He would never play another game without it. The new realities of hockey, with bigger and stronger players, the game is faster and a lot more dangerous. The curved stick is all the rage and in the right hands a devastating weapon. (Episode 6, Hockey: A People's History)

At first, his coach Toe Blake didn't like that at all but had no other goaltender in the line-up, so when the Canadiens continued winning games, he accepted it (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Plante#Mask). Plante's insistence on the necessity of face-protection for goalies was one of many steps towards a new understanding of safety in ice hockey, which was long overdue since slapshots had gotten viciously fast and perilous, and today the goaltender mask is a mandatory part of every goalie's equipment.

I.4) JESUS SAVES, GRETZKY SCORES

“...there is a mythical dimension to almost everything about him.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 132)

Wayne Gretzky is one of those personas in hockey history, if not the persona, who developed that “something special” or “something magical” from his very earliest days on the ice. Born in Brantford, Ontario, in 1961, he was taught to skate at age 2 by his
father Walter who discovered his talent and started working on his skills on a backyard rink at their home where he developed a level of play that his peers at minor hockey couldn't keep up with. So from his first official game onwards he started breaking records and changing the way the game was to be approached. He was an average sized kid, not particularly strong or fast, but he was able to read the game and the momentum of what was happening on the ice, unlike anyone else could. It might be his father's credit who taught him to “skate where the puck is going, not to where it is” (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_gretzky#Early_years](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_gretzky#Early_years)).

Wayne Gretzky is part of the Canadian family album. From the age of 2 every aspect of his life is exposed and scrutinized. When Peter Gzowski interviews him in 1973 he's just 13 years old but already a national celebrity. He's perfect, a family boy, polite, clean cut – classic Canadiana. (Episode 8, *Hockey: A People's History*)

Gzowski's book *The Game of Our Lives*, which I will refer to also in the coming chapters, is about the time when he accompanied the Edmonton Oilers in their 80-81 season as a writer, in which the newly signed Gretzky leads his team to win the Stanley Cup in his second season in the NHL. But even before that, Gretzky had made himself a name as the next big promise in youth hockey, leading and breaking records in scoring points, and by the time he joined the Pee Wee Tournament, the biggest kids hockey game in the world, the people were sure that this was an up and coming Canadian hockey star. “There he was, the greatest offensive force in organised sports. An embryo. The shy one, the kid who was always the youngest and the smallest on the team. In a few years he will find himself in the centre of the greatest hockey renaissance this country has ever seen.” (Episode 7, *Hockey: A People's History*). He was cited saying: “The first game we played I was so nervous, it was sold out, Jean Beliveau came in the locker room and wanted to meet me and wish me luck, and I didn't know what to say.” He “ties Guy Lafleur's Tournament record in his very first game vs. Texas, winning 25 to 0.” (Episode 7, *Hockey: A People's History*). The grace of his game and mysterious mastering of the sport on ice led poet Richard Harrison to say: “He happened to be the man whose intelligence (…) vibrated exactly the speed of a hockey game. That's why he could play it, it was like an instrument. He seems to do nothing he seems to vanish.” (Episode 8, *Hockey: A People's History*)

In his ten seasons with the Edmonton Oilers they won the Stanley Cup four times and
entered the Stanley Cup Finals several more times.

The city exploded when they won the Stanley Cup. Gretzky: “I don't think there's any feeling like it, it was the greatest feeling I ever had in hockey.” Just five years after joining the NHL the Edmonton Oilers establish themselves as a team for the ages. Gretzky anchors one of the most dynamic squads in hockey history: Mark Messier, Paul Coffey, Jari Kurri, all future hall-of-famers, who weave pure magic on the ice. They rule the sports press, films are made about them, their stories fill a dozen books. They are the century's last great dynasty. (Episode 8, *Hockey: A People's History*)

For Canada, he was a national icon, CBC sports caster and Hockey Night in Canada host Ron MacLean describes it like this:

Wayne was the answer to whatever it was that people had in their brain about what deteriorated Canadian skill level. He was the Messiah. This guy came in and showed that he could stick-handle, pass with the best and better than anyone. He's from Canada – we're okay. (Episode 8, *Hockey: A People's History*)

Gretzky was truly one of those characters who overruled everything that was there before him. When in the Fifties and Sixties the kids on the rinks and fans wore Canadiens or Maple Leafs sweaters, in the Eighties, everyone wore the Gretzky sweater with the number 99, a number he picked because the one of his biggest idols, Gordie Howe's number 9, was already taken. He became the symbol of a new style of play and an icon in advertising, with his face on billboards and on the covers on magazines. Everybody in Canada knew him. Author and sports columnist Stephen Grunt describes his appeal to Canadians in his physical averageness and unique capacities:

Gretzky comes along and has an original way of playing a game that's been around forever, does things that you're not supposed to be able do. He's a physically underwhelming guy, he's very ordinary, which is part of the charm, that he's not a superman. He looks like me and you, but he has that great original brain, he's a one-of. (Episode 8, *Hockey: A People's History*)

After ten very successful seasons in Edmonton, his manager Peter Pocklington, decided to trade Gretzky because he was allegedly in need of money, and so one of the biggest trades up to that time took place. Very much to the disappointment of many Canadians, he got traded to the Los Angeles Kings, in sunny California. He had just married an actress, Janet Jones, which incited rumours about his motivation to pick that
team. But for the Kings, with “the Great One” on their team, the ice arena started selling out and hockey started to boost in LA. Although they didn't win the Stanley Cup with their captain, hockey's popularity grew remarkably in the United States and Gretzky’s career was at its peak. Anyway, for Canadians, losing their Gretzky was a tough knock. “Today, many formerly heart-stricken Oilers fans recall the event (the trade to LA) with a kind of numbness, in part I think because Gretzky himself has moved on to ‘life after hockey.’” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 133). But they were also given every reason to be proud since “Gretzky is both the working-class boy who made good and the Canadian who made it onto the huge stage of the American entertainment industry. Indeed, the Gretzky story is one of ‘making it’ in so many ways that even the dream merchants of ‘boys' own’ fiction could scarcely have made it up. In Wayne Gretzky, life surpasses the normal limits of fiction.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 132).

“Watching him from the press box, it reminded me of the old Rudyard Kipling story where a Cobra has a guy cornered and the Cobra says: If you move I strike, and if you don't move I strike. That was Gretzky, you were dead no matter what you did.”
Jack Falla in Episode 8, Hockey: A People's History

I.5) WARRIORS & ARTISTS

“If you were somebody from another planet and you came onto this earth, I think you would be absolutely astonished by hockey, of how fast you could really go, of how you could maneuver, turn, dance and do all kinds of things. (...) What an amazing thing, wow!” Ken Dryden in Episode 10, Hockey: A People’s History

One of the most attractive features of hockey, especially for kids, is the fact that, once you've learned how to skate, which many kids take to very easily, you can go really fast and run over one another in full body protection and it's fun to chase pucks and shoot them over the ice with sticks. I think that's what most players remember as the greatest thing in the world. If you want to make it to a professional level in that sport, you have to exercise hard, start very early and really fall for the game.
That's an element that even a keen analyst of hockey might miss — the sheer
physical pleasure of the basic activity involved. Some other sports require such
intense, painful, concentrated effort (often because the physical movements
involved aren't natural to the human body) that whatever pleasure results comes
mainly from the competition. But hockey is built on a physical action that is a
delight in itself, and you could tell this by watching Jean (Béliveau) that morning
in the TMR Arena. He skates in a way that tells you at once that he just damn well
loves to skate, enjoys it, would do it as much and as often as he could, even after
twenty years of amateur and professional hockey. It was a treat to watch. (Urstadt
2004: 202)

The skates and ice are what makes the game so special and beautiful. The speed you
can attain and the moves you can make are athletic and artistic at the same time. "If
hockey dreams exist mostly in the minds of the players, skates help humans achieve a
certain supernatural movement on the ice. While we may not be able to leave the
ground, on skates we stretch gravitational limitations by moving about as fast as we can
under our own power. In terms of speed, we become just a little bit faster, a little bit
‘better’ than we normally are. There is the illusion of overcoming the ballast of the
body." (Blake 2007: 77). In hockey you find athletes that really know how to make an
art of a game. “Pierre de Coubertin's self-conscious use of the imagery from classical
Greece in his promotion of the modern Olympics in the 1890's – and his belief that the
Olympics should be both an athletic and artistic festival – set the stage for later claims
that amateur sport and art were two sides of the same coin.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 18).

Once you're in it, you have to love the game for what it is, handle the rough play at
times and accept defeat at some point, and to take it as natural features of this game.
Making it to the top in the professional sport of hockey, as in all other professional
sports, players have to dedicate their whole lives to achieve that goal. "Amid the
struggle of daily life, there occur few moments when everything makes sense, when you
can escape your body and travel to a place few people will ever go, a place where hard
work pays off and where good things come to those who wait, a place where dreams
come true.” (Baker 2004: 278).

Unlike many other sports, though, hockey also requires the ability to fight opponents.
The game will simply demand a disposition towards physical toughness from each
player. Occasionally every player will be faced with such a situation, caught up in the
heat of the game, and about to burst into violence to take a stand for their team. This is
where the players' instincts come into play, withdrawn from the athletic and artistic
aspects and confronted with an ancient warrior-like attitude. "Hockey fighting is a
special category of boxing all into itself. It's not like boxing in a ring – like an Ali versus Frazier – and it's not like plain street-fighting. And it certainly isn't like wrestling. It's a unique kind of fighting because of the ice, the skates, the gloves and whatever.” (Fischler 1999: 59). Hockey fighting had been around from the very first day of its public exhibition. It starts with the crowd cheering loudly to every body-check thrown on the ice, that get the players fired up and on edge. "There is absolutely no question in mind that the contemporary players were pussycats compared with those who played in the pre-expansion post World-War II era. Likewise, I am convinced that those who skated in major leagues during the pre-historic era 1910-1920 were the toughest and dirtiest players of all.” (Fischler 1999: 254).

What we can see here in the definition of players is the "traditional tension between the hero as warrior (e.g. Eddie Shore) and the hero as artist (e.g. Wayne Gretzky).” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 141). Gretzky himself explains that “to understand how graceful ballet is, the sport of hockey is like that all the way back to the twenties. You gotta be able to skate, and so we combine this with a competitive side and a physical aspect, but it's ballet on ice.” (Episode 3, Hockey: A People's History). On the ice, Gretzky was and artist, but skating on his side was his sidekick, Dave Semenko, the one who kept Gretzky away from the opposing bad boys, and came in to fight them if necessary. In order to act out his superiority, Gretzky needed to be protected on the ice, by a warrior, if you will. "Historically, popular culture forms and practices have often possessed a subversive edge, characterized by iconoclasm ('no gods and precious few heroes') and a 'levelling' (democratic) impulse. (…) By definition, the hero must be 'Other,' yet we often resent his superiority, and always yearn for ways to close the gap between the exemplary figure and our own flawed selves. We are, at one and the same time, worshipful and critical; the tension between Superman and Everyman persists” ( Hughes-Fuller 2002: 144). And that's what's so fascinating to a hockey fan, that geniuses and goons are involved in the game, and it's a thrilling experience to know how much potential lies in both the artistic and brutal ways of play. Tim Horton, a player for the Toronto Maple Leafs in the Fifties and Sixties and one of the physically strongest of his time, claimed the motto “If you can't beat them in the alley, you can't beat them on the ice” and to Ken Dryden he "had a certain mythology about him, and what we knew as children was that he was an incredibly strong guy. If you went into the corners with him you had no chance. He was the mild manners guy, who off-ice wore horn-rimmed glasses, and we never imagined hockey players wearing glasses. This was Clark Kent,
Superman.” (Episode 6, *Hockey: A People's History*). And so these players became mythologized by their fans, they actually became the real-life heroes you could go and watch play at the hockey rink. That's the way myths are created by “stories that dramatize important themes and tension in a culture” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 8) and in Canada hockey has established itself among the most important themes.

The harsh reality of a fist fight on the ice and the violence in fowl play is a factor very familiar to players, serious injury is not uncommon and a few players had even lost their lives on the ice or in the aftermath of a game related trauma.

This sense of levity and flight before crashing into the boards is an emblem of play's fragility. In common terms, the fun can stop at any time. At the same time, it is an emblem of the distance between dream and reality. (Blake 2007: 79)

“I think we see in hockey and in hockey players a kind of authenticity, we see something kind of pure and essential, honesty, toughness, lack of ego, the idea of a hockey idealism, like Bobby Orr scoring a goal and then skating head down to the face off circle, without even acknowledging that he's done it.” Stephen Brunt in Episode 10, *Hockey: A People's History*

I.6) THE VIRTUAL CREATION TALE

“Are we going to have challenges? Absolutely. We're not gonna win every tournament, these countries are getting better every year, but nobody's going to take away the fact that it's our game, that will never be taken away.” Wayne Gretzky in Episode 10, *Hockey: A People's History*

So by now we have found out that it is a historically proven fact that Canada is the home of hockey and that the game had become one of the main cultural devices that balances the Canadian sense of national identity. Hughes-Fuller suggests in her dissertation that any nation, such as Canada, is a community imagined by its people and the rest of the world. Hockey, as cultural text, helps to achieve this. In Chapter III of her work *The Good Old Game* she mentions that ”one of the ways we imagine community is through ransacking the past for images and narratives that we can put to work in the present.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 53). Since hockey had been created at a similar time as
the nation of Canada, the people took to those two things that had been there from the earliest hour, that marked their community and gave them a common identity. "Sports are not just a distraction from the pain or humdrum of daily life; they are also an imaginative way of becoming someone or something else.” (Blake 2010: 65). This new nation of Canada was an imagined community with the game of hockey serving as its cultural device. It had become an important part of their shared history and identity. 

"Martin Laba writes that hockey, whenever people have claimed it to be naturally and organically linked to the land, 'has served as a virtual creation tale’ for Canadians (Laba 1992, 343)” (Blake 2010: 135). Hockey had the power to unite the people in the stadiums, gave them something to talk about, something to build up on and something to culturally claim as their very own progeny. Anyway, claiming "that a mere game is the key to the future of a nation probably is delusional; but so is all mythic and visionary thinking. (The same charges of delusion are commonly levelled against bilingualism and multiculturalism, two candidates for Canadian uniqueness and staples of unity.)” (Blake 2007: 188). The game unexpectedly united the people and was not construed to guide them into the future by leading intellectuals back in the day. It came up in a blessed time of pioneering spirit, imaginativeness and competitive credo. "The benefit of hockey to Canada is that it provides a panacea or elixir, proves that we exist in cultural terms and that there is a common element in this complicated nation.” (Blake 2007: 188f). Ken Dryden also describes the gift of hockey as not just some kind of sport, but something much more valuable for Canadians. At some point he realized “that 'the game' was not the same thing as hockey or baseball or any other sport. It was something bigger, something that had to do with an intense shared experience of parents and backyards, team-mates and friends, winning and losing, dressing rooms, road trips, fans, dreams, money, and celebrity. ‘The game,’ (...) was a life so long as you live it.”(Dryden 2005: 305).

In fact, hockey became so important to the nation because it filled a void in the necessary mythical features of legends and heroes that other nations turn to and rely upon, especially on the fields of literature and art. "Canada has no Preseren, Goethe, or Dante as a common poetic reference point, and hockey literature – with its common reference point – is a possible means for making up for this lack.” (Blake 2007: 152). Gretzky is to hockey players, what Goethe is to poets and Jesus to Christians. Such personality cult figures are immensely meaningful for devotees, still in Canada nothing's resistant to sarcasm and irony.
Journalist Robert Fulford argues that “Canadians are authorities on mythology” in the way that “residents of the Sahara grow learned in the location of water. It is what we spectacularly lack and what we yearn to possess.” (Blake 2010: 140).

Sports journalism in Canada is so centred around and concerned with hockey that basically any detail of the sport is being reported and commented. In spite of all the fascination about the game, Canadians do not seem to have lost the idea about its origins and, besides glorifying their top players, do not overindulge in myths and tales. "In addition to ridiculing concepts of masculinity through the epithet ‘fruits,’ (Don) Bell lampoons the usual mythical treatment of hockey's importance to Canada by suggesting (cruelly and perhaps correctly) that there is virtually nothing else to keep us busy during the winter. The noble tradition of hockey – which some claim arose from farmers killing time in the off season – is portrayed as the result of a lack.” (Blake 2007: 249)

Along with the growing cultural significance also the interest of capitalist societies grew and reached for their share in the business, as Hughes-Fuller points out. "Despite their origins as 'play,' today 'sports – as a plurality – can be understood best as distinct creations of modernity, fashioned and continually refashioned in the revolutionising conditions of industrial capitalist societies’” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 18). As natural as culture and capitalism go together, the inter-mediation and promotion of the game are subject to the similar conditions and rules. "...Gruneau and Whitson remind us that ‘over the past thirty years or so, and especially during the 1980s, the dominant form of storytelling in and around the game seems to have become increasingly dominated by the language and the imperatives of marketing’ (137).” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 134). Subsequently, the masters of capitalism and marketing took over the lead of the league.

"Stories and characters from NHL games emerged as the stuff of Canadian folklore. (...) Hockey Night in Canada began to create for hockey, a deeply rooted, almost iconic place in Canadian culture, regardless of the fact that the NHL had become a continental league dominated by U.S. Money” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 183).

When Hockey ventured overseas in 1920 with the Winnipeg Falcons, hockey started to spread and grow popular in the wintry regions of North and East Europe and the nations employed in the game grew stronger and better on the ice every year. What the Canadians had created was now internationally exported and adopted a momentum of its own, culturally and economically. But the most annoying fact for Canadians, which again I am presuming, was the fact that the United States had the financial means to buy
whatever was for sale, and had taken over the league and most of the players and teams. "Canada's worries about hockey are twofold: the rest of the world has become too good at our game, and the game is being sold down the river.” (Blake 2010: 155).

*The hockey tale may be 'ours,' but hockey fiction consistently shows that it is neither glorious nor benign.* (Blake 2010: 143)

I.7) THE FASTEST GAME ON EARTH

*...the stroke of genius is the change that makes hockey the fastest game on earth: the forward pass.*” Episode 2, Hockey: A People's History

If any superlative was to be accounted to hockey to give it that one-of-a-kind appeal it's in this chapter's headline. It is the speed you can attain in skates on the ice and the quick passing that accelerates the action that even the trained eye struggles to follow, and that is, to the fan, the ultimate satisfaction, and to the innocent lookers-on, a trying challenge.

Hockey had the violence too, and you could slam into someone at twice the speed possible to generate on a football field. And then, of course, there was the particular pleasure of hockey: that one moved across a completely different medium – ice – that allowed great speeds, quick stops in a spray of shavings, the ability to move backward as fast as forward, the maneuverability of a dragonfly. (George Plimton *Open Net*, Kennedy 2003: 173)

Many writers of literature on hockey stress the quickness of the sport and the seemingly uncontrolled action of skating after a puck and crashing into boards. The speed the players can attain on the ice can offset the limitations of the field and reduce it "to the size of a basketball court. Things that are impossible to do on your feet – go twenty miles an hour, glide, turn on a dime – become possible. The body and mind are acutely aware of physical detail and, at the same time, are separated from the earth.” (Urstadt 2004: 152).

