

Hockey in Canadian Fiction

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In Colombo's two volumes of *Canadian Quotations* (1974 and 1976) the number of ice hockey quotations exceeds the total of all other sports combined. As several of the entries themselves testify to the singular significance of this sport in Canadian society, e.g. "(hockey is) the Canadian metaphor" . . . "the essence of the Canadian experience in the New World" . . . "the only true Canadian invention", etc., perhaps this is not too surprising. What may be remarkable, however, is that none of the contributions were selected from the realm of Canadian fiction. This cannot be because Canadian novelists have entirely neglected the sport, for "puck" is a four-letter word which appears frequently in their prose. More likely their sporting metaphors and similes were considered unsuitable for what purported to be a factual compilation. If so, then research elsewhere, particularly in the United States and United Kingdom, has demonstrated that the academic study of sport

benefits from a serious perusal of fiction. Through scholarly investigation it is now largely acknowledged that the novelist or poet, like the artists, can illuminate their time in a useful way. (Good social history, for example, uses their observations frequently). This is true of the portrayal of hockey in fictional literature. Since several Canadian novelists enjoy an enviable international reputation, any omission of their unique insights in literary anthologies may be regretted. Familiar themes such as the hero overcoming odds, experiencing sex, masculinity expressed through competition, aggression and violence, the status and role of women, crowd behavior and vicarious identification, and upward mobility, can readily be located within Canadian hockey fiction. These are overlaid often with peculiar and perennial Canadian issues and problems, i.e. the French/English dichotomy and regional differences, the harsh northern climate, the vast geography and small population, the love/hate relationship with the National Hockey League (NHL), and the obsessive rivalry with the USSR. Hockey serves in children's fictional literature, too, as the same builder-of-character for young Canadians as do other sports in other countries. Yet it must be admitted, for all the volume, that the Great Canadian Hockey Novel remains to be written. The material is there, the talent exists, the time seems right - and one hopes that hockey will soon find its Canadian Ring Lardner or David Storey, a voice whose Canadian passages Colombo cannot ignore.