But there is a routine in all of what's going on, one that had been trained and developed by the individual players on the teams.
Hockey is a raucous Canadian prairie attraction moved indoors, and it looks chaotic and formless, but it isn't. It's just fast – the fastest team sport in the world. If it were possible to freeze players in the midst of a game and trace their paths, their trails would indicate a plan as plainly as if they were steps on a ballroom dance floor. There are plans of attack and there are plans of defense. (Urstadt 2004: 25f).

The most important rule modulation that allowed the game to really lift off in terms of speed was the forward pass. Earlier, the players were only allowed to move forward with the puck on their stick and pass it backwards, similar to an “onside” game system such as in rugby, but after 1930 the regulation changed in order to accelerate the game and make it more attractive, resulting in the legal forward pass that turned it into an “offside” game, putting team play before individual effort (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_hockey#Game).

Since then, for nearly fifty years, the story of hockey has been speed. It was the forward pass that gave speed the chance; later it was the centre red line, better ice conditions, better equipment, better training and conditioning of players, and shorter shifts that accelerated its impact. But it was speed unaccommodated, never allowed to work, because the playing patterns, skills, and attitudes of our game were never changed to make it work. As a result, the major developments in our hockey-forechecking, the dump and chase, escalating violence, the slap shot, tactical intimidation, the adrenaline attitude of the game – are all logical implications in a pyramid of implications with unharnessed, undirected speed as their root. (Dryden 2005: 248)

From the professional level of play, to the amateur side, right down to people playing hockey for fun on ponds or kids trying out their first steps on skates in full gear at team tryouts, it is the fun of a speedy game that's ever so exciting. “Winning the game was not the only thing that counted; (...) the sheer joy of the contest of skills was important. A quick turn around an opposing player, skating, turning, stick-handling; all the skills that made hockey the fastest, toughest and most elegant game ever devised by man, were their delight. They played the game not only with grace and power and skill, but with their souls as well.” (Episode 4, Hockey: A People's History). And if you are a spectator of a professional match, fan or not, "everyone knows that some of the loudest moments in an NHL arena come when big bodychecks are thrown.” (Fischler 1999: 76). Once again, Ken Dryden finds the right words to describe the fascination of witnessing and participating in a hockey match:
I think the golden era is always the era when you were a kid. Players are skating 100 miles an hour, the puck is being shot at 1000 miles an hour, everybody is 10 feet tall, and so you get older, you grow up, and your memory frozen in time are all those images and impressions from when you were a kid. (Episode 6, *Hockey: A People's History*)

And then, of course, there was the particular pleasure of hockey: that one moved across a completely different medium – ice. (Kennedy 2003: 173)

1.8) LOSING IS A CRIME

“History is such an important part in what makes a rivalry; the cities have had history with each other, the teams have had history with each other and that goes back for a lot of years.” Wayne Gretzky in Episode 6, *Hockey: A People's History*

Similarly to the Summit Series of 1972 mentioned in point three in this chapter, in many cases of rival games and competitions the underlying agenda of the teams and individuals on the ice is that losing, generally, was a crime. Whether to lose the game as a whole, or lose the will to win, even lose the fist-fight taken for your team, the players' attitude and conviction is what stands out in an authentic game. That's how the players feel and what the fans and spectators expect. That's what the teams sell and the fans and spectators buy. It's in that tension between dream and reality, game and work, fun and job, and the quickness of their alteration.

In his autobiographical story *They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven* Ken Baker illuminates an associate player's career and “fate” in a rather tragic way:

Fun! Hockey should be all about fun, he thought. *When it stops being fun, that's when I'll quit.* Now he's in Bakersfield, and the fans are booing him every other night, and his body aches, and his team is losing, and his little girls just wanna go home. It's not fun. (Baker 2004: 222)

It's the reality of the entertainment business that one could easily get caught up in as a professional player, in hockey as in any other professional sport, and that's where the fun can quickly stop. About himself Baker writes, “someone asked me the other day if I was stressed out and I said no. Why? Because I'm involved with a game. Yeah, it is my livelihood, and it is a business, and this is our job, and sometimes things get to you and
you blow up, but we are still playing a game. There are a lot more important things happening out in the real world, more things at stake, but this is our jobs and it is a game. You can't lose that perspective. (...)” (Baker 2004: 227).

In literature, the handling of such a mentality as “losing is a crime” is also essential to the spectators'/readers' interest, because “whether it is drama or sport, some sort of identification is required for a release of emotions to take place. If we do not care about the event or people involved, no identification can take place, and any emotional upheaval and catharsis is nipped in the bud. (...) ...hockey violence, even if gazed at from the gallery, goes beyond the ice to encourage further violence.” (Blake 2007: 111).

That's also what I understand in the lines of Jeff Greenfield's short story Hockey Fan Antics, or... Why the Rangers Will Never Finish on Top or Win the Cup where he writes:

As everyone remembers, Aristotle taught that tragedy is a catharsis of emotion through pity and terror; an exercise in which we learn something of life by watching heroic mortals struggle in a web spun by Higher Forces. We do not watch Oedipus Rex or Hamlet to find out whether Rex will reign happily ever after, or because we hope Hamlet and Ophelia will settle down at Elsinore. We go to be moved by the spectacle of man challenging his inexorable fate. For the followers of the New York Rangers, this winter remarks the resumption of one of the longest-running tragedies in history. (Urstadt 2003: 104)

In a rather critical tone, Jason Blake supposes that "hockey literature is parasitical in the sense that hockey culture has already provided a space where grown men can beat each other up to the delight of docile spectators. There is no need for authors to create that unusual world, and the intellectual justification for otherwise aberrant behaviour is pre-existing.” (Blake 2007: 105). The assertion that the violence that has established itself as a natural part of a hockey game would encourage violence outside of the hockey arena is not one that I share, because it is a feature of a hockey game, and not of a street fight; whatever the situation, I don't think people are likely to imitate a hockey fight in a bar or on the street from being encouraged by what they experienced in the action on the stadium's ice – but that's a different topic and not one of my objections in this thesis. Anyway, it is very correct to question the part violence plays in hockey games. “The same sort of violence that is tacitly or openly applauded in real hockey, is represented as a corruption of the game in fiction. If this does not mean that hockey is the ‘wrong game’ for Canada, it does show that much of the hockey we play and watch is hardly an ideal form of the game.” (Blake 2007: 148). And what I think Gretzky is suggesting in
this part's introductory quote is a rivalry that is rooted in this tradition of a long running game between cities that have history with each other, and that's where the fascination for its fans comes from. The fans can identify with the characters on the ice and be divided and united at the same time. Hockey brings the people together, with different teams to root for, but with similar emotions and attitudes on site. "Playing primarily in the 1970s, Esposito was a living symbol of a changing Canada, of a time when the options available to Canadians were no longer anglicisation or cultural ghettoisation. Although Canada has always been a nation of immigrants, Bidini claims that public cultural life in Canada was 'all British and Irish' until the flashy Esposito entered Canadians' homes and consciousness.” (Blake 2010: 153). Hockey provides heroes and characters that carry with them the pride of a nation and symbolize the will and power to win as if losing was a crime. That is a spirit, and it's hockey that this spirit belongs to. It started in Canada and it took it by storm. It entered their culture, literature, language, politics and almost every other aspect of their national partitions, and for the better, I believe. And as Hughes-Fuller states, I take her quote to close in on this chapter:

Whatever the future may hold in store for hockey, I am reasonably certain that we will continue to look to the past for our measures of excellence. In the future, however, our heroes will include Hayley Wickenheiser and Cassie Campbell as well as Howie Morenz, Gordie Howe, Rocket Richard, and the first truly global (in both the good and bad sense) hockey star, Wayne Gretzky. (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 230)

_In a country that – outside of Quebec – cannot clearly differentiate itself linguistically from the United States, hockey references often function like passages in dialect._ (Blake 2010: 215)
II.1) MAKING IT

“It's the human struggle at the most primal level. There's someone in your way trying to stop you from literally achieving your goal, the net. That sense of determination to overcome those who stand in your way, that became my template in life.” Giselle Lavalley in Episode 8, Hockey: A People's History

In this second chapter of my thesis I want to present a domain in hockey literature dealing with cash or rather the capitalisation of the game and the many careers that have come to earn salaries in the million dollar region and the many discrepancies and frequent conflicts they have brought and how they are reflected in the hockey literature. The first part here will deal with the dreams of kids, the realities of players and the position of philosophers towards that one achievement: making it.

Hockey is a game very much beloved of its players and fans, and to kids in Canada, it's a way of growing up. The heroes of their teams are hanging on posters in their rooms, their sweaters sport their names and they buy whatever sells in their name. That's where commercialism comes in. Hockey is a big time business in Canada, as well as in most other hockey countries, and “the ‘professional player’ is a seemingly paradoxical term because there is always the suspicion that wherever cheques are issued the game is played primarily for remuneration.” (Blake 2007: 48). Every professional player started playing the game very early, in order to become a master on the ice. You start at four, five or six years old. By the time you reach puberty, you'll have to decide whether you're going to try and make it or leave it be and enjoy other things. There's either this or that.

As the childhood dream of being paid to play a game one enjoys is realised, however, the balance of work and play often tilts towards hockey becoming just a job with harping bosses, uncomfortable timetables and the prostitution of the self for a few, or millions of, dollars. In literary representations professional hockey is far from any ideal of play or utopian premonitions. (Blake 2007: 56)
The number of children taking to hockey annually in Canada is gigantic. Standing out from that huge sea of young hockey aspirants, for Wayne Gretzky for instance, was an unparalleled instance:

His physical gifts, in any case, are not enough to account for Gretzky's supremacy. Each year in Canada alone, some hundred thousand boys totter out on the ice for their first game of organised hockey. By the time they reach puberty, about half of them will have dropped out. Some of those who leave will have done so for reasons that have little to do with ability: girls, school, their parents' unwillingness to continue the Saturday dawn drive to the rink, or simply because they don't like playing hockey. (Gzowski 2004: 176)

There aren't many ways to make it to the big leagues. In the case of Gretzky, there was his Dad who encouraged him to play. Walter Gretzky himself had played junior hockey but could not pursue a professional career because of chicken pox, so he did exercises with his son in the home made backyard rink, gave him good advice and drove him to the training regularly (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_Gretzky#Early_years).

"Hockey runs in the family, and, like other family traditions such as working the family farm, continuing the legal profession, or taking over the family shop, hockey can be a tacit imperative.” (Blake 2010: 181). Others need the help of agents to take their side and try to manage what is to become a career in the big leagues. As soon as there is money involved, or rather the providence of remuneration, the steps taken towards making it can be drastic. "Agents are revered as magical characters who, Rumpelstiltskin-like, can 'turn' effort into gold with a magic word. More discomforting than agent-idolatry is the statement that parents regard their hockey-playing child as an object that will yield financial returns – along with the insinuation that they are willing to send their child into bondage for the sake of potential future money.” (Blake 2007: 198).

I have picked out an example for each of the kids', players' and philosophers' view towards careers in hockey that I find very illustrative and suggestive. The first one by Rudy Thauberger is taken from Doug Beardsley's collection of hockey fiction Our Game. It is a short story about a family whose son becomes a hockey goalie.

You remember him in the backyard, six years old, standing in a ragged net wearing a parka and a baseball glove, holding an ordinary hockey stick, sawed off at the top. The puck is a tennis ball. The ice is cement. He falls down every time you shoot, ignoring the ball, trying to look like the goalies on TV. You score, even
when you don’t want to. He’s too busy play-acting. He smiles, laughs, shouts. You buy him a mask. He paints it. Yellow and black. Blue and white. Red and blue. It changes every months, as his heroes change. You make him a blocker out of cardboard and leg pads out of foam rubber. His mother makes him a chest protector. You play in the back yard, every evening, taking shot after shot, all winter. (Beardsley 1997: 215)

This retrospective in the story tries to point out the origins of a boy who became a man on the ice, a boy of the family who will be lost to the game, who will suffer to become like his heroes, to ‘make it’. Everything he worked on from his childhood days was dedicated to that goal - becoming a goalie. The story ends like this:

Everyone adores him, adores his skill. But when you see his stiff, swollen hands, when he walks slowly into the kitchen in the mornings, every movement agony, you want to ask him why. Why does he do it? Why does he go on? But you don’t ask. Because you think you know the answer. You imagine him, looking at you and saying quietly, “What choice do I have? What else have I ever wanted to do?” (Beardsley 1997: 216f)

Also in Doug Beardsley's collection I found the next extract that I want to quote here, and will quote again in the next chapters, because it is one of my favourite short-stories on hockey, Teeth by Fred Stenson.

A speedy jaunt in my Porsche and I am home to my luxurious two-bedroom condo by the river. The kitchen faucet exudes a thin stream of boiling-hot water which in former times was a simple drip. The dirty socks, the Kentucky Fried Chicken bones, the cones of cigar ash on the carpet, the beer bottles lying on their sides… I had a cleaning lady once. She clucked her tongue and said how disgusting. A monkey wouldn’t live like this and you a big-shot hockey player too. (Beardsley 1997: 134f)

This is an example of a hockey player who made it to the pro athletes in the business. He's detached and disillusioned by his reality of living a kid's dream but makes no pretension as to whether his status was justified:

...some people play this game for fun. I personally can't imagine it and suspect this of being something cooked up by the owners and the press. I do have a foggy recollection of thirteen-year-old kids flailing away on corner lots in the freezing cold for reasons other than money or coercion, but I also know that I was never one of them. (Beardsley 1997: 130)
The biggest pride he takes is in his perfectly undamaged teeth that are so rarely seen among hockey players. Until that one night:

...frustrated to total insanity by the faraway, seraphic smile on my face, he lowers his head and drives the top of his helmet into my mouth. This, I feel. (…) Standing at centre ice. I look down at the red dot and it is getting redder by the second, dyed by a stream from my mouth. A quick lick tells me that one of my two perfect, well-flossed and brushed front teeth is no longer occupying its traditional place in my healthy gum. (Beardsley 1997: 138)

That experience makes him thoughtful:

Somehow, everytime I lick up under my swollen lip, I am reminded of this near future and the many sources from which money can come. Money, unlike teeth, can be replenished. A missing tooth is a hole in the head for life. (Beardsley 1997: 139)

As the third and final extract for making it I want to include Dave Bidini's short story called Steaua Wears a Black Hat which I found in Bryant Urstadt's The Greatest Hockey Stories Ever Told. It was originally part of Bidini's best seller Tropic of Hockey, a collection of his experiences from travelling through Eastern Europe and Northern China, looking for traces of hockey. The following lines are about what he finds somewhere in Romania that triggers some philosophical thinking in him:

I looked closer, and there he was, a teenager, smaller than the rest, looking in: Jagr. There was no Navratilovian mullet to give him away, no earring. But there were his trademark flushed cheeks, his wonky eye, his bubble helmet. Jagr. I recognised a few others too, but couldn't place their names (Jiri Slegr and Jaroslav Modry were on the team, as well). It was 1987, before the fall of Communism, and Jagr was all of fifteen. He was not yet a glimmer in a scout's eye, three years away from being drafted fifth overall by the Penguins of Pittsburgh, where he would ask for, and be given, the number 68, to remember that year that Soviet tanks crossed the Czech border and seized power. He had not yet grown to tower above the rest of the players, nor were his shoulders as big as they would be when he ascended to the pros. In 1987, his life was spent in tournaments like these, games in small, hockey-crazed towns across Eastern Europe, twenty-four hours from Prague by train. He had rolled through the forest, eaten salted meat and bread, withdrawn from the rest of the world, yet looking out, as I had, at the endless trees and dark woods and mountains, wondering what kind of hockey lay ahead, and against whom he'd be playing. At fifteen, he was within reach of the skills that would make him one of the most elegant scorers of his time, eleven years removed from waving his Olympic gold medal from the stage in Prague's Old Town Square. When Jagr took to the ice in Vakar Lajos rink in 1987, could he have imagined that his life would work out the way it did? (Urstadt 2004: 81f)
Jaromir Jagr is another prominent example of a boy who took to hockey and made it to a super star in the biggest league in the world. He learned to play hockey in Europe, and made it onto the American ice. In 2011, he joined the Czech national team at age thirty-nine, defending the title of world champion, ending up with the bronze medal. A career inimitable, but any European hockey kid's dream.

“Winning and the idea that you'll be set for life with a great amount of money are the two things that have corrupted the game horribly.” Ron McLean in Episode 10, *Hockey: A People’s History*.

II.2) A NATIONAL DISASTER

*In any language Gretzky spells “Money”*. Episode 8, *Hockey: A People’s History*

Not since Maurice Richard or any other hockey super star had a single player gotten so much attention and was able to fascinate people for the game of hockey like Wayne Gretzky. Even in Europe everybody knew who he was and what he represented. He was a kid from Edmonton, Canada, who was given the heavenly gift of being the best player on this planet and wouldn't ever let anybody down who believed in him. Stadiums were filled and sold-out wherever he entered the ice, playing for the Edmonton Oilers of Canada. The NHL had long been spreading over all of North America, many Canadian teams went broke and had to be sold and found a new home in the United States.

In his book *The Game of Our Lives* Peter Gzowski put down an interesting conversation between him an Gretzky, when he was still with the Oilers:

“You're having a good time, aren't you?”
“Jeez.” he laughed. “I must be about the luckiest guy in the world. Can you imagine getting paid as much as I do for playing hockey? I've only had one real job in my life, you know. One summer I had to haul myself out of bed at six-thirty and go shovel gravel off a truck for the highway department. I hated it. Later on, when I didn't want to practice hockey very hard, my dad would say, ‘Do you want to get up every morning at six-thirty?’ and I'd sure go and practice. You hear guys complain about the schedule and that. But for me this is just the perfect life. I'm having, well, you know, I just can't think of anything better than this.”
“Are you ever embarrassed by the amount of money you are making?”
“No. Why should I be? There are guys making a lot more, and I'm supposed to be...
the biggest draw in hockey. It must be worth it for somebody.”
(Gzowski 2004: 169)

Peter Pocklington signed Gretzky to the Edmonton Oilers in 1979 and made quite a deal out of that. The Oilers won the Stanley Cup 4 times with Gretzky and he broke record after record. Out of economical reasons Pocklington was looking for ways to trade him in 1988. Only two hours after he won the Stanley Cup with the Oilers for the fourth time Gretzky was told about the plans of his trade. Pocklington managed to sell him to the Los Angeles Kings in Southern California. Gretzky married his wife and actress Janet Jones in LA before in August of that year the public was informed about the trade.

About that, Marsha Mildon writes in her short story Number 33:

It was a national disaster. In fact, it was the first disaster of free trade. In the name of free enterprise, we sold away a national treasure in order – so we were told – to improve American interest in our game. I was stunned; I quit my job and left town within the week. Who could face life in Edmonton without the Great One? The Welcome to Edmonton, City of Champions sign was not removed from the highway, but that was mere bravado. Edmonton’s reign as the premiere city in the nation was over. (Beardsley 1997: 205)

In fact, Gretzky left Canada because he was sold and it was a trade, but it also gave an unprecedented boost to the sport of hockey in LA, and what boosts in LA, boosts in the whole of the United States. “In Los Angeles, most hockey players play the roller skating version on cement rinks and beach-side parking lots. Ice hockey didn't come into vogue until the late 1980s, when the great Wayne Gretzky joined the Kings and inspired hordes of kids to come into the cold.” (Baker 2004: 14). Stadium attendance and fan interest in the Kings increased remarkably and more hockey teams were founded in the sun-belt. Hockey had become a new attraction for California residents who had never experienced a frozen lake or river.

When Gretzky was sold to the Los Angeles Kings by Peter Pocklington, obviously the initial reaction to it was: there goes our birthright, there goes our genius from Bradford Ontario, from a great hockey town being sold to Hollywood. What a terrible thing. Gretzky going to Los Angeles created the illusion that (...) you could take hockey anywhere and sell it. That it didn't have to have any roots, that you could sell it to people who had never seen ice, who had never played a game, who had no connection and no idea who Foster Hewitt was. (Stephen Brunt in Episode 8, Hockey: A People's History)
For Canadians, watching Gretzky leave and take his talent to the United States was a pretty bad blow, since most Canadian teams struggled to pull through and they felt committed to US money, but there was even “a further irony in the fear of losing our national symbol to the United States. On the one hand, it is merely a continuation of a trend that started with the advent of professional hockey – though now more than eighty percent of NHL teams are based in the United States; on the other, in geographical and representational terms it implies a reverse-global warming as the American South takes over the icy game.” (Blake 2007: 177).

Who had the money, had the players and the teams, and the filled arenas that guaranteed revenue. Who needed money, sold the players and eventually sold the team. “I think we like to pretend that it was a Canadian controlled game but it's been run by Americans forever and when the teams left Canada for the United States it was just a confirmation – that's where the money was. If you raise that border, you'll be drawn magnetically to the money, to the market place. And those teams were magnetically drawn out of Canada.” (Stephen Brunt in Episode 9, Hockey: A People's History). The mass spectacular took over the local wonder-team and as a matter of fact ”now it is more common to watch paid imported athletes 'serve' the big city for whose team they play, and even cities as large and as traditionally supportive of hockey as Winnipeg and Quebec City are thought to be too small and too economically insignificant” (Blake 2010: 58) for this kind of competitive hockey. Today, there is no way for gifted players to not enter the business in order to maintain a successful career.

*Since his trade, Gretzky has been evoked in hockey literature; the player has become a symbol or a living metaphor.* (Blake 2010: 161)

II.3) GOONS & GROUPIES

*As a hockey player, I live a special existence in Montreal.* (Dryden 2005: 28)

This part may have my favourite headline of all but they are also topics in hockey literature: tough guys and the female fans. But by groupies, here, I'm rather talking about the female hockey fan, that this little passage from Marsha Mildon's short story made me aware of:
But don’t mistake me. I wasn’t just another Gretzky groupie; I was an expert. I consumed everything I could find about hockey. I read Hockey News; I bought Gretzky hockey cards; I read every book there was to read about hockey. (…) I listened to Peter Gzowski rhapsodise about the Canadian identity and reminisce about missing a goal on a perfect pass from Gretzky while he scrimmaged past the Oilers. Imagine – one of us mere mortals had received a pass from Gretzky. (…) I knew everything about hockey. (Kennedy 2003: 202)

So, despite the sweet alliteration, I want to discuss goons here in the first place. The term ‘goon’ for a ‘rowdy’, or plainly for an aggressive badly behaving male with little brains, had entered international hockey slang for those tough guys among the ranks of hockey teams who are responsible for most of the violence on the ice. They are the ones checking, slamming, fighting during the game, taking stands of toughness and being loved and hated for that. Naturally, there's always an implied question as to whether education and intelligence played a role in hockey at all. George Plimpton, for instance, remembers that “when I started, the college graduates made up about two percent of the players in the NHL. Now it’s changed… up to twenty percent are college grads. The players now know how to make friends outside of hockey. Back then it was much more clannish. We had the kids off the farms, not even high school education, and it took them a lot of time before they got worldly wise. But they were always tough, and they still are…” (Kennedy 2003: 172). But yet, the increasing percentage of academics can not outweigh the majority of brutes on the teams. Ken Baker accentuates that in this extract of his book They Don’t Play Hockey in Heaven:

“What's your book gonna be about?”
These are professional hockey players. Brutes. They get paid to make other people hurt. Except for Jamie, whom I can't even pick out of this mono-sartorial crowd of giant white men in black helmets, these aren't the kind of baby-stroller-pushing yuppies with whom I interact on a daily basis back at home. The last thing I'm going to say is Revenge of the Nerds truth – Uh, well, guys, I had a dream a year ago, that I was, uh, playing hockey again, and, uh, now I want to write about ma comeback about playing with the Condors – lest they laugh me out of the arena and kick my pansy ass back to San Francisco. So I say the first I'm-one-of-the-guys thing that pops into my head.
“Sex and hockey,” I say, desperate to fit in. (Baker 2004: 45)

There's not much about sex and hockey that I actually found during my research. It is rather more about the quest than actual love, about players looking for the promised prey:
But where are these women? This is the greatest mystery of my life. Maybe they are in a bed with my toothless team-mates but I doubt it. I have a feeling that they are already married to lawyers and carpenters and accountants and that they limit their goings-on with pro athletes to a sly lusting after our brutishness in front of the colour TV Saturday night. Oh, please. Just one of you. Come to me! (Beardsley 1997: 135)

What Fred Stenson points out here is that the professional player is no more than a puppet in the hockey show and just as disillusioned by his living realities and the ‘popular myth’ that there were “a million women in this land who are dying to take care of (...) a national sporting hero” as the rest of his colleague actors from the “colour TV Saturday night”. He might still have “all thirty-two” of his “perfect, mint-flavoured teeth” which might as well be a “rarity if not a total exception among hockey players” but his body is bruised, worn and aching, so “who in their right mind would be interested in this body” (Beardsley 1997: 135).

So much for the groupie-aspect, I realise there remains plenty to be discussed that I can not go into detail here. There's a good amount of material to be found on these ‘goons' though. In a more technical term, they are called ‘enforcers’, which I will go into detail about in chapter IV, part 6). They are fighters, brutal ones. Mean and cruel on the ice, and mostly calm and ordinary off the ice. Stan Fischler published a book with interviews of the most notorious hockey goons called Ultimate Bad Boys, in which I found the next quote of an interview with Matt Johnson:

On the one hand fights are part of the game but, on the other hand, I never really want to see a guy get hurt. I want my opposite to be able to play and earn his check but the bottom line still is that hockey is a physical game. Every year players are getting hurt. It happens. Injuries are not something I relish seeing but they do happen. Me, I've been fortunate. I haven't suffered any major injuries from fighting, just cuts and bruises and maybe a banged-up knuckle or two. What am I like away from the rink? Well, I don't go around hitting people. I ride my Harley and have a good time. (Fischler 1999: 60)

As far as national reputations about Canada being a country full of hockey players and, therefore, hockey goons is concerned, the part where hockey mixes in with the national identity of a country rather roots out of love for the sport, is authentic and original without emphasising the violence in the first place. Hockey was not established but flourished and became part of the culture with little compromises and, as Hughes-Fuller again correctly states, "to suggest that our love of hockey is nothing more than
the result of clever social engineering on the part of elitist nationalists is surely to suggest that the fans in question really are ‘cultural dopes’, an explanation which is now generally considered to be theoretically impoverished.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 43).

Another interesting thing I found looking for stories about goons and such is the story about a Hungarian hockey player named 'Whiskey' that Dave Bidini wrote about in his short story *Steaua Wears a Black Hat*:

There was only one figure from Romanian hockey I didn't meet, although I spent much of the trip waiting for him to appear. His nickname was Whiskey. The dashing Robin Hood of Romanian hockey, Whiskey was a former player from Hungary turned bank robber. I anticipated a covert meeting with him (...) but he never appeared. He was considered public enemy number one by the Hungarian authorities, even though, (...) “He only steals from banks, never the people. He is also very polite and very gentle. All the people from Ciuc are behind him, especially the fans because he was a player, too. He is very clever, and his actions hurt no one.” Whiskey was linked to twenty-seven robberies, in which, along with (Gabi Orban), a fellow Hungarian player, he'd stolen 140 million Hungarian forinths. He was the most wanted man in Hungary, a reputation that no doubt increased his popularity among hockey fans of Szekely land, and a Barilkoesque legend had developed around it. (Urstadt 2004: 84f)

The man's real name was Attila Ambrus and he had really become a legend in his country, akin to Bill Barilko, a Canadian hockey player who went missing together with his dentist and was found eleven years later on their plane's crash site. Ambrus' official caption goes like this:

*While he later carried a gun, Ambrus never harmed anyone in his robberies, and was famous for his outlandish disguises, for presenting female tellers with flowers prior to robberies, and for sending the police bottles of wine. Immensely popular at the time of his arrest on January 15, 1999, a flag honoring the "Whiskey Robber" was flown at the UTE stadium for years afterwards.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attila_Ambrus
II.4) BLOOD ON THE ICE

Truckers get haemorrhoids, mail men get dog bites, and hockey players get scar-
faces. I have the face of a writer. (Baker 2004: 94)

Due to another legend, the first ever hockey game held at the Victoria Skating Rink in
Montreal 1875, ended in a brawl with the local figure skaters who claimed the ice –
ending in a fist fight and a couple broken noses. So from day one after the birth of ice
hockey, fighting became a part of it. Up to this day, fist fights and rough play is frequent
in games, as just recently, the match between Canada and Russia during the world
championships of 2011 in Bratislava, Slovakia, demonstrated. The Canadian and
Russian players had to get stitches on the bench and continued playing with blood stains
on their sweaters, they got hit in the face by pucks and checked face-first into the
boards. It was really like in Fred Stenson's story:

I look down at the red dot and it is getting redder by the second, dyed by a stream
from my mouth. A quick lick tells me that one of my two perfect, well-flossed and
brushed front teeth is no longer occupying its traditional place in my healthy gum.
I don't remember swallowing it. Slowly, I skate around the ice looking. It's got to
be here somewhere. Teeth don't just vanish. (Beardsley 1997: 138)

That sort of violence and the subsequent injuries are not necessarily promoted, but
nevertheless expected and in no way surprising to both player or spectator. It had long
become a natural part of the game. "There are many other examples of how the
increasing commercialisation of professional hockey has changed the ways in which the
game represents itself to – or rather is 'packaged' for – its audience." (Hughes-Fuller
2002: 209). Undeniably, the moment the audience gets the loudest is when the brawls
begin, and that's also what draws the crowd into the arenas, they want to see fights. And
the bigger the reputation of a team being particularly tough is, the more people can be
expected to want to watch them play/fight. "The prototypical hockey movie is almost
certainly Slapshot, although made in the 1970s, in a blackly comical way it anticipates
and addresses much of what's 'wrong' with hockey today: violence, greedy owners,
sleazy managers, and especially the plight of small market franchises." (Hughes-Fuller

The 1970s were the era when NHL and WHA hockey violence reached its peak, and
Fights became part of teams' tactics. "Fights become a marketing tool. The movie *Slapshot* is based on a true story of a minor league hockey team struggling to win over the fans. What finally does the trick is the Hanson brothers. Their game is brutal and bloody and the fans can't get enough. The movie may have been fiction, but it reveals a disturbing truth about professional hockey in the 1970s. In both the WHA and the NHL skill is taking a backseat to intimidation." (Episode 7, *Hockey: A People's History*).

Back then players, except for the goalies, did not wear helmets or head protection on the ice, and that was also considered an element of toughness, nowadays recited in stories about 'good old time hockey', in a way that “the mystique of Canadian hockey... (will be) reduced – like so much of the heritage industry today – to the marketing of nostalgia. (Gurneau and Whitson 283)” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 226). That was the time when Bobby Orr was the most highly anticipated talent and record breaking player on the ice. The weak spot were his knees and that's where the opposing player tried to get him.

The ankle was never a professional hockey player's worry. The great anxiety was the knee. That was the area to which the greatest stress was transferred. It was the problem area for hockey players as it was in so many other sports. The knee. That was what happened to Bobby Orr. A bag of handkerchiefs. That was what his knee looked like. He couldn’t get in on a gentleman’s tennis game with that knee – one of the greatest athletes who ever lived. (Kennedy 2003: 159)

The tactics of those days involved hitting the better players at their weaknesses in order to disengage them from the game. The tragedy of such behaviour, and its likely results, are expressed very impressively in John B. Lee's poem that I want to include here to end this part 4):

**Dying on the Ice at 39 is Hard** John B. Lee

He stepped onto the ice  
Circled twice  
Fell flat and died  

No Shakespearean monologues.  
No dying words for a desperate son.  
No pyrotechnics of the heart.  
It just suddenly stopped  
Like a small bird slamming into glass.

His teammates gathered
In a stunned huddle
Then breathed away from him
On worried skates
That day they tore their calendars
Like grieving widows.

He went cold so fast
His pulse stuck on the half beat
Like a swirling coin under a gambler’s thumb
And he lay in a limp heap.

Whether November moves in the bones of a tree
Or April is coral coloured with the crocus
Sea-shelled in a tiny garden
Death comes when death comes
And ‘he was dead when he hit the ice’
But lying on the ice at 39 is hard.

On the busride home
They carried his corpse
In the beer cooler
And drank quietly
Like buck-deer in a moon-lit clearing
Thinking about what everyone who has ever lived
Is too stupid to understand.
(Kennedy 2005: 85)

“We are in the entertainment business, I don't consider I have any moral responsibility.” NHL president in Episode 7, Hockey: A People's History

II.5) CHALLENGES & CAREERS

Only winning makes it good. (Dryden 2005: 302)

Obtaining a career in professional hockey is an extraordinary challenge in itself, and in this part of this chapter I want to demonstrate the conflicts and objections of those who made it and those who tried it. Ken Baker tells in his story They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven how he tries to make a comeback as a hockey goalie and has to put all his effort into getting back to his previous condition and shape, in order to succeed.
Mark Twain called the play-versus-work conflict “a great law of human action,” and I'm growing to appreciate what he meant when he wrote that “work consists of everything a body is obliged to do and … play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money; but if they were offered wages for the service that would turn it into work, then they would resign.” (Baker 2004: 127)

The professional player is obliged to work on his physical condition and has to be in top-shape in order to contend in what hardly can be referred to as ‘play’ but much rather ‘work’. Many of his peers on the team had tried it in the NHL, weren't good enough and then spent years in minor hockey, with little pay and jobs on the side to be able to provide for their families:

In the NHL, players are expected to arrive at training camp in perfect shape. They get paid millions of dollars a year to be fit. But this is the WCHL, where players, almost all of whom will never even get a sniff of NHL action, make an average of five-hundred bucks a week. These minor-leaguers, like me, didn't have the luxury of working out all summer. They had jobs. Eddie worked at a golf course. John Vary mowed lawns. Ryan Hartung, one of only two Americans on the roster, tended bar in Minnesota. Jamie Cooke sold real estate. Mears, who is married and now lives in Bakersfield year-round, woke up every morning at four to inspect oil pumps. David Milek, a rookie who graduated from Guelph University in Ontario in the spring, worked as a lifeguard. Josh Maser worked on his family's cattle ranch in Alberta. Some taught at hockey schools. It's safe to say that none ever wrote magazine articles. (Baker 2004: 89)

Furthermore, he speaks of a “spiritual peace” about the game that makes him so sure he has to try out his luck with a comeback. The game and its challenges have such an appealing draw to the goalie that he can't compare its gratification with the delights of any of his other occupations. Reminiscing on that, he writes that ”ever since I quit, I haven't come close to finding the spiritual peace that comes with physically pushing yourself to the limits of your performance, and I have not yet found a single yoga pose that is more challenging than stopping a 100 mph slap shot. Maybe I will now.” (Baker 2004: 21).

Ken Dryden points out in his book The Game that not only the players, who have to become business men of their own at some point, have to face challenges and work hard on their careers, but also the little beloved team owners want to assert their claim. He
says that,

Owners are businessmen. They like to make money. They think they are special, and they want others to think of them the same way. Some also want attention, not just status. They don't want to be just another “dime a dozen” multi-millionaire invisible to all but their colleagues and cronies. Ownership of a sports team can do that. It will get them attention. It will make them important. What the owner's didn't realize was that attention and importance can be good or bad. Only winning makes it good. (Dryden 2005: 302)

And again: losing is a crime. If you can't win, you're very likely to give up at one point or another. Closing in on this part of that chapter I want to attach another poem by John B. Lee, about the father who was a player once:

**My Father Quit Hockey One Night Late in his Youth** *John B. Lee*

My father quit hockey  
One night late in his youth.  
Went home  
And hung his skates in the shed  
Told his young bride  
He was done with the game.

Done with the time he would race  
A catalogue bent round each shin  
And the wind in his face.  
Done with the crack of the puck  
And the rush-cut of the blade.  
Done with the music of heart in the head.  
Done with the sanguine age  
When winter had a joy to rival the summer’s sun.

He still tells the story  
Of one luckless player  
Who lived out his days a broken doll  
Heart quietly ticking  
Like a great clock lost in a corner.

But as for me  
I feel a sadness that cannot grieve  
And like a wicked son  
I risk un mendable memory  
And play the game beyond  
The reach of wisdom in my ever collapsing years.  
(Kennedy 2005: 31)
II.6) SERIOUS ART

The joy of it all is that we have found him, that the game is so much a part of our lives that when a Wayne Gretzky is born we will find him. The sorrow is that there may also be Wayne Gretzkys of the piano or the paint brush, who, because we expose our young to hockey so much more than to the arts, we will never know about.

(Gzowski 2004: 84)

When the poet Al Purdy once called hockey a “combination of ballet and murder”, besides matching two very opposite things of art and crime, he also fore-grounded the entitlement of a serious art in the game of hockey. There’s aspects of athleticism as well as artistic demands required and in the combination of those you find the ideal way of playing the game. Peter Gzowski noticed just that potential of combining these two sides in the Great Gretzky:

Elite athletes, then, like chess masters or artists of the jazz piano, may not so much think differently, as perceive differently. Moreover, because they can quickly recall chunks of information from their long-term memories, they can react to those perceptions more efficiently. What Gretzky perceives on a hockey rink is, in a curious way, more simple than what a less accomplished player perceives. He sees not so much a set of moving players as a number of situations – chunks. Moving in on the Montreal blueline, as he was able to recall while he watched a videotape of himself, he was aware of the position of all the other players on the ice. The pattern they formed was, to him, one fact, and he reacted to that fact. When he sends a pass to what the rest of us appears an empty space on the ice, and when a team-mate magically appears in that space to collect the puck, he has in reality simply summoned up from his bank account of knowledge the fact that in a particular situation, someone is likely to be in a particular spot, and if he is not there now he will be there presently. (Gzowski 2004: 181)

The art of playing hockey would be as possible to attain by practice and training as playing piano or chess, including the given talents and parental support. Gzowski elaborates on this thought, suggesting that the ”corollary, of course, is that Gretzky has seen all these situations before, and that what we take to be creative genius is in fact a reaction to a situation that he has stored in his brain as deeply and firmly as his own telephone number. When I put this possibility to him, he agreed. ‘Absolutely,’ he said. ‘That's a hundred percent right. It's all practice. I got it from my dad. Nine out of ten people think it's instinct, and it isn't. Nobody would ever say a doctor had learned his
profession by instinct; yet in my own way I’ve put in almost as much time studying hockey as a medical student puts in studying medicine.” (Gzowski 2004: 181). By becoming a master of the sport and an idol to his fans and future players, he also entered the ranks of other popular and historically valuable artists. Jason Blake considers that the ”language of art has been neatly incorporated into the vocabulary of mediated sport, and comparisons between athletes and artists are ubiquitous.” Wayne Gretzky “was ‘as revolutionary in his approach to hockey as Pablo Picasso was to painting, James Joyce to literature, or Belá Bartók to music’ (McSorley 1999, 152).” (Blake 2007: 240).

The comparison of art and play is a field of many arguments over. Blake suggests that ”art, like work, has traditionally been considered to be an opposite of play because it is productive rather than autotelic: it results in an object, a work. Here, too, Ehrmann disagrees: ‘even if play is understood as a 'pure' expenditure, an expenditure for nothing, it consumes something nevertheless, if only time and energy, but sometimes also considerable property’ (Ehrmann 1968, 42)” (Blake 2007: 242). As far as consumption is concerned, well, I think that as long as both art and play are making money, and in most cases play makes more money than art, NHL games tend to have a frequent appeal that only few Rock concerts have, then we can say that play is no more an expenditure for nothing.

A quote from what I find is a very witty short story by Brian Fawcett, My Career with the Leafs, illuminates a conversation between a poet who had just joined the Toronto Maple Leafs for a few games and they discuss grants:

He wanted to know about the grants, so I explained to him the economics of trying to be a serious artist in a country that wants to have serious art without having to put up with the inconvenience and cost of paying the artists. He looked skeptical. “Except for that, hockey is pretty much the same,” he said after a moment’s thought. “Only hockey players get screwed up more easily and a lot faster.” “That’s because there’s more people paying attention,” I said, “and there’s more money involved.” (Beardsley 1997: 186)

The one factor that separates art from play in this sense is the competition factor. Artists may not be paid as well as athletes, but also, artists don't have to compete, there's no opponent they have to beat, and losing is not considered a crime, but rather a characteristic feature of an artist. As Jason Blake correctly points out, “yet in spite of the temptation to see sport as ‘theatre,’ the aim of sport is to win – the ‘goddess of sport is
not Beauty but Victory...' (Elliot 1974, 111). (...) A new play does not seek 'victory,' and when budding pianists of violinists compete for prizes, there is always an eeriness about converting beauty into a number on a judge's score sheets. In sports, beauty arises only in the service of a team or individual's clearly quantifiable victory.” (Blake 2007: 244).

But what about the spectators? In Blake's view, "players in the game are active subjects most of the time, and art requires an objective viewpoint. The assumption in such is that when we watch a hockey game we are like the gallery visitor viewing a painting, or the reader of a novel.” (Blake 2007: 245). The excitement of a hockey game is a totally different experience than a walk through the museum or a good read though. Readers or Gallery visitors don't put on their favourite book's or painting's merchandise and go around chanting and shouting to the artists they root for. I had rather compared that to the visitors of Rock shows because there I can see parallels. "A crucial difference, however, between hockey and any art lies in the emphasis on originality. Unlike the artist, the hockey player is deeply conservative – and hence more ritualistic – in adhering to rules, traditions and expectations.” (Blake 2007: 251). Here is where we can draw a line, because nothing is more tedious in art like music than redundancy, whereas in hockey, every player is different but after the same goal, yet never redundant.

And then again, what about the spectator's role? Does art need an audience? Does sport need an audience? "Staged art usually demands a live audience, the so-called 'missing fourth wall' – not so a hockey game. Unlike art, sport requires no outside interpretation and therefore 'needs no audience because play expresses an exuberance that need not be communicated. The activity is (...) for its own sake.' (Guttmann 1978, 12).” (Blake 2007: 252). I agree only in part because I think both need an audience, if not audience, then a game like hockey at least needs a judge and some validation of some sort, or as "Patricia Hughes-Fuller points out a key similarity between hockey and art: each requires and rewards some sort of interpretation.” (Blake 2007: 273). Nevertheless, it is impossible to stage a team sport like hockey for an audience. "When the agonic, or competitive, desire to win is removed through careful planning it is no longer sport, but artificial.” (Blake 2007: 252). And to the spectator, or consumer, hockey games as shown on TV or watched in the arena, interpreting the action should be an active and personal enterprise; "Pierre Bourdieu argues that, as in music, our experience of sport is becoming entirely passive, beyond any practice, and we are 'conquered' by television and commercialism (1984, 185). (...) If hockey is important to Canadian culture, there is surely something to be gained by engaging with it as a
spectator, even if one has never played the game, and especially if one can avoid limiting oneself to pre-packaged interpretation.” (Blake 2007: 272). The question whether art and sport differ or equal remains to be discussed. "Hockey may not be art, but the fiction offers echoes of the bon mot in theatre circles.” (Blake 2007: 276).

...agonic hockey is a way of telling the story of war without actually going to war. (...) After a war, “rule exists wholly as a result of victory; in sport, victory exists as a result of rule” (Fischer 2002, 31). (...) If hockey is a simulation of war, it is also a simulation of art. (Blake 2007: 254)

II.7) THE MONEY GAME

“Hockey is a hit.” Episode 3, Hockey: A People's History

Money, or *cash*, as I have entitled this chapter, as we have also seen in points 1) and 5) above, has become a significant factor in a hockey player's career, there's a gigantic gap in salaries in the diverse leagues, the top earners in the game, of course, shred the ice in the NHL. How incredibly the salaries took off, and how it has changed the morals and ethics of the game I want to discuss in this subchapter.

Primarily, I want to present an interesting thread Ken Dryden proposes in his book *The Game*:

Travel back to 1979, knowing what we know today. Find a hockey fan and ask him about money.
“Money,” he’ll say. “Isn't it outrageous what these guys are making? They play this little boys' game that they've played all their lives for nothing, now they get all this money, and they're complainin'. ‘We wanna play where we wanna play. We're like slaves,’ they say. Yeah, right.” Our fan is sputtering. “The Rocket never made more than $ 25,000 a year, and Howe, in Detroit, not much more than that. And now, what's the average salary? $ 110,000 Canadian? Give me a break! They're ruinin' the game. These guys and their agents.”
Then tell that fan about 2003.
“Well, actually,” you say, beginning slowly, not quite sure how to get to the rest, “I've been living in the year 2003 and it did last. In fact, it got worse.”
The fan raises his eyebrows at your first bit of news, even higher at the second.
“Yeah, the average salary in 2003 for an NHL player is about $ 1.7 million U.S.”
The fan's eyebrows are stuck.
“Really, it's worse than that because in 2003 the Canadian dollar is worth a lot
less. So it's about $2.3 million Canadian. And that's for thirty teams. The real superstars get about $10 million U.S. or so. That's about $14 million Canadian.”

(...)

It is right, all of it – the $110,000, the $2.3 million, the twelve bucks and the one hundred bucks. It seems we couldn't have gone from where we were to where we are, but we did. It happened, in part, because of Gretzky. (Dryden 2005: 295 f)

The amount of cash these players are making has gone through the roof. It seems what was earlier believed to be nearly “ruining the game” has by now grown up to a steady ledger in the game's environment. Money makes the difference and the people involved in the decision making processes and team and player managers and agents are in power to rule the leagues and get the cups.

Money has affected who wins the Stanley Cup and who doesn't. It has especially affected the fortunes of Canadian teams. In the fifty years from 1943 to 1993, Canadian teams won thirty-five times. In the last ten years, since money has become a competitive tool, they've not won once. Canadian teams take in almost all their money in Canadian dollars and spend most of their money in U.S. dollars. With the Canadian dollar having dropped in value, it's a big problem for them. (Dryden 2005: 304)

It's a big problem for Canada, their best players are leaving for US teams, understandably, because the grants are so much higher and their value and reputation are highly estimated. Not only Canadians are making careers in the US NHL, also European players from Sweden, Finland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, Slovakia and even, contemporarily in 2011, 3 Austrian players have made it there. Even though they are taken away from their home leagues and are mostly missing out in the Olympic and World Championship Games in their National Teams, they are proudly exported as well acclaimed big shot hockey superstars, millionaires. They are part of a global elite in hockey. Ken Baker includes a comparison in his book *They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven*:

The average player in the West Coast Hockey League makes $13,000 a season. The average player in the National Hockey League makes $1.64 million a season. And there's a good reason NHLers make so much more money: They are better. (Baker 2004: 71)

The reason there is so much money involved is because the games had attained a mass appeal and the NHL stadiums are sold out frequently with 18 to 20 thousand
spectators. This business of the sport had turned out to be a great success and boost to some cities, and a disaster and anticlimax to others. As in any other sport or business, also “hockey is the object of market-driven mass cultural production (Kidd and McFarlane; Gruneau and Whitson; Cruise and Griffith) but as John Fiske in particular has emphasized, such products are made meaningful only through a process of negotiated popular consumption” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 8). Mass consumption is an ambition and purpose of team owners and managers, the bigger the attractions on the ice, the better the reputation of the players, the meaner the action and more frequent the fights, the more people in the stadium and the bigger the revenue. The audience consumes and sustains the status of their teams because “today, in an era of mass media and mass markets, the discourse of hockey is one in which an increasing variety of representations either replaces or enhances the actual experiences of playing/watching hockey. (…) … the audience has the power to effect, not only the nature of representations of the game, but even the game itself.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 28).

However, the benefits of hockey are on principle matched with its adversities in hockey literature, especially when it comes to matters of remuneration and revenue. The fact that what has become of the game from an outdoor leisure activity to a sold out stadium attraction is stirring up emotions in hockey discourse. Exploited markets and millionaire players are seen as a sort of corruption of the game by some, and a blessing and ideal by others. Masses of spectators in the stadiums and in front of the TV screens are entertained and sold a tight programme full of commercials and advertising, expert discussions and a spectacle in light and sound. Patricia Hughes-Fuller sees in this, that ”in theory, the solution for those who do not wish to experience hockey through the eye of the television camera, is to actually go and watch the game ’live.’ But even here, to greater or lesser degrees, the game itself is re-articulated as a certain kind of cultural event, as well as being ’packaged' as entertainment. (…) Also, while pickup games on community rinks are still relatively spontaneous events, NHL games played in arenas such as the Skyreach Centre are comparable to rock concerts in their scale, scope and ’production values.’” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 197).

"The dreamers, schemers, and stars have made hockey a truly national passion, a sport once played by upper-class college boys, has become a showbiz spectacle.”
Episode 2, Hockey: A People's History
CHAPTER III

“CULTURE”
A WORLD APART – LESSONS LEARNED – HOCKEY PARENTS – HOCKEYISM

III. 1) A WORLD APART

...hockey provided one of the few forums for self-expression, a place where citizens could be together in great numbers and form a unified voice. At the rink fans were able to scream and yell and taunt... (Ursstadt 2004: 87)

This entire third chapter will deal with the culture of hockey in Canada and the way it influenced and still effects every day life there. Hockey is a sport that provides a shared experience for a huge group of people, the stadiums provide a place where nothing but the game counts and the discourse is an invitation to anyone familiar with sticks and pucks. Hockey literature is an immediate product of that culture and lots of work had been written on the topic. In this first part of this chapter, I want to give examples of hockey being described or represented as a world apart, a world where the rules and orders of real life cease to exist.

Hockey is also a family game, and many families follow the games on TV or radio. In a short story by Diane Schoemerlen we get a picture of her family situation and hockey attitudes, when she writes that her mother ”did not consider her everyday dislike of those Frenchmen (…) to be contradictory. Hockey, like stamp collecting, it seemed, was a world apart, immune to the regular prejudices of race, province and country – although she did sometimes berate my father for siding with a Yankee team.” (Beardsley 1997: 86). Matters of race and descent are being replaced by a player's value on the ice. For Canada, a country of immigrants, British, French, Italian etc. it meant that there was finally a way to eliminate prejudice while the people siding with their teams were affiliates rather than opponents. Both the audience and the players could experience that:

And in the sharing and the spontaneous approbation of their applause, all the petty human divisiveness, the pain of ordinary days, the long dream-distorted nights, the memories of wars on far-away ground, the half-healed scars – all that divides us from each other and ourselves faded with the blending voice, the harmony of the universal cheer. The momentary shout of triumph which gives, however
illisory and fleeting, a sense of fusion and permanence. There was meaning in it. And if they did not know it they felt it. (Beardsley 1997: 109f)

For the people watching and playing the game in stadiums or on rinks around town this was a way of coming to terms with the past and making something of the present in the moment, forgetting about divisions and creating something in unison.

This is again an appropriate opportunity to quote from Dave Bidini's *Tropic of Hockey* and his experiences abroad, in Eastern Europe. In Romania, hockey had quite similar provisions to offer:

There were more than a million informers in the Securitate, each of them backed up by a militia responsible for keeping track of those citizens considered unreliable – kids who sang in coffee bars, writers, painters, former activists. Under Ceausescu's regime, no person was allowed to change dwellings without permission from the militia, and anyone who made a visit of more than twenty-four hours to a town they did not live in had to report to the authorities. In this political climate, hockey provided one of the few forums for self-expression, a place where citizens could be together in great numbers and form a unified voice. At the rink fans were able to scream and yell and taunt Steaua. Even though some fans were jailed before games (...) the Ciuc crowd were brave and resilient, and for many years, those who sang their Hungarian freedom hymn from the stands were the most defiant voices heard in all of Romania. (Urstadt 2004: 87)

The “world apart” as described above, as a “forum for self-expression”, is what Hughes-Fuller also sees as an important factor for a sense of community. "Viewed 'objectively', hockey is nothing more than a sport played on ice, involving a dozen or so people, curved wooden sticks, and a flat rubber disk called a puck but for Canadians, it is also a cultural myth; one of the ways in which we construct what Benedict Andersen has aptly named our 'imagined community'” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 3).

Hockey represents “the last remaining place where grown men can act like children (...). Elsewhere, in a narrative reconstruction of the past and childhood, hockey may be endowed with a kind of sanctity though (...) often these narratives have subtexts that are far from idyllic. (...) Metro's idol, the Puck Artist, will still remain, frozen in time, the teenaged god of hockey, sex, and rock 'n roll, eternally performing magic pirouettes in a small winter town where Buddy Holly is always on the radio, and hockey is more than a commodity.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 104). The story Hughes-Fuller is alluding to is called *The Puck Artist* by Levi Dronyk - a story about Canadianness and coming-of-age, of a
kid learning the game and learning about life, from his hero on the ice, Billy “The Kid” Semeniuk:

I forgot about hockey. The songs on the radio seemed closer, blending easier with what I was thinking, fitting better now than they had with the Forum fantasies. For the first time, the songs became the soundtrack. The hockey passion was suddenly tempered. I had to know about Buddy Holly. I had to know about the wetness Billy the Kid so eloquently described. The new ideal, to be like him, required three things: skates, more sweet music and the warmth of a strange new escape. (Beardsley 1997: 75)

They are nine year old kids in Canada in the late fifties, discussing the value of hockey in their lives:

"So you see," he completed the first dissertation, “any kid without an instinctive understanding of the game is genetically un-Canadian.”
“Eat my shorts, professor,” Pinka mumbled.
“Hockey's in our blood,” Billy the Kid added.
“So how come all of us ain't in the NHL,” Robby wanted to know.
“What I said, butternuts, is that we all have an understanding. Not everyone has the skills.”
“Big fuckin' deal.” Pinka wasn't impressed.
“But the game's losing its purity.”
“What!” Robby demanded.
“Too much money. It's taking over.”
“Fuck off Semeniuk, it's a job they gotta get paid.”
“I know. So it's no longer a game. And all of us have to grow up.”
(Beardsley 1997: 74)

In her dissertation Hughes-Fuller quotes the work of David Adam Richards, author of *Hockey Dreams* and she thinks that “for Richards, hockey and Canada are inseparable. Their connection, while not real, is true”. Quoting his work she states:

We were and are all delusional spirits. The delusion is this. That perhaps HOCKEY – hockey can keep this country together. Hockey can save Canada – for we see to the bottom of our heart there is no Gretzky without Lemieux. Perhaps we are that delusional, and perhaps for one time when we really need it to – when we really want it to, a delusion can work for us instead of against us. (HD 234-235) (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 171)
Hockey encourages the individual to expand their horizons, to imagine ever-greater things and Richard's work represents a "compelling account of a community and culture under stress, and of how hockey stitches together the patchwork of our collective lives while remaining, for most, an elusive dream." (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 164). It is a matter of being Canadian on that large North American continent where "hockey is presented as a vehicle for the voluntaristic assertion of community and collective identity in response to exclusions on the part of 'mainstream' society." (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 213). This collective identity brings people together in what Hughes-Fuller describes as an imagined community where "dispersed across six time zones, Canadians celebrate and despair of hockey goals at the same time, even though clock time varies by four and one half hours from Newfoundland to British Columbia." (Blake 2007: 30). Over the years, as this sport has received ever-increasing publicity and gained general popularity, Canadians took to hockey as a way of saying who they are and who they are not. It entered the national conscience, and eventually evolved into something like "Canada's most reliable red thread for talking to family members, neighbours, or fellow Canadians from different regions or provinces.” (Blake 2007: 84).

In his examination of hockey fiction, *Ice Hockey as a Cultural Symbol in Canadian Prose*, Jason Blake gives very detailed examples of hockey symbolism and its cultural background in Canada, as well as what it means to speak of hockey as a national identity. It "unites Canadians by providing a common focal point – even if it means eradicating difference in favour of a simple story of sporting nationalism.” (Blake 2007: 168). Simply put, Canadians expose themselves to hockey more than to any other sport, making it nearly impossible for other sports to gain national attention on the level that hockey has. But, as I have mentioned, "it was through the medium of hockey that multiculturalism entered the living rooms of the nation and became a mediated yet living reality.” (Blake 2007: 170). Feeling a connection with one another is at the heart of it all. It is not “just about hockey, it was about experiencing something that made us feel exhilarated as a community. We're down as a community. We live in a time where we're prone to feeling a little awkward at the simple task of saying hello to our neighbours, yet we have no problem high-fiving someone at a hockey game.” (Episode 9, *Hockey: A People's History*). Canadian society was a full blend of immigrants from all over the British and French colonies including European settlers. Throughout its first century of independence, Canada's multiculturalist foundation had segregationist features even among families. In such a climate, hockey “operates as an area of peaceful
communication – whether verbal or physical through passing the puck – between hostile parties (which is why friendly soccer matches that take place between hostile nations are regarded as diplomatic coups).” (Blake 2007: 217). It has proven to have the power to join and unite parties in positive ways, by giving them a sense of national togetherness and identity, even if “deeming hockey the essence of Canada and – as Heinrich Heine stated regarding his conversion to Christianity – the entry ticket to Canadian culture is, at best, wide-eyed optimism.” (Blake 2007: 222). Whether optimism or just plain ignorance, it is definitely one thing you can not get around when moving to or living in Canada. Another interesting example in Blake's work has to do with sports serving as national identity markers, especially in situations where very hostile parties are involved and the cultural value of a game as a “world apart” becomes intelligible:

In times when Trinidad and Tobago were not yet independent, James (C.L.R.) correctly highlights the importance of cricket for “performing” the nation on the world stage, while offering a platform to compete against the ruling English (and beating them at their own game). In such cases, sports clearly leave the building of autotelic activities because they become a surrogate, sanctioned, and celebrated form of warfare. (Blake 2007: 242)

“Hockey, all it is is people hitting a piece of rubber back and forth with sticks.”
“Water,” I said, “all it is is hydrogen and oxygen. Why drink it?”
(Johnston 73) (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 89)

III.2) LESSONS LEARNED

“TO KEEP A BOY OUT OF HOT WATER, PUT HIM ON ICE” (Beardsley 2002: 163)

In this part I want to present a few quotations from my readings that I found particularly interesting in terms of a tradition of learning about the game and learning how to play it, displaying its importance on cultural levels. I was inspired to include it here by, again, Marsha Mildon's short story Number 33. It is a story about a female hockey fan who realizes that women's hockey exists and tries to learn to play the game in order to become a true Canadian.
Icing? What is Icing? I wondered. And a face-off? What could that be? I was baffled by almost everything I heard, except of course, “Number 9 fakes a pass across the goal. He shoots, he scores. The Canadian team wins it all!” That I understood very well. The heroes of my country were winning at our most important game. (Kennedy 2003: 200)

For her, as for many fellow countrymen and women, hockey players were the heroes of her country and the game most important to her. It was a matter of losing or winning for a whole nation. And she had to learn the rules and how to play in order to become a full-fledged Canadian. Just like in the Puck Artist's words, “any kid without an instinctive understanding of the game is genetically un-Canadian.” (Beardsley 1997: 74). And it is not only the professional form of hockey that is taken so seriously, also the pond version of simple “shinny” becomes quite ponderous in cultural terms.

The nonchalance of shinny is one of its greatest attractions. You appear to be nonchalant but you are trying like hell. You always took it seriously, but were instantly able to stand back and look at yourself in a self-deprecating manner. The happy-go-lucky approach was never far beneath the surface. The paradox is obvious but Canadian and true: it doesn’t matter but it matters a great deal. (Kennedy 2003: 21)

The quote by Paul Quarrington in the above section of this chapter maintains that young boys in Canada would rather spend their free time on the ice and play hockey than get into any trouble outside the rink. It is reminiscent of a sort of national wisdom combined with military obedience.

I have found a few more interesting anecdotes of trainer's wisdom and hockey instructions and codes of practice, like this one from Roy MacGregor's book The Last Season, taken from one of coach Sugar's pre-game speeches:

“What makes a shark truly unusual is what he doesn’t have. And that’s a swim bladder.” Someone laughed. (…) “Go ahead,” Sugar said, “Laugh. But let me tell you first what it means. A shark has to keep moving constantly. A shark does not float, like other fish. A shark can’t float. He has no swim bladder, see. He can’t let up for a minute and that’s what makes him top dog. You think about that awhile, okay?” (Beardsley 1997: 144)
Here he is emphasizing the importance of keeping up the movement on the ice, to keep skating in order to keep up the pace of the game and thus make room for passes and moves on the field. Earlier the players on the team had been instructed by a cleric:

We were used to Father Schula’s prayers that no one got hurt, but so far this year we had had Sugar read aloud from *Tom Sawyer*, quote John Kennedy and Winston Churchill and some Chinese guy I’d never heard of and give lectures on everything from why water droplets scoot on a hot pan ("Keep the puck away from the traffic") to how vultures in Egypt break open ostrich eggs by dropping small stones on them ("You can’t do it all yourself"). (Beardsley 1997: 144)

Praying for no one to get hurt is as much a part of the routine as the strategies of very physical play on all positions in the game. Guy Lawson explains such strategies in his short story *Hockey Nights*:

On offence, in the grand banal tradition of Canadian hockey, the Bombers would “dump and chase”: shoot the puck into the opposition's end, skate like hell after it, then crash bodies and hope to create a scoring chance. On defence they would “build a house”: each player would be a pillar, spreading to the four corners of the defence zone, supporting one another, and moving the foundations of the house as one. (…) They would play the man not the puck. (Urstadt 2004: 151)

Jeff Greenfield gives further assertion as to the tradition of violence on the ice, which originates in such strategies as “playing the man not the puck”, in his story *Hockey Fan-Antics*:

There is, in hockey, no idiotic propaganda that violence is only incidental to the game. When you put strong men on skates and arm them with sticks, people will hit each other. Almost no one gets hurt in a fight – skates don't give much traction – so most fights start and end with arm-wrestling, pulling a jersey over a rival's head, and falling on the ice. But when a real brawl erupts – with fists flying all over the ice – the fans forgive anything, including a losing game, roar out the blood lust. (It is, indeed, something of a tradition for a losing hockey team to stage a wild fight in the last period of play to inspire its rooters.) (Urstadt 2004: 108)

The Canadian style to play hockey has a tradition of toughness and physical aspects. Early teams consisted of mine and mill workers - strong men who would intimidate opponents and constantly keep that potential to go berserk on the ice in a battle for the puck. In Brian Fawcett's short story, *My Career With the Leafs*, that I have quoted already earlier in this paper, the main character is a poet who coincidentally gets
admitted to join the squad of the Toronto Maple Leafs for a few games. The part of that story I want to include here is the first interview he gives on Canadian national TV:

“Well, Brian, how do you like being with a team like the Leafs, eh, with their tradition of ruggedness and hard work?”
“Well, Howie,” I said, still not sure if he realized that I understood English, and pretty sure he didn't know I was a poet, “I find the ruggedness something of a problem. Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood created a problem a few years ago by writing some books about the importance of Nature and the frontier, and a lot of similarly empty glamor nonsense about rugged Canadian pioneers, and as a result a lot of the writers in this country now go around wearing logging boots and punching people for no reason. I used to do it myself, actually.”

Meeker was staring at me, his jaw somewhere down around his navel. I took this as a signal to continue.
“I mean, violence may be natural, but Nature isn't a very good model for behaviour. It's really been overestimated.”
I knew I was gesticulating too much, and starting to yap. I'd forgotten about the cameras - it was Howie Meeker I wanted to convince. I couldn't stop.
“Art is really about civilization,” I said, “not about Nature. All Nature does is overproduce, then waste most of it, and then resort to violence when the garbage starts to stink. When human beings follow Nature, you get guys like Hitler.” (Urstadt 2004: 193f)

I enjoyed this sequence in particular because he does not at all appear as Canadians would expect a hockey player to appear. He comes across far too literate to be authentic in his position, which he misunderstands and thus learns his lesson about what he is supposed to represent, very much to the embarrassment of his team and colleagues:

“Geez, man, that's the unwritten law of hockey,” Ferguson said. “You're supposed to pretend you're really dumb.”
It was my turn to be incredulous.
“Darryl thinks there's some kind of agreement between the owners about it,” he said. “When you get out of Junior Hockey, you're given a sheet of things you can say to the press. You talk dumb, talk about teamwork, and all that crap.”
My head was reeling. When I was a kid I believed that the world was full of secret rules and conspiracies, but this was real life – the Big Leagues. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.
“I mean a few years ago,” he continued, “when Kenny Dryden started getting interviewed, he used all kinds of literate words like 'tempo' and so on, pronounced all the words properly, and there was a terrific uproar. But he was in law school and they had to accept it. I dunno. They may get him yet – force him to retire.” (Urstadt 2004: 193f)
In comparison, in Ken Baker's story *They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven* I found an extract in which the protagonist - Ken Baker himself in goalie position with an American pro-hockey team - meets NHL goalie Evgeni Nabokov, a Russian player who represented just what would be expected by the public, an almost mono-syllabic, strongly accented Russian immigrant hockey player:

Nabokov played three seasons in the AHL and the IHL before making the Sharks in 1999. He has to be aware of the WCHL. He takes off his blocker and kindly shakes my hand. He looks at me not like a peon, but like a member of a fraternity, that of pro goalies. With respect. I feel I'm in the presence of royalty, which I am. “How's it going?” I ask nervously. “Getting ready,” he says. “It should be good year. We see.” “Got any advice for me?” “Any what?” Nabokov asks Strelow. “What duz he say?” Warren saves the conversation from sinking into total absurdity, shouting on my behalf, “DO-YOU-HAVE-ANY-ADVICE-FOR-HIM?” Somehow, Warren's nurseryschoolsppeak works. “Oh, oh,” Nabokov says apologetically. A few seconds later, he looks me in the eye and says, “Stop da puck.” (Baker 2004: 74)

Ken Dryden, mentioned in the quote above and quoted frequently throughout this paper, was a very successful goalie for the Montreal Canadiens in the seventies as well as a student of law and author after ending his career on the ice. He was actively involved in the process of making hockey more friendly and accessible for families, and in reducing the multitude of violence in hockey. He was actually one of the more literate players, not shy to express his opinion on what was going right or wrong in his view. The following is an extract of his book *The Game* where he ponders about the way hockey has evolved over time and in history:

It wasn't until I began recovering some of the roots of hockey that I discovered my own best metaphor for what history and culture can mean. (...) It was the recurring themes that startled me most: hockey as big business, the decline in interest in the United States, the NHL's pandering to the American fans, the increase in fighting and brawling – all were themes we had been led to believe had begun with our generation. Even more fascinating were references to different styles of play. Until then, I hadn't known that hockey was once an onside game (where back passing was permitted but forward passing was not), that hockey had been played by seven players a side, that the forward pass was something introduced late to the game, or that there could be any connection between the forward pass and stick-handling, between stick-handling and body-checking. The “dump and chase”, for me, had been a feature of expansion, but here it was being vilified in
the 1950s in almost the same words as we vilify it today. Later I would realise that anything in one time can be linked to anything in another, that there is always someone who took a slap shot in 1910 or built a car in 1880, even if the recollection is exaggerated and the connection artificial. More important now was that the discovery that hockey before my time was more than just stories of “Cyclone” Taylor's goal while skating backwards, George Hainsworth's twenty-two shutouts in forty-four games, Howie Morenz's death from a broken leg and his subsequent funeral in the Montreal Forum. And if there was a connection between a forward pass and stick-handling, maybe there were other connections as well. There suddenly seemed to me a story I had never heard, a link between present and past that might tell us why we play as we do. (Dryden 2005: 242ff)

Well, as far as lessons to be learned are concerned, hockey is a rich field of wisdom and traditions, experience and education, and there's plenty more to explore in literature. It is rooted firmly in the culture of the people and the land and every day life aspects are linked to hockey tactics, sometimes metaphorically, but also literally. It is a quote from a retired Hungarian player that sums the philosophy up most fittingly:

“My philosophy is: hockey is life. What you learn on the ice, you take to your home, your office. Nothing that you accomplish on the ice is unnecessary.” (Urstadt 2004: 97)

...since hockey is a part of the cultural air we breathe, Canadians understand it the way that people who grow up singing folk songs comprehend and feel those melodies. In short, hockey is a given in Canada. (Blake 2007: 17)

III.3) HOCKEY PARENTS

For some parents it's religion or music lessons; but my parents wanted neither Christian nor concert musician. They wanted a big, mean pro hockey player who would wish them toothless Happy Birthdays during the Hockey Night in Canada intermissions of their autumn years. (Beardsley 1997: 130)

As mentioned above, tradition plays an important role in North American hockey. Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska, was publicly referred to as a ‘hockey mom’, even though she was born in Idaho, but was living in and governing that northern State. In fact, she had little to do with hockey, but the term stuck and was mediated world wide. Hockey moms and dads really are a community of women and men whose children play
hockey at any level and who dedicate their lives to supporting them – driving them to the games in mini vans stuffed with hockey gear, going to see their games and setting them up to become real hockey players. The status is something these parents are, for the most part, proud of, especially in Canada. Of course, not every family supports their children's dreams of hockey super-stardom.

The following lines are quotes found in my reading that describe certain incidences between players, fans and parents. The first one is from Diane Schoemperlen's short story *Hockey Night in Canada* about a family's reaction when hockey was broadcast on TV:

> When her friend Rita was there, my mother at least played at watching the game. Whenever the crowd roared, my father groaned and Rita began to shriek, my mother would look up from her stamp collection, which she was endlessly sorting and sticking and spreading all over the card table, and smile encouragement at the TV. (Beardsley 1997: 85)

The scene reveals a rather distanced affair demonstrated by her mother's “smiling encouragement”, being more attracted to collecting stamps - a neat opposition. Another example of a mother's dislike, or rather disinterest, of her child's desire can be found in Marsha Mildon's story *Number 33*:

> Now you may ask how I made it to 1994 without ever hearing of women’s ice hockey – except, of course, for reports on the National Team and Manon Rheaume. The answer is: I have no idea. I can only assume that my mother’s determination that I should be an *artiste* simply anaesthetized my awareness of women’s hockey. But the moment I heard of it, I was seized of an overwhelming passion to play. It was an inner throbbing through my blood, a kind of Canadian genetic imperative which I hadn’t even imagined was there, so firmly had it been repressed in the depths of my *you’re-a-girr-ull* psyche. (Beardsley 1997: 205)

This quotation brings up a few themes on raising children, especially girls, in such an environment. Manon Rheaume is a female hockey goalie from Quebec and the first woman ever to be drafted and added to a NHL men's team, the Tampa Bay Lightning. She encouraged a lot of girls to play hockey with boys' teams. (In fact, she also played with an Austrian team for one season.) While the mother tends to ignore the influence of hockey on their daughter's life, the father and brothers tend to encourage it via their coaching and playing, as in Manon's case. The stamp-collecting mother wants her daughter to become an *artiste*. Nevertheless, a “genetic imperative” makes her go after
her own “passion to play” and try to overcome her “grr-ull psyche”. A passion she had been forced to hide from for so long:

What no one else knew, or for that matter had reason to suspect, was that, at age seven, I began a passionate love affair with the game of hockey. (Kennedy 2003: 199)

There are also examples of the motivated hockey dad who tries to introduce his children to the game for various reasons. Peter Gzowski was one of those fans of the game who tried to pass it on:

As my own Toronto-born sons reached wobbling age, I, along with a million other fathers, began to take them to the local arena on Saturday mornings, and even stayed to coach; and when I could cadge tickets to the Gardens, or when we watched on television, I would try to pass on to them my own enthusiasm for the game and its heroes. (Kennedy 2003: 33)

The enthusiasm is there, and along with it the aspiration to evoke some of the same passions in their kids. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not. It can become a problem as soon as the father wants his children to accomplish something which he himself was unable to, as Steven Shikaze's story *Hockey Dreams* demonstrates:

For the father, the fun had left two or three years earlier. Once his own father realized the exceptional talent his boy had for the game, he pushed him harder. Driven by his own dreams, his father enrolled him in summer hockey camps and power skating lessons. The backyard was flooded in winter so he could practice skating and stickhandling. From house leagues to all-star teams to AA to AAA – at each level, he excelled. The further he moved up the ranks, however, the less passion he had for the game. Practices were three times a week, games anywhere from two to four. Weekends were spent travelling to tournaments. While his best friends remained at the house-league level, he was on the ice four times a week, with little time for anything else. The final straw was when his father decided to coach his team. (Kennedy 2003: 53)

Hockey dads had worked on their offspring for generations and, in this case, the father learned something from his upbringing and tries to introduce his son to the game differently, by making him find out about the fun hockey can offer rather than pushing him to excel at it. On the drive home after a game's defeat they still enjoyed what happened:
During the drive home, the son is glowing. Did you see my shot? I almost scored! We would have won the game! I saw it, the father replies. He, too, is glowing; his dream fulfilled. (Kennedy 2003: 53)

Raising children with a team sport was also regarded as a virtue from early on. As in the top quote in part 2 in this chapter, hockey has a tradition of making men of boys and training them to become respectable Canadians and fellow gentlemen citizens, including the toughness and athleticism. “Gruneau and Whitson (...) note that, while initially hockey developed more or less spontaneously from ‘different stick and ice games’ (35) including 'hurley, ricket, shinny and an ice version of field hockey’ (35), it too was influenced by the aforementioned ‘powerful British public-school sensibility’ that stressed the role of ‘manly games’ as necessary training for the young gentlemen of an emergent gentry class.” (41) (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 23). This tradition goes back to the times of British colonization of Canada and the imperatives they established in cultural education and ethical manners at that period.

For (Matthew) Arnold, as for many of his contemporaries, the cure for anarchy was culture. This was the premise of some of the great reform movements of the period (for mass public education, for temperance, etc.). Strategically applied doses of culture would humanise the slouching beast and teach it to walk erect. (...) sports were identified with a range of manly and ethical behaviours, so it is not surprising that they were made part of the cultural pharmacopoeia: The concert hall, library, even the playing field came to be seen as potential sites for education and class conciliation – sites for the construction of a common culture that would reaffirm the civilising value of the cultural accomplishments of the privileged classes. (Gruneau and Whitson 17). (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 21)

For the modern family today, these ambitions may still count as valuable and worth handing down to the next generations. Hockey has become an institution where the younger generation can earn respect through the game. "Although sports highlight inequality based on ability, they also provide settings where family members are equal before the rules, or where the younger generation can be superior to the father. Factors such as age and authority are less important when skill is the only thing that counts” (Blake 2010: 188). In addition to that, hockey can also be a vehicle to confront or bring the more fragile parties of a family together. "The hockey rink provides a place for a dialogue of sorts to begin between family members too emotionally reserved or divided to risk conversation. Passing a puck back and forth is a form of communication, and
seeking out a player, or refusing to pass to a player, sends a clear message.” (Blake 2010: 191).

“A backyard rink connects you with the people you love, a little town arena connects me with my neighbours, with my children, it connects us all and that's one of the enduring wonders of sport.” Jack Falla in Episode 6, Hockey: A People's History

III.4) HOCKEYISM

In this city hockey is the chief social cement. (Beardsley 1997: 122)

The three-letter “-ism” suffix denoting primarily specific systems, doctrines or theories is a fitting title for part four. I first came across the term ‘hockeyism’ in a short story by Tina Lincer called The First in the Penalty Box:

I’ve learned to shrug off the sidelong glances from Hebrew school teachers who clearly don’t approve of, or understand, why my son misses school almost every Sunday. I’ve begun, only half jokingly, to tell friends whom we barely see between the fall and spring equinoxes that we’ve converted from Judaism to hockeyism. (Kennedy 2003: 56)

Hockey is often (“half jokingly”) compared with religion and politics. We can speak of Hockeyism in Canada since it “is the stuff that is brewed in the melting pot of our nation. It sweeps away all champions of racial groups; it laughs at the supremacy of any racial faction.” (Kennedy 2003: 25).

Hockeyism might stand for a system of values and identification in the way that rules out other systems and beliefs. When Canada's supremacy in hockey was challenged by the Soviet national team, every game won or lost was kept track of like individual battles on the front-lines. Marsha Mildon depicts an experience of that Summit Series:

Like most Canadians, I remember exactly where I was when Paul Henderson
scored the last of his three game-winning goals to clinch that series. I was in a bar, linked through a frantic outpouring of patriotic energy with dozens of people I didn’t know personally, but whose hearts I knew intimately. (Beardsley 1997: 203)

The Series attained such significance for the nation's pride that it would have been difficult to find a Canadian who had not followed it. The winning goal had such impact on cultural terms that Mildon remembers exactly where she was when it was scored, just like others remember where they were when the two planes crashed into the World Trade Center on September 11th or when the news spread that Michael Jackson had died. The game is a matter of national cultural heritage and every victory is celebrated like a national triumph, every defeat mourned like a catastrophic loss. "Though it is foolish to regard a hockey loss as an allegory for the decline of the nation, such thinking remains a clear indication of hockey's symbolic importance in Canada." (Blake 2007: 27).

As political systems establish leaders and religious theories establish saints, hockey culture has a variety of established heroes. "In the domain of popular culture, however, heroes are very much alive and, in the specific case of hockey, still possess many of their traditional core attributes. More important to the discussion at hand, they also continue to perform many of their traditional mythic functions.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 108). These functions of mythical heroes may include matters of upbringing, special talents revealed thus separated from the ‘true identity’ or dangerous quests where stakes were high. In higher culture these functions may have developed through the ages but for hockey in popular culture they are still assimilable. "These myths are vehicles for exploring central cultural themes and issues. They may explain cultural origins, and/or legitimise the social, religious, and political order.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 109).

As hockey became religion, one of its heroes, player Jean Beliveau, became a saint to the creditors of the Montreal Canadiens, as Marsha Mildon narrates:

On Saturday and then Wednesday nights I watched Hockey Night in Canada. I was a Canadiens fan and wore a white home jersey with the number 4, celebrating Jean Beliveau’s mastery. Year after year I raised the Stanley Cup over my head with the Canadiens, and I learned to drink champagne without sneezing as I celebrated their triumphs. I even attempted to play goalie for an otherwise all-British women’s field hockey team – just because they called their sport hockey. (Kennedy 2003: 200)
As reflected in stories about hockey, the games are followed as deliberate as a Sunday mass at church, where everything outside is regarded as trivial.

There were hockey games on TV, and if I dared to tiptoe into the living room to inform him, say, I’ve just won a scholarship to Harvard, or I’m getting married tomorrow, or, “Hey congratulations! My wife just gave birth – you’re a grandfather,” he would glare at me and say, “Not now you fool. We can discuss such trivialities between periods.” (Kennedy 2003: 63)

In an interview for the documentary *Hockey: A People's History*, Eric Lalonde, player for the Montreal Canadiens says: “The Canadiens have always reflected and been attached to the people, not only in Montreal but in the whole province, it's in the French culture and the dynamic trends that we see in our team; being fast, being impulsive, being exciting” (Episode 6, *Hockey: A People's History*). Hockey is a religion and the Montreal Forum is the high temple.

Throughout Canada, hockey casts a spell that fascinates and captivates its followers. "Love it or hate it, hockey is unavoidable. There is no segment of society shielded from the national affinity and addiction. Even the non-addict is aware of the presence, in the way that the non-gambler will notice the gaming atmosphere of Las Vegas.” (Blake 2007: 15). The omnipresence of the game, with its stadiums sticking out in the major cities like cathedrals and giant replicas of hockey sticks impending like crucifixes, there's no avoiding that “in Canada, the game is always there. It's in the family, it's in the culture, it's in the air.(Klein and Reif 1998, 6). It is surely for this reason that much hockey fiction makes the Canada-hockey connection in an understated manner.” (Blake 2007: 163). The reader is assumed to be familiar with the faith and tradition of hockey, and therefore need not be explained the role of the game in this country. Besides, hockey is being debated and a constituent of public discourse of any level in Canada. "Hockey gives a community something to talk about, and even opinions of hockey provided by those less-informed Canadians who have never played are generally accepted as legitimate. (…) As all Canadians know, hockey can dominate a community, including the allocation of public funds as money flows towards hockey arenas and away from other cultural options. Hockey's rise to prominence is aided by the removal, or reduction of, other options.” (Blake 2007: 247f). Hockeyism is in effect in Canada.
Summing up this part of chapter three, I want to add another quote from Ken Baker's book *They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven* where the main character compares the features of the game to those of Christianity:

Why would they play hockey in heaven anyway? Hockey is one of the most unbiblical of sports. In hockey, you're not encouraged to turn the other cheek. In fact, you usually crack the other guy in the cheek before he cracks you. In hockey, it's all about what thou shalt do to win, not what thou shalt do to glorify God. Football and baseball are Christian havens, where end-zone genuflections and on-the-field player-huddles and pre-game prayers led by ministers are commonplace. You never see that in hockey. (…) I've seen rookie Jason Ralph get seventeen stitches sewn into his forehead. I've seen men cry from the kind of pain usually only seen on the military battlefield. I've seen men suffer dislocated shoulders, hip pointers, concussions, chipped teeth, bruised lungs, knee strains, broken jaws, broken fingers, and lacerated faces. I've seen a man cross-check another man face-first into the boards. Of course, they don't play hockey in heaven! It's a devilish sport, gritty, dirty, naughty, earthly pleasure. And that's why it is so much fun to play, and why I love the game. But, clearly, they don't play much hockey in heaven. (Baker 2004: 258)

“It turns that formidable icy surface that Europeans think of as nothing but death into a field of play. It brings together English, French, Native traditions, and then it produces a longer tale, a longer story across the generations that begin to play. We were the nation that was created when the game was created.” Richard Harrison in Episode 10, *Hockey: A People's History*
CHAPTER IV

“VIOLENCE”


IV.1) TOUGH IT OUT

The idea was to take it. (Beardsley 1997: 78)

In this fourth and last chapter of my thesis I want to go into detail about depiction and stories on the particular violence of hockey games in hockey literature. As we have read thus far, hockey counts among the fastest, toughest and most violent team sports in the history of the modern sports world. The violence, such as body-checks, board-crashes and fist fights, had been a part of the game from day one, enforcement and intimidation are basic tactics of play and, due to the speed of the puck and the force of the fully equipped and body-built heavyweight men armed with sticks on ice, injuries like lost teeth, broken ribs and cut faces became almost elementary and unavoidable in a player's career.

This is no secret even to the young learning to play the game. The most famous idol-players make no mystery about their scar faces and fake teeth, it is rather considered work-related, like a badge of honour and braveness. To become an established professional hockey player means to be able to tough out situations in which you get hurt and to put up with it in a detached and courageous way. It is also part of growing up with a hockey team and making a reputation of oneself, which is important to find ones place in the team. It includes bullying and harassment of the worst kinds that the kids have to 'tough out'.

The idea was to take it. Say you did do something in retaliation and somehow won – only a fantasy, because no one ever did win – say you called the police or your parents, you’d be decked after that every time you came around a corner, or worse. Stories in Chums Annual, or Triumph, or The American Boy where the little guy stood up to the bully and won were stupid. In real life there wasn’t an end to the story; it kept right on happening. There were two ways out: one was to put your head down and wait until they were through with you, and the other was
to grow big enough to join them. Or not. (Beardsley 1997: 78)

Similar to the experiences of the protagonist in Harlow's story, from the first day of organized hockey, the young players are physically and psychologically challenged to meet the expectations and stand up for themselves. This is a method of conditioning that is accepted and even estimated and rewarded in this environment. That has long been established in hockey culture.

What players, young and old, have to witness and are very likely to go through themselves in the course of a decade of organized hockey or more are injuries, inflicted through overly aggressive behaviour on the ice or simply through too much speed and bad luck, of serious forms. Incidents like these described in George Plimpton's story Open Net weren't all too fictional.

Gilles Gilbert, whose young, angel-face features suggested perhaps he had escaped the ravages of the puck, told that quite to the contrary: in three weeks’ time playing for the Three Rivers (Quebec) junior team he had lost all his top teeth when a defenseman ducked under a shot fired unseen from the point (...), all his bottom teeth two weeks later, and a week subsequent to that he had turned his head and lost part of his ear to a puck. He saw the piece lying on the ice and fell over in a faint. “That was the first time my parents saw me play,” he told me. (Kennedy 2003: 157)

Before the time of obligatory face masks for goalies, they were particularly vulnerable since shots were slapped furiously and the forwards came speeding towards the net often crashing themselves with puck and keeper into the goal. Rudy Thauberger illustrates a goalie's wrapping up career in her short story Goalie.

The injuries begin. Bruises. Sprains. His body betrays him. Too slow. Too clumsy. His ankles are weak, buckling under him. His muscles cramp. His nose bleeds. A nerve in his chest begins to knot and fray. No one understands. They believe he’s invulnerable, the fans, his team-mates. They stare at him blankly while he lies on the ice, white-blind, paralysed, as his knee or his toe or his hand or his chest or his throat burns. (Beardsley 1997: 214)

In reality, every player in the game can tell stories of witnessing or experiencing injuries and biting through pain and failure so that they seem to have become unavoidable and part of every player's coming of age. It's part of the game, and equally to the crime of losing, giving up and surrendering to the pressing danger of that fast and
On his second shift, however, Esselmont receives a harsh welcome to the pros when a Long Beach player inadvertently slashes him in the mouth. The blow smacks his lip against his upper front teeth, two of which crack. His teeth cut into his lip, blood squirting onto the ice like ketchup. Esselmont can only look down on the ice on all fours as he tries to regain his composure. As the pool of blood spreads, the referee blows the whistle, and Larry sprints out to Esselmont and presses a towel to his face to sponge up the blood. In between the first and second period, one of the doctors, without using Novocain, will sew the cut on his lip with five stitches; the two chipped teeth will be capped next week. Nonetheless, Esselmont returns to the ice for the rest of the game. In most walks of life, if you get smashed in the face so bad that you need stitches and dental work, there's a good chance you'll take, at least, a week off from work. Esselmont only misses ten minutes. (Baker 2004: 134)

In this autobiographical sports book, at one point the author even compares his experiences with hockey injuries to things one might see on the front-line military hospital, including pain-inflicted cries of players and blood soaked jerseys. In his book *They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven* he includes also an anecdote of his former colleague who seems close to having to end his career after an on-ice accident.

I ask him what happened, and he says he doesn't remember anything, but everyone said it was one of the scariest things they'd ever seen in pro hockey. Early in the second period, Ryan lined up for a face-off in our end. Our centre won the draw and the puck trickled back to the boards. Ryan skated toward the puck with his head down, and as he scooped it with his stick, a Tacoma checked him hard against the glass. Ryan was immediately knocked unconscious, and his helmet popped off. The momentum of the blow knocked him backward, and the back of his head slammed violently against the ice. He lay face up and knocked out on the ice for over a minute. Looch, afraid that Ryan wasn't breathing, knelt next to him and shouted at him to wake up. Larry leapt onto the ice and the first thing he did was put his head near his nose to check for breathing. He was. “The first thing I remember is sitting up in the locker room and not knowing where I was,” Ryan says, “I recognised Larry and, being that I was sweaty and in hockey gear, I put two and two together, that I had been hurt in a game, but, Kenny, it was a very, very scary feeling. (...) It was as if all my memories for the past year were gone and I was scared as hell.” (Baker 2004: 240)

Board checks are the most dangerous in hockey and are frequently punished and penalized. Two plus two minutes on the penalty bench or even ten minutes and
disqualification from the game are given in more serious and intentional attacks like such. Anyway, these crashes into the boards are also unavoidable at the speed the skaters can attain and, in the course of an offensive move, body checks are necessary and the defenders' job.

Rough play and ensuing altercations are highlighted elements in the game as in the literature on the game. Body-checking and fisticuffs "had not been a feature of the original game, but made its appearance soon after. It had to do with an often small ice surface (…); the unavoidable result would be frequent if inadvertent collisions.” (Dryden 2005: 245). The inadvertence of such crashes and rows as depicted in hockey literature and in the quotes above is not objected, but definitely included and used in order to express the raucous action in a written way. About that matter, Jason Blake replies that “the schoolyard argument that the fight ‘just happened,’ arose spontaneously for no apparent reason, is insufficient for explaining hockey violence in general, though tempting and often accurate for an individual confrontation. In literature, on the other hand, violence is no accident. Even if the fights resemble those we have witnessed or been in as hockey players, the author has chosen to include, depict and shape a particular type of violence in words.” (Blake 2007: 84).

The confrontations between opponents does not necessarily have to become violent. In many such cases of collisions the players also just get up and skate in opposite directions, it's mostly the heat of the game and the presence of special enforcers on the ice that take to their fists and drop gloves and helmets, which at some point becomes eligible in the game's development. Certain players' role it is to fight when it may change the trend of the game to their benefit. Every fight makes a difference and has an impact, and thus it became a part of the game. Blake considers that "it is the presence of fighting which differentiates professional hockey in North America from all other ball games and to which it owes its reputation as a violent game; hockey literature generally thematizes violence by considering the role of fighting in the game, and the general acceptance of fighting as an understandable, natural, and even required part of the game.” (Blake 2007: 86).

Quite a few stories about hockey and its players focus on the violence in the game and the enforcers on the ice. One of those stories is Roy MacGregor's novel *The Last Season*, about a hockey 'goon' called Felix Batterinski, whose last name could be translated as “the happy batterer”, a Canadian with Polish roots who grew up in Northern Ontario. In the course of the novel he becomes the most dreaded player of the
Philadelphia Flyers who win the Stanley Cup twice with him, but his story is ultimately a tragedy, struggling with his heritage and environment throughout and eventually ending up as a pro player in Finland, perspective-less and paranoid. Hughes-Fuller observes that "Felix Batterinski is a member of the category euphemistically known as ‘New Canadians’ and his Polish-immigrant father, whom he loves deeply, is a source of embarrassment to the acne-ridden and emotionally embattled teenager who hopes to become a professional hockey player.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 60). But his lack of talent and skill on the ice force him into the role of the fighting brute of his team, a development he is well aware of and which he takes as his only chance to make it in the big league. While he is celebrated and rewarded for his actions on the ice, his personal life fades into callousness and his personal relationships and self-respect deteriorates. "He (Felix Batterinski) makes violence his career and thereby suffers from what David L. Vanderwerken, in an article on MacGregor's novel, calls ‘Terminal Adolescent Syndrome.’ Growing pains remain with this player: ‘The ice becomes Batterinski's refuge, where his monstrousness not only is approved, but also economically rewarded’” (Vanderwerken 1993, 46). (Blake 2010: 110).

**Fighting and violence are often depicted as a route chosen because of failure, or of being a less talented player.** (Blake 2007: 139)

IV.2) ONLY A GAME

...this lie perpetuated that myth: that the win was the consequence of superior skills rather than of an aberrant rush into brute force. (Beardsley 1997: 249)

In hockey literature violence is an accepted element of the game often described as brutal and rapid, for some necessary and spectacular, for others immoderate and unessential. Hanford Woods, author of the short story *The Drubbing of Nesterenko*, describes hockey fights rather as resembling “Burlesques”, ridiculous rituals followed by uninspired players, in his book. This quotation here delineates his view on the role and effect of violence in the game of ice hockey:
The hockey player is an innocent who believes that it is important to win, who will risk a lot of himself in many different ways to reach that end. People who find hockey brutal are unnecessarily squeamish; like the players, for the purpose of argument, they forget that hockey is only a game, a stylised activity, a grossly distorted, incomplete miniature of life with all sorts of illusory goals and rewards attached to it. Hockey fights, even the worst of them, are burlesques. A player has to lose his head before anything real takes place, and what then happens has nothing to do with hockey. (Beardsley 1997: 246f)

And here he presents an interesting comparison with a real life situation:

A man gets up each day and drives to work, in the evening he drives home. This is a pleasant charade, more or less like a hockey game. Reality is only admitted into this world when, crossing an intersection, his car is rammed by the reckless fool who has run a red light. Even then, it's rare if anything serious happens. The principals climb from their cars, the one angry at the other, the other angry with himself, they exchange insurance cards, wait for the police to arrive, worry over their cars. (Beardsley 1997: 246f)

In a way, it's suggested, two hockey players who fight for the puck in a game follow a similar pattern of behaviour, in a hockey context:

Two players clash for the puck in hockey, one tries to gain advantage by holding the other's stick, the latter retaliates with an elbow in the neck, the former drops his stick and gloves, the latter follows suit, they begin a foolish bout of punching, shoving and grabbing. The object is to pull your opponent's sweater over his head and administer a good drubbing and publicly humiliate the resultant mummy. The linesmen intervene, generally before the end has accomplished itself in its full glory. The fight becomes a clownish wrestling match. The players, finally separated, menace and growl, unable to get at one another. They don't really want to, the thing has blown over, but they must blindly follow rituals. By performing in this tedious denouement they console themselves that their pride is intact. So in this world turned vain and idle, is honour maintained. (Beardsley 1997: 246f)

I think this paragraph brings up interesting views on the “foolish”, even childish, behaviour of fighting hockey players, “clownish wrestling” and maintaining their own and their team's honour by “punching, shoving and grabbing”. The seriousness of possible injuries here are purposely disarmed and the action specified as something totally measurable and silly, and, to Wood's narrator, even “tedious”. Here, the reader might think, ‘is this all only a game?’ - yes, but there are written and unwritten rules, and there are ignorance and jeopardy.

Another story that Jason Blake discusses in his dissertation *Ice Hockey as a Cultural*
Symbol in Canadian Prose, Lynn Coady's 2002 novel Saints of Big Harbour, brings up this topic of rules and learned behaviour encouraging fighting on the ice as a course of action and ritual. The child-narrator Guy is forced into the position of the hockey enforcer on the ice and fighting becomes his main occupation. After he quits the game, instead of trying other options of play, he gets confronted by another older boy in school.

The ex-hockey player Guy remarks, “I got the crap beaten out of me, worse than ever in my life” and then compares the incident with a hockey-related, albeit off-ice attack the year before: “Even that guy from the dance last spring wasn't that bad. At least I knew what it was about (...). It was about hockey, so it made sense” (ibid., 151f). Guy's laconic and nonchalant “it made sense” is humorous because it so baldly states that violence and abuse in hockey is allowed, understandable and therefore acceptable. It is another shade of the myth of hockey being a world apart, one in which violence can be both expected and forgiven. (Blake 2007: 116)

Fighting is something players experience, learn and get accustomed to throughout their hockey education in a way that life besides hockey may seem a lot more difficult to encode or understand in terms of violence that can make “sense”.

In Doug Beardsley's short story The Sheer Joy of Shinny the author portrays that game, “Shinny”, as the kind of hockey that is not taken as seriously but still has an important recognition and reputation for Canadians, in the way that it “didn't matter and yet we all knew it did”, the kind of play that was really “only a game”. In that following quote thereof I find an adequate excerpt to what's so fun about tough play and what justifies the development of violence in a persuasive way:

It gave him a healthy disposition toward checking virtually absent in hockey today. He became accustomed to it and in a strange way looked forward to it. Handing out a good check is a wonderful feeling. There's nothing quite so clean and satisfying as knocking someone entirely of their feet with a good check when they least expect it. (Kennedy 2003: 19)
The very freedom of sport, the metaphorical escape from everyday life, becomes an entrance into a violent other world. (Blake 2010: 132)

In the development and evolution of modern hockey the written rules had constantly been processed in order to keep it the spectacle that it is and guarantee some basic safety for the players involved. Still, these rules are frequently broken and the penalty bench continually occupied. In this part 3) of this chapter IV want to discuss examples of such situations depicted in hockey literature where the players simply deny rules and act above them, where rules are just not applying any more and the game just breaks into havoc and chaos and where the motivation and consequences are made clear.

Retaliation is an unwritten rule. If one of the players on your team is being attacked irregularly and the referees fail to react it is his line's partners' job to retaliate in order to keep up the balance and demonstrate unity. In Stenson's story Teeth this is what happens as one player attacks the other teams star-player:

Then, it happens. Steve Burke, who has been on the ice for every Montreal goal, goes nuts. He boards the Canadiens’ superstar right-winger so hard a pane of plexi-glass falls out into the crowd. The super-star drops as if shot and does not move. The rest is axiomatic. Two of the Montreal players go for Burke with sticks up and threatening. One of our boys goes in to even up the odds. The referees race over to try and prevent total war. Fat chance. The super-star still isn’t moving. His eyes are closed. He may be dead. All the Montreal players come storming off the bench which means that all our players must storm off the bench too. (Beardsley 1997: 137)

This is a true unwritten rule I have personally witnessed during games when such an illegitimate attack happens. The whole team will become involved and the coach sends all of his players on the ice to stop the game and show presence and the will and ability to fight for retaliation and justice as a team. It also happens in reality that several fights break out on the ice, eventually even the two goalies of the opposite ends get a chance to fight each other, which really is a hilarious sight to see. In these cases a pause or break of 20 to 30 minutes and several penalties are not unusual. In Europe, if there is blood on the ice the fighting player gets disqualified for the rest of the game and all other fighters get two or five minutes for rough play. A century ago the referees had to judge similar
attacks. Don Reddick writes in his short story based on an actual event that "in those
days it was up to the referee to decide how long a penalty was. For your everyday slash
or trip, you had a minute coming, if a guy intentionally tried to kill someone (...) fifteen,
twenty minutes wasn’t unusual.” (Kennedy 2003: 101).

Hanford Woods' story *The Drubbing of Nesterenko* is about the players Eric
Nesterenko of the Chicago Blackhawks and his Montreal Canadiens opponent called
John Ferguson of the 1960s. The latter is characterised as follows:

He took his fighting role seriously, he sincerely believed it was a basic ingredient
in the Montreal Canadiens’ winning formula. Canadiens fans, players, coaches
agreed with his conviction, forgetting that before his time and without similar
brawling talents the team won five consecutive Stanley Cups. (Beardsley 1997:
244)

The so-called “drubbing” of Nesterenko actually took place, more than once
(http://www.hockeyfights.com/fights/70620) and the author describes Ferguson's
fighting style:

He dropped his stick and was punching with a quickness incredible in one so
clumsy. He hit automatically, as though working out on a speed bag. With his left
hand holding the enemy jersey he threw overhand rights into the captive face. The
psychological victory was a consequence of the head-bashing. He entered each
fight with an absolute confidence in his ability to win it, though he rarely mixed
with the other good fighters in the league (...). He seemed a completely mindless
brute, though after the fight, something like a vain exultation rose to his sturdy,
coarse face. Then he became almost self-conscious. He continued to disregard his
opponent, but he was always a little embarrassed while skating to the penalty box,
his head bowed under the storm of adulation and abuse his bouts occasioned.
Before he entered the penalty box he would straighten his sweater, adjust his
elbow and shoulder pads and look up at the clock. They were nervous rituals: his
sweater did not need straightening, the clock had nothing to tell him. The wide
berth his fights created made him uncomfortable. (Beardsley 1997: 245)

Woods depicts a player who is mainly deployed for his fighting ability and
intimidation talent as an enforcer. He chooses to do so because it is that myth of the
game that strength and toughness can compensate for talent in hockey, and it ”is
therefore understandable that ‘fighting becomes the tolerated channel’ for releasing
aggression – even if it overlooks other ways of releasing aggression such as ‘skating
faster’ or ‘shooting harder’” (Blake 2007: 100).
In a story about similar violence in a game, Don Gutteridge in his novel *Bus ride* illustrates a situation where his protagonist Bill is hit by his opponent who he knew he had to watch out for:

Danulchuck’s thwarted, avenging elbow found relief at last against our hero’s thoughtful brow. Then the fleshy thud of a stick-butt-ended against bone. Bill saw or heard none of this. Pain flashed through him, he was falling, he was on his knees, struggling to get back up, a fire on the left side of his head. And here, on the smudged ice, a patch of blood, a scarlet badge of defeat oozing into the snow, spreading and visible. His blood. Sudden shame. He stayed on his knees, dizzy, not wanting to get up. (Beardsley 1997: 114)

His comrades step on the ice and come in to help settle the conflict and the spectators' reaction to that hit fires them up:

The crowd was attempting to assist them.
“Skin him alive!”
“Kill the bastard!”
“Cut out his Yankee guts!”
In fact they were becoming almost nasty and not a little dangerous, for Bill had struggled shakily to his skates, blood streaming down his left cheek, the scarlet pool at his feet widening, so that even those in the fifth row at the far end could see it despite the encompassing snow. (Beardsley 1997: 114)

When scenes and actions like these happen the crowd gets the loudest and call for retaliation in that ‘eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth’ tradition. Gutteridge purposely includes the reactions of the crowd because that's what makes the spectacular perfect, the noise of female and male voices calling for compensation and emotionally letting off steam. George Plimpton also includes such crowd exclamations in his story *Open Net*, of blood-thirsty spectators:

Someone called out, “Hey, Georgie, give them the Northland sandwich!”
“What's the Northland sandwich?”
“That's the brand name on your stick, for Chrissake... stick it in their teeth is what I'm saying!”
“Oh.” (Urstadt 2004: 45)

The taunting crowd wants to heat up the hatred of the opponents, motivating them to pursue a more violent and action-packed style of play, or show, if you will. In this story, George Plimpton is the protagonist himself, becoming part of the Boston Bruins, whose
fans are used to seeing an aggressive style of hockey by their team. When at training
camp, he learns about his fellow players:

"You’d better keep your eye on Schmautz,” I was told. “They have a nickname for
him – ‘Doctor Hook,’ or sometimes ‘The Scalper,’ and that’s for the way he carves
people up with his stick.” (…) I wanted to know, “Why would he do that to me.
After all, I’m on his team.” (Kennedy 2003: 174f)

This fictional anecdote, in a humorous way, illustrates the portion of violence existing
even at the own teams training camp and the crazy possibility of getting “scalped” by a
lunatic comrade. Quite a menace.

Another interesting anecdote about such rowdyish behaviour and entitlement to resort
to violence above any rules I found in Guy Lawson's story Hockey Nights, about young
players in a minor hockey league system, who try to make it to the NHL and get
attention by a very rough play, often above the rules, only following their own ones:

Meeks had explained his fighting technique to me back in Flin Flon: “I can't
punch the other guy first,” he said. “That's why I've got a lot of stitches. The other
guy always gets the first punch and then I get mad.” Meeks took the first punch
from Seventeen square in the jaw. Meek’s head jerked back. He grabbed
Seventeen by the collar and threw a long, looping, overhand right. He pulled
Seventeen's jersey over his head. Another shot, a right jab, an uppercut; switched
hands, a combination of lefts. A strange sound came from the audience, a
mounting, feverish cry; Seventeen was crumpling, arms flailing, as the linesmen
stepped in and separated the two. Meeks waved to his team-mates as he was led
off the ice by the officials to the screams of the Weyburn fans. (Urstadt 2004: 166)

The tactics used by these seventeen-year old players in this story are ignorant yet
tolerated and even expected in their league. The course of this action seems to be pre-
planned and anticipated by players, coaches and parents alike. The kids fight while their
fathers watch, like ancient Vikings, proud of their kids who are learning to kill. And it
leaves the kids with psychological and physical reminders. Ken Baker writes in his
autobiographical story They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven:

Later I get a good look a Josh's right hand and see that he has no visible knuckles.
Instead, where a normal person, say, someone whose living doesn't involve
pounding faces with fists, has five distinct bony knuckles, Josh has a heinous
mound of scar tissue. (…) I ask him what's the key to winning a hockey fight.
“Well, a lot of guys will tell ya, 'Oh, you gotta yank the guy's jersey over his
head,’ or ‘You have to rip off his helmet,’ or some shit like that. But it's actually more simple than that. Basically, it's hit or be hit. No one can punch you when they're getting their face smashed in.” (Baker 2004: 97)

Later in the story he reminisces about what he had seen ”at intermission, Goldie sits dazed at his stall with multiple knuckle marks all over his face. He keeps sniffling to keep the blood from running out of his nose and has stuck both hands into a bag of ice. This sport, I am reminded, is fucking brutal.” (Baker 2004: 139)

All of these examples above particularly describe the way violence is applied and executed in hockey and reproduced in literature. Unlike a boxing match where a fist fight is expected, exercised and planned, ”when hockey players fight – even if they have been told to fight by their coaches – there is always a sense that the violence is more intense because it is spontaneous and illicit. A hockey fight always looks like things had gotten out of control, and the ordered game-world has been given over to a purely animalistic masculinity.” (Blake 2007: 94). That behaviour is celebrated by the fans, and hungry for more, they call for further rule breaking action, since “for players and fans in the more ‘masculine’ sports, violence is not recognized as such because both parties have implicitly agreed that injury and bloodshed are possible, and the usual definitions of violence are set aside as we favour the arbitrary rules and conventions of sports.” (Blake 2007: 96). Violence and fighting in a hockey game are not in the rule book, but considered perfectly usual and justified, since everyone in the game agreed to apply such behaviour as tactics. And so these stories are also reflected in hockey literature.

All hockey fights have meaning and can be interpreted, but a fight in a hockey novel or story has more meaning because there is no possibility that it arose spontaneously. Since the novelist chose to include and shape the fight, the reader is invited to interpret and reflect on the role of aggression and violence both within the novel and within broader societal contexts. (Blake 2010: 91)

There are occasions when an aggressive style of play really results from the situation on the ice or in result of the trend of the game and is therefore understandable and justified. But, also, sometimes the tough guys among the teams, the enforcers, are instructed by their coaches to go at special players on the other team in order to take them out. Such tactics have been said to have made use of in Bobby Orr's time with the Boston Bruins. He was known for his weak knees and the opposing teams sent out enforcers who were told to attack his weakness. That's what Ken Baker calls ”the ugly
side of hockey – that is, the side where an opposing team, whether instructed by their coach to or not, tries to further injure a player to take him out of the game.” (Baker 2004: 204).

As the old hockey joke goes, “I went to the fights last night and a hockey game broke out.” Translation: fights are the norm, the expected, rather than the exception in our national game. (Blake 2007: 85)

IV.4) ENTERING AN ALTERCATION

A hockey fight is a microcosm of the game itself. Parity is the rule and it is often the fight, not the fighter, that determines who wins. (Fischler 1999: 170)

However justified or wrongful these blow-ups between players might be, since they happen so frequently, there are rules that two fighting players adhere to in order to keep it counterbalanced and ‘fair’. It becomes particularly complicated when, as I mentioned in part IV.3) above, the whole team gets sent onto the ice in order to show strength and the will to step in in retaliation for an attack on a colleague. Plimpton explains such rules at some point in his novel Open Net:

Physical pressure was what made one team dominate another. (...) And that, too, was why Cherry kept emphasising the team togetherness, even urge the players to break the third-man rule, which was that players could not break into a fight between two opponents without incurring heavy fines and penalties. The official wording for this is “entering an altercation”. The French-Canadians refer to a bench clearing as a bagarre générale. The rules are very rough on the bagarre générale. In theory, two linesman can handle a fight between two hockey players, but when seventeen men from each team get on the ice with their gloves off, things tend to get really out of hand. It was rare, even with the Bruins, that this rule was broken, because the fines came out of one's own pocketbook... but to hear it so obviously flaunted in a locker room tirade made a player feel sacrosanct: he was being told he was one who was above all the rules. (Urstadt 2004: 46f)

As far as the official position of the authorities is concerned, it is again Ken Dryden who addresses that issue in his book The Game:
The NHL theory of violence goes something like this: Hockey is by its nature a violent game. Played in an area confined by boards and unbreakable glass, by players carrying sticks travelling at speeds approaching thirty miles per hour, collisions occur, and because they occur, the rules specifically permit them, with only some exceptions. But whether legal or illegal, accidental or not, such collisions can cause violent feelings, and violent feelings with a stick in your hands are dangerous, potentially lethal feelings. It is crucial, therefore, that these feelings be vented quickly before anger and frustration explode into savage overreaction, channelled towards, if not desirable, at least more tolerable, directions. In essence, this is Freud's 'drive-discharge' theory of human aggression. (Dryden 2005: 217)

He continues his line of thought and introduces other models that support a critical view towards the violence in operation, suggesting that, “... the NHL is wrong because if Freud was right, anthropologist Desmond Morris is also right. As Morris believes, anger released, though sometimes therapeutic, is sometimes inflammatory; that is, by fighting, two players may get violent feelings out of their systems, or, by fighting they may create new violent feelings to make further release (more fighting) necessary. If Freud was right, the NHL is also wrong believing as it does that fighting and stick-swinging represent the only channels by which violent feelings can be released. Anger and frustration can be released within the rules, by skating faster, by shooting harder, by doing relentless, dogged violence on an opponent's mind, as Bjorn Borg, Pete Rose, and Bob Gainey do. If Freud was right and anger released is anger spent, then a right hook given is a body-check missed, and by permitting fighting, the NHL discourages determined, inspired play as retaliation. (...) But Freud might be wrong. Anthropologist Richard Sipes thinks so. He has written that violence, instead of being a human potential requiring release, once released is learned and repeated, not cathartically purged anyway – in other words, violence feeds violence, fighting encourages more fighting. If Freud was wrong and Sipes right, the NHL is still wrong.” (Dryden 2005: 218).

These altercations in hockey games aren't only about releasing violent feelings, they are also entered strategically and deployed as a means of revenge or game domination tactics. Stan Fischler's book about enforcers in the NHL called Ultimate Bad Boys, which I will go into detail about in part IV.6), includes various recreations of such altercations such as this one from a game between the New York Rangers vs. the Philadelphia Flyers:

It was about as one-sided a fight as there could be. Schultz landed about 15 punches and a pretty good headbutt. Rolfe staggered off dazed and bloodied and
the Flyers went on to win the game, the series and the Stanley Cup. The Rangers were highly criticized for not jumping in and saving Rolfe. A look at the videotape, however, explains why they didn't. On the ice at the time for New York was their number one line – Jean Ratelle, Vic Hadfield and Rod Gilbert. The other defenseman was Brad Park, their top defenseman. None of them could afford to get thrown out. What they should have done was to send out Harris or Irvine on the next shift and take someone like Joe Watson and pound him. At least they could have gotten even that way. (Fischler 1999: 233)

The attitude portrayed in this anecdote is clearly that of the primitive 'eye for an eye' nature, and in the Seventies hockey was swayed with such instincts. Intimidation and machismo was at its peak in the game's history and such teams as the Rangers or the Boston Bruins were getting the best results out of that. In a game in 1970 between the two "one minute into the game, with a face-off in the Rangers' zone, Ranger goalie Ed Giacomin skated out to Sanderson and told him, 'we're going to get you tonight.' A few seconds later the puck went into the corner, and when Sanderson went after it, the Rangers jumped him and pounded him. The Bruins followed in and the brawl was on. That set the tone for the fight-filled game which the Rangers went on to win. The two teams accumulated what was then a league playoff record 174 penalty minutes." (Fischler 1999: 231). In the aftermath of the many violent outbursts of that era, the NHL was forced to introduce more resounding penalties, such as player suspensions and fines, so that "while a tough brand of hockey would continue to be played, 1976 was truly the last year when toughness was king in the NHL." (Fischler 1999: 235).

One of the wildest incidents of that “last year when toughness was king”, in Fischler's point of view, took place on April 11th, 1976, when the two Canadian teams of the Quebec Nordiques played against the Calgary Cowboys. The Nordiques had lost the previous match in their home town, so that the probability of a tough physical game had been foreseeable, but eventually the "brawl was so wild that twenty Quebec City policemen had to come out to the ice and try to break it up. Ten players were ejected and the first period took two hours to play. When the dust settled, Calgary recorded an 8-4 win. The next day Quebec was livid. The team sent a list of demands to the league saying that if they were not met, they would not fly to Calgary for game three. Quebec demanded Jodzio be suspended for life, Calgary coach, Joe Crozier be suspended for the year and WHA executive V.P. Bud Polie, who was the league representative at the game, be fired. The WHA agreed so that Quebec would finish the series, which they lost in
five games. In addition Gordie Gallant was also suspended for the rest of the series, Danny Lawson and Quebec coach Jean-Guy Gendron were suspended for one game and both teams were fined $ 25,000.” (Fischler 1999: 236).

Incidents like these were becoming fewer, but they did happen again, like on a day in 1984 at a play-off game between the Quebec Nordiques and the Montreal Canadiens, a day that came to be remembered as the Good Friday Massacre (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Friday_Massacre). Adding to the reputation of hockey being the most violent game were the television live-broadcasts following the rows and zooming in on the fighters and commenting on the ongoing action in an excited manner to the loudly cheering audience. These “punchfests” had become the ultimate spectacle in hockey, are being referred to as “hockey classics” to fans and hobby-hockey-historians and, as Hughes-Fuller suggest in her dissertation, “for Fiske and Hartley, sport is ‘ritualized conflict’ (145), which expresses the values of competitive capitalism. This, in part, accounts for television's tendency to focus on the individualistic and aggressive aspects of a particular sport and on winners rather than losers. Fighting in hockey is a good example. When an altercation breaks out between two or more players the camera zooms in to half-body shots of the antagonists, flailing wildly at each other, while the officials, and/or their team-mates, attempt to separate them.” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 189f).

...hockey has maintained its role as a ‘specific expression of culture in action’ (Laba 336). (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 3)

IV.5) DUBIOUS SPECTACLE

A team not blessed with flashy goalscorers can always sell tickets, and even win a few games, by promoting fighting. (Blake 2007: 130)

The spectacle of such a bench-clearing, or “bagarre générale”, fascinates the fans who fill the seats of the arenas in joyous anticipation of the next dropping of the gloves and outbursts of fights. That they therefore functioned as crowd-magnets and sold more tickets was a mixed blessing. To Dryden the "NHL theory of violence is nothing more than original violence tolerated and accepted, in time turned into custom, into spectacle,
into tactic, and finally into theory. (...) What matters is that fighting degrades, turning sport into dubious spectacle, bringing into question hockey's very legitimacy, confining it forever to the fringes of sports respectability” (Dryden 2005: 218). This juxtaposition of violence in sport being a degrading, dubious matter on the one hand and a capitalist commercially rewarding affair on the other is an issue debated and expressed in hockey literature to a great deal. Ken Baker's novel They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven portrays and elucidates the arguable role the player has at some point in the story:

Sasha doesn't even want to fight. “It's not worth it anymore,” he tells me. “Why should I get my head beat in, tear my shoulder, cut my hands in order to keep all these pussies from getting their faces beat in. Fuck them guys!” But, to our fans, Sasha is Hulk Hogan. They love it when he drops his gloves and, without even having to throw a punch, frightens players into skating away. It keeps the cheap shots down. They love it when he mocks the opposition with the chicken dance. They love it when they see him performing kung fu chops and kicks in warm-ups. Our general manager, Matt Riley, needs to fill the seats. Jonathan wants to make money. Unable to market our team as winners, Riley sees an economic opportunity in our resident wild man by selling hundreds of red T-shirts picturing Sasha's kung fu grip on the chest reading “Lethal Weapons”. Sasha is an entertainer. He is no longer playing for the team, or even for himself. He is a character in a one-man play. He is the mean, menacing muscle-head who can rile up fans in a single clench of the fist. (Baker 2004: 214)

In a rather humorous tone Baker includes an anecdote of that ‘hockey goon' Sasha in a conversation with another such player of an opposing team after a game, recreating the run offs of their recent fights and coming up with a smashing marketing idea. Sasha comes back “to the locker room to get dressed, and starts going on and on about how they should rename the WCHL the ‘XHL,’ and turn it into the pro hockey version of pro wrestling. 'I'm telling ya, man, the fans would eat it up,’ he says. ‘We could stage fights, play off a script, make it more entertaining. The fans are sick of seeing the same old games every night. They want to see fights and shit.’ He's either a total fool or a genius.” (Baker 2004: 217). It turns out in the following lines that the two had actually agreed to stage a fight during the next game, which they do, very much to the embarrassment of their team-mates and disgrace to their team-integrity but to the satisfaction of the cheering fans who have no idea what was being shown off for their spectating pleasure. To the narrator it was just ”a fucking farce. The knuckle-head theatre depresses me. I have worked so hard to be a pro hockey player, sacrificed everything in order to get a taste of real pro hockey. This is my eighth game in a pro uniform and, until now, it was
an achievement I was proud to have reached.” (Baker 2004: 218).

The fighting is controversial in many ways; it had developed and been part of the game from the first day, became tolerated, customized, applied as tactics and strategy resulting in the game acquiring a remarkable degree of popularity, yet it put the game’s legitimacy and respectability in jeopardy. At some point, when “removed from the Canadian or NHL context and its naturalized history of violence, stripped of all rhetoric and motive, hockey fights are reduced to groups of Canadians abusing one another for the entertainment of the Other.” (Blake 2007: 89). The violence would become the “essential attractive feature of hockey” for many spectators going to the games, and that would repel others who do not understand how the rules are set. In this context, Blake also mentions Aristoteles and his conclusion in Poetics, that ”our emotions are manipulated by actors playing out a rhythmic script. The spectator identifies with the characters on stage, suffers by proxy and then leaves the fake tragedy behind”, and then compares sport and theatre, saying “sports violence is rather real than feigned. For this reason, Allen Guttmann argues that ‘even the most 'dramatic' ball game is very different from the experience that Aristotle analyses in the Poetics' and he is therefore doubtful of the 'concept of catharsis as it relates to sports' (Guttmann 1992, 157). The tamest hockey game contains more actual aggression than MacBeth” (Blake 2007: 102). Additionally, hockey fights became so popular that best-of clips were regularly shown on national television. ”Being praised by Cherry on Hockey Night in Canada or, better, making it into his video for a fight, is a very public stamp of approval for a certain type of hockey and a sure way of establishing, or accentuating, one's masculine image.” (Blake 2010: 114). Don Cherry, former hockey player and coach in Canada, and now host of popular Canadian shows like Hockey Night in Canada and Coach's Corner on CBC Television, is one of the opinion-leading advocates of violence and a tough, ‘Canadian’ way of playing hockey. His collections of NHL hockey highlights, called “Don Cherry's Rock'Em Sock'Em Hockey”, include the best and wildest fights, and sold millions of copies in the Nineties and contributed largely to the mass phenomenon of hockey violence fascination in Canada and outside its borders.

At least since Baudelaire, dandyism has been associated with nostalgia (Howells xv) and this too applies to Cherry, who freely acknowledges the ‘retro’ character of his dress. (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 152)
The stage is set for a new breed of player and the rise of professional Hockey.

(Episode 1, Hockey: A People's History)

In almost every team-sport each player has his own special position, on the field, in the team and during the game's moves due to his size, talent or other specification. In soccer there's the central forward, in football there's a quarterback, in baseball there's a pitcher, and in hockey you have the enforcer. Though the role is not quite as official as the aforementioned, it does exist and has been cited in hockey literature. Some of their functions include the body-guarding of the most valuable players on the team, like for instance what Dave Semenko did for his players in the Edmonton Oilers including Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier and Jari Kurri: making sure they get their space on the ice by intimidating the opponents and stepping in as soon as there's any tension or danger of an altercation (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Semenko). They also protect their goalies in front of the net making sure that they don't get attacked or injured by opponents. Not rarely they resort to very aggressive responses and fighting and tough play are their specialities.

In this part 6) I want to demonstrate and display the mentality of such enforcers, in quotations from Stan Fischler's 1999 book Ultimate Bad Boys and basically introduce some of those “bad boys” and what they think about their job on the ice. The quotes from the following millionaire hockey players should illuminate the seriousness of tough play in hockey as it has developed over the years. In the early years, the NHL's post-expansion era after 1967, players had been employed for their particular fighting skills, with less value put on their skating and scoring talent. In time the game demanded more well-rounded players who could do it all, skate, score and fight. Peter Gzowski, in his book The Game of Our Lives, states that "the teams we had admired most fervently as youngsters had played the game savagely, and many of our idols, (...) were renowned for violence. What seemed to differentiate the new wave of enforcers was the fact that they could do nothing else. Traditionally, the man who protected his team-mates was also expected to score twenty goals, or play a solid defence. In the post-expansion era, he could only brawl.” (Gzowski 2004: 81). Ken Dryden on the other hand suggests that those "with memories of the 1920s or 1930s, or before, will insist there were more serious incidents of violence in other times. Perhaps so. But it was in the late 1940s that
a pattern of violence entered the game. For the first time, it became part of the regular play. And when it wasn't removed, it only meant it would get worse. The nature of violence, the emerging style of play, guaranteed it.” (Dryden 2005: 253).

Here's what the best-paid enforcers themselves think about it.


Rough play is always going to be part of the game. But the game has changed in recent years and that change has been significant. Players who have that (enforcers) role in today's game also must be able to play and to have a vital role on their team. They can't be there just to fight. Nowadays, most of that type of player can play the game, not just fight. (Fischler 1999: 25)


How would I describe my style? I'm an aggressive player. I try to get things going during the game. Once the puck is dropped, I'm out there throwing bodychecks and getting some flow going. When that kind of play happens, there's always a chance of a fight. My fighting technique? I'm a smart fighter. I take my time and like to take control of the opponent before I land some punches. I don't think I'm the toughest guy, or the guy who takes the most punches. I have to be careful and take the punches at the right place. I think out there when I'm fighting. I take my time. (Fischler 1999: 27)

It's all about respect but there's also a lot of smarts involved. I consider myself a smart fighter. Sometimes I won't go right away. I'd rather wait for the next shift and get the job done well. When I'm tired, I just go out there and hold on to the other guy. In a situation like that, I can't afford to make a mistake because that mistake can cost me. (…)

It happened to me once in Junior hockey. A little guy was bugging me, putting his hands in my face. I just snapped and started punching him around. You don't gain any respect doing that but you do gain respect from this one guy. After that, I knew that he would stay away from me. Fights can produce interesting reactions. I can remember an exhibition game against Edmonton when I beat up a couple of guys in one game. After that, I got a lot of respect. I could skate around the rink with the puck and had a lot of time to do things. I scored two goals that game. (Fischler 1999: 31)

Outsiders who look at players like me often have misconceptions. The usual image that enforcers have is of being very mean, nasty people. But when I'm not on the ice, I'm not a mean person. I like everybody – the fans, everything about
hockey. On the other hand, there are times when I won't feel like talking to anybody. When that happens, some people might consider me mean. Because of my background – I did not grow up with my real parents – I have had some problems with communication. I kept everything inside. It was hard. If I had a problem, I had to solve it myself. I was always taking the hard way and still do sometimes. Because of my childhood, I had a tendency to do things the wrong way. (Fischler 1999: 32)


I've always been kind of a little spazzy, but I never thought I'd be fighting as part of my living. But it's the way to play in this league and I have to do it. (Fischler 1999: 34)

I don't think it is necessarily glorified. Fighting is needed in the league to protect the smaller players. We're a bunch of men out there playing a physical game and tempers flare. If it happens, it happens. And if they show it on TV, big deal.

(...) We're looked at basically just as goons, but we're really pretty normal, nice guys off the ice. On the ice, we play mean because that's the way we have to play. (Fischler 1999: 35)

Everyone is going to lose a fight at one time or another. Obviously, I'm mad at myself when it happens, but there's nothing I can do if a guy hits me on the chin and I go down. Or if I get a little cut on the nose and it looks like I lost – I might not have but that's the way it goes. That's the way it works sometimes. When I win obviously I'm a lot happier. I feel like I did something really good for the team and when I win against a tough guy I feel really good. I might be better at it than he was just that one time. (Fischler 1999: 36)

_Kris Draper_ (Detroit Red Wings 1993-2011)

I'm not a fighter, but I've had a couple of fights and I don't think there's anything wrong with it. You have a fight, you go in the box for five minutes and that's it. I think it's part of hockey and it always has been. (...) Most of the fighters are character players, and you need character players to be successful in this league. Fighters fight each other, they don't pick on smaller players.

I don't see myself as a player who wears a shield, and that is nothing against players who do wear shields. We have the right to choose. And I choose not to wear one. (...) I've had a lot of stitches, and I touch wood that nothing serious has happened to me. Every time I go out as a player, I see myself as a guy who just goes out and plays. I don't know why but I've never considered wearing a visor. (Fischler 1999: 48)

I think fighting is a part of the game. It will always be here and it should be. It keeps the game respectable and honest. It stops guys from being dirty and the fans like it. The guys that do it have respect for each other and know when they have to do it. (Fischler 1999: 52)

He (Owen Nolan) and I are almost the same personality. We fought in training camp and were roommates, too. So we would fight and then go home and watch a movie and laugh about it. I've seen guys fight and then end up at a restaurant talking to the guy they fought with. I think that's the special part about hockey: the respect I think players have for each other as people. It makes hockey players special the way they are. They leave it on the ice. (Fischler 1999: 53)


Here's how it happened: a player on the other team ran into our goalie – or tripped into our goalie – during a tournament game. It was a weird scene for a couple of reasons. Number one: the fellow who dumped our goalie was a friend of mine even though he played for the other team. Number two: our fathers were sitting next to each other in the stands, watching the game. Anyway, we dropped the gloves and fought. The funny thing was that while we were fighting, our dads were just sitting there talking. To me, that was kind of strange. (Fischler 1999: 56)

What I do know – and what I learned along the way – is that I can't let myself get intimidated by anyone on the other side of the ice. If I get intimidated in advance, that is the time I will lose a fight. I can't let that happen and no one should let that happen. (Fischler 1999: 58)

Once I stopped obsessing about the fights, I began to feel better about myself. I realised that being a well-rounded player is the goal I should be striving for because it would be better for me as a big-leaguer. It would be better for my career and certainly provide me with longevity. (Fischler 1999: 59)


Why did I do it? We had been told to stand up for our team-mates. If someone touched our goalie, we had to jump in. If there was a scrum, I was there. This philosophy was embedded in me at an early age. Team-mates appreciate when players like myself stick up for them. I got respect and felt good about myself
because I did something positive for my team. I could feel it from the rest of the guys. (Fischler 1999: 62)


The “rule” is pretty simple: if the fellow on the other club starts taking liberties, I say, “Hey, don't be hitting anybody else or we're going to go.” That was defined for me in Junior hockey. Fighting was going to be part of my game and if not fighting then banging somebody, or hitting someone in the face or trying to do something to agitate the other side. (Fischler 1999: 67)


The odd thing about tough guys is that the average fan misunderstands them. Fans have the idea that enforcers are bullies and that's not really the case. They are all really tough, true, but they are all really nice guys. And very well-liked on their teams. (Fischler 1999: 75)

**Bryan Marchment** *(Winnipeg Jets, Chicago Blackhawks, Hartford Whalers, Edmonton Oilers, Tampa Bay Lightning, San Jose Sharks, Colorado Avalanche, Toronto Maple Leafs, Calgary Flames, 1989-2006)*

In terms of actual fighting, the dropping of the gloves is not a very much intimidating factor anymore. There isn't anyone in the league I won't drop my gloves with to go to the aid of a team-mate but there isn't much sense in the dropping my gloves if, after punishing a guy with a hit, they send out an enforcer who might get a penalty going after me. I'm a lot happier to let them go after me and get two or four or even five minutes in penalties. (Fischler 1999: 88)


Tough guys respect other tough guys. Sure, you beat each others brains out on the ice, but after the game you shake hands and go out for a beer. That's the way it is with hockey players but a lot people don't understand that. (Fischler 1999: 93)

These quotations make no pretension that fighting in hockey was unreal or harmless, in fact, all of these statements prove the point that violence is agreed, accepted and
applied in the course of the games and established in the self-concepts of the enforcers. Their role is universally understood and natural, even considered necessary. What Blake comprehends from the words of Don Cherry is that, "basing his arguments on experience and ‘common sense’ rather than theory, he argues that emotions will inevitably boil over in hockey and that fighting is simply the best way of letting off steam. (...) More formally: ‘The catharsis hypothesis suggests that fighting in sports provides controlled and symbolic outlets for aggression that might otherwise manifest itself in more serious forms' (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, 177). (...) The argument is that, since attacks and retaliation are inevitable, they should take the form of straightforward fist fights, in which both players are on the alert. Many involved in professional hockey, from players to fans, from owners to referees, agree with this, and it is the unstated point of departure for hockey fiction that considers violence.” (Blake 2007: 99f). Hughes-Fuller includes her view on the gender issues of these behavioural patterns on the ice, and adds that "hockey violence existed in the early years of the game and, despite rules against fighting, if anything it has escalated in the time since then. While I agree with feminist thinking regarding the link between patriarchal cultures and institutionalised violence, I think it would be a mistake to argue that hockey violence is simply an expression of the players' 'maleness’” (Hughes-Fuller 2002: 140).

*Tactics, tactics and ritual; hockey isn’t a game but a complex set of rituals.* (Beardsley 1997: 124f)

IV. 7) THE WAY TO PLAY

The final quotes I want to mention in this chapter, are concerned with the violence as part of the game, and an even established certain way to play, namely an unwritten rule that includes and approves the use of fists and rough play and all its consequences. Whether ironically speaking, or not, Jason Blake affirms that "the hockey smile (i.e. the missing incisors and canines thematized in Fred Stenson's *Teeth*) and scars may be the unofficial part of the hockey uniform, but they cannot be taken off and left in the dressing room” (Blake 2007: 142). In other contexts, these scars and tooth gaps would definitely mark somebody's failure or weakness, even illness, but in hockey, they are proud reminders and markers of toughness, pride and conviction. In this game, and the
literature about it, we find tendencies of incorrectness that had, from the first day of
official hockey, inspired and fascinated players and fans, and polarized, divided and
united groups of people from any social, political or cultural background.

In Dave Bidini's short story about the Chicago Blackhawks his main character, the
narrator Charlie Gardiner, explains:

I also used to love hockey until I played in heaven, in a game where everyone
threw a clean check, scored a pretty goal and made a great play that saved the
friggin’ day, which is fine if you like shooting fish in a barrel. (Quarrington 1996:
13)

It is a perfect example of the reality of the early hockey players. The cities they came
from, Chicago, Detroit or Boston, Montreal, Toronto or Quebec, were no places like
heaven. Those were steel, mining and industrial factory towns, whose workers engaged
in the game primarily. They shared a great love for the game, tough old-time hockey. No
helmets and bad salaries were accepted and the Depression of the 30ies added its ordeal
to the teams. That's when most of the rules were being perfected and the NHL soon was
the only successful leftover league. And the rough play was what made it successful for
a grand part.

Ken Dryden augments that the "violence of our game is not so much the innate
violence in us as the absence of intervention in our lives. We let a game follow its
intuitive path, pretending to be powerless, then simply live with its results. The game
now has more Americans and Europeans who play it, it is trained and developed more
often in schools and universities, yet its conservative culture remains.” (Dryden 2005:
263). He ponders about the possibilities of changing the game and its rules, to eradicate
the violence from the game, but to whose advantage? When the one thing that draws the
crowds en masse into the arenas is being permitted, how will it turn out, how would fans
react? Hockey has a tradition as a rough game and the responsibilities are in the hands
of officials, businessmen and team-owners, who I just assume are in their position
because and for their love of hockey, whether they are American, European or Asian.
Hockey has expanded from where it began. What made it such an attraction in Canada made it an attraction elsewhere. The speed, the ice, the equipment, the sound of slapshots reverberating through the arena, the freezing breath from burning exhausted lungs, the smell of the locker rooms - it all adds up to the unique spell that hockey casts.

“What you're looking to do is to raise the emotional level to a point where you just generate more and more energy, an energy that generates more possibility. And you do things beyond what your mind ever imagines.” Ken Dryden in Episode 7, Hockey: A People's History
CONCLUSION

_In little more than a hundred years this game born of winter, of survival, has come to be the soul of a nation._ Episode 10, _A People's History_

This is the final part of my thesis, which is, predictively, in many ways incomplete and subjective, but illustrating a vital and exciting branch of literature that encourages more research and discourse. In this brief conclusion I want to encapsulate my findings and arguments of the four previous chapters. By investigating hockey literature, I have found that the proposition that it is a Canadian game is assumed to be self-evident. Its evolution and success can be directly linked to the land and the people living in it, its influence on the national identity is beyond dispute. The teams of the early NHL, the Original Six, had traditions of mine, mill and factory workers that were characters who would shape the way hockey players would behave and look, creating a life style and reputation that would stick.

Summing up, the many attractive features of hockey - for kids, to learn how to skate, to go really fast and run over one another, to chase pucks and shoot them over the ice with sticks; for the professional player, the speed and quick passing, to commit oneself to the team, to push to limits, to excel at the athletic and artistic demands of the game; for the passionate fan, to follow the accelerated action, to root for the local team, to chant in unison, to overcome racial and socio-political boundaries – are phrased and recorded in hockey literature. In Canada the game had become one of the main cultural devices that balances a Canadian sense of national identity. It provides heroes and characters that carry with them the pride of a nation and symbolize the will and power to win. Hockey entered culture, literature, language, politics and almost every other aspect of Canadian national partitions.

Of course, hockey had also developed into an internationally successful business which is also picked out as a theme for writers, especially the steps taken towards making it. When Wayne Gretzky left Canada and brought his talent and business to the United States many Canadian teams struggled to pull through. To obtain a career in professional hockey is an extraordinary challenge and I think autobiographical stories such as Ken Baker's _They Don't Play Hockey in Heaven_ or Peter Gzowski's _The Game of Our Lives_ demonstrate most impressively the conflicts and objections of those who made it and those who tried it. The benefits of hockey are on principle matched with its
adversities in hockey literature, especially when it comes to matters of remuneration and revenue. What has become of the game from an outdoor leisure activity to a sold out stadium attraction is stirring up emotions in hockey discourse.

Furthermore, I have found that hockey is a sport that provides a shared experience for a huge group of people. The stadiums are high temples where nothing but the game counts and anyone familiar with sticks and pucks is invited to join in the discourse. Hockey literature is an immediate product of that culture and lots of work had been written on the topic. Matters of race and descent are being replaced by a player's value on the ice. Patricia Hughes-Fuller describes as an “imagined community” in her dissertation and people are brought together to form a “collective identity”. Hockey is a rich field of wisdom and traditions, experience and education, and there's plenty to be explored in literature. It's rooted firmly in the culture of the people and the land and every day life aspects get linked to hockey tactics, sometimes metaphorically, but also literally.

In order to express the raucous action on the ice during games in a written way the inadvertence of violence is not objected, but definitely included and used in hockey literature. Violence and fighting in a hockey game are not in the rule book, but considered perfectly usual and justified, since everyone in the game agreed to apply such behaviour as tactics. And so these stories are also reflected in hockey literature. The fighting is controversial in many ways; it had developed and been part of the game from the first day, became tolerated, customized, applied as tactics and strategy resulting in the game acquiring a remarkable degree of popularity, yet it put the game's legitimacy and respectability in jeopardy.

This thesis was intended to illustrate a rather young branch of literature that deserves to cast light upon and inspire further introspection and research. What the game of hockey had come to add up for the people in Canada and the rest of the world where winters are long, cold and icy, how this sport has earned a reputation and is being denoted in so many different ways and what players and fans of the game represent is what I wanted to get at in all those chapters. From the first day of official hockey, it inspired and fascinated players and fans, and polarized, divided and united groups of people from any social, political or cultural background.

*It seems that to Canadians the world is still round and flat, and made of vulcanized rubber.*

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