Chapter V

*Les Canadiens: A Political Perspective in Collective Creation*

Paul Thompson returned to Canada in 1967 after his education, began to associate himself with the Theatre Passe Muraille, just about the same time Rick Salutin also came home. As artistic director, Thompson had produced *Doukhobors*, *The Farm Show* and Carol Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump*. Both Paul Thompson and Rick Salutin had similar political and theatrical interest, which paved the way for a creative collaboration resulted in the production of *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt* and became one of the most popular collective creations of the Canadian repertoire. Since then Salutin worked with Passe Muraille for the collective creation of the *Adventures of an Immigrant* (1974) and on his own plays *The False Messiah* (1975) and *Nathen Cohen: A Review* (1981). Rick Salutin’s play about hockey and Quebec nationalism, *Les Canadiens* was first produced at the Centaur in 1977. The play won the Chalmer’s Award and has been widely performed in Canada.

According to Mary Jane Miller there is a second version of *Les Canadiens*, which was published by Talon books in 1977 and produced by George Luscombe at Toronto Workshop Productions. It was this version that won for Salutin the Chalmer’s Award of 1977. In this play Salutin relates the implications of the separatist election victory of the Parti Quebecois on fifteenth November 1976, to the contemporary uncertainties and confusions of English-Canadian political and cultural identity in Quebec. The game of hockey provides an extended stage metaphor that renders the historical events politically relevant to the Quebec election. “It’s hockey as history and history as hockey”, observes Diane Bessai (Playwrights 137).

According to Mary Jane Miller:
Hockey could be seen as a game, a ritual, a drama; as a surrogate battlefield; as scenarios about Quebec against the rest… First, *Les Canadiens* does capture the traditions, the skills and the ambience of hockey… Secondly, it is a challenging play about our current crisis and its roots, using an accessible and versatile metaphor for the birth, growth, and maturation of a political process in Quebec, and perhaps the rest of Canada. (57)

As far back in 1839, Lord Durham noted that Canada was “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state” (Miller 60). This conflict between the two founding races of Canada, which began with the articles of Capitulation of 1760, whereby the French surrendered Canada or New France to English control, continues even today. As Hugh Mac Lennan observes, “Quebec refuses to forget her past… Quebec has not forgotten the conquest. She has not forgotten 1837. She has not forgotten Louis Riel. She has not forgotten and will never forget what was done to her in 1917 by the Anglophone majority” (64). Its hockey has always been a story of national self-assertion by its people.

Quebec has always been a distinct society, with its own distinct customs, social institutions, economic organizations and governmental functioning. The early French-speaking settlers in Quebec tried to preserve their own culture and language. The British conquest of Quebec in 1838 estranged the Quebecers, caused resentments and antagonisms, against the Anglophones and made them follow a policy of isolation. Parish priests emerged as the leaders of the society projecting a French identity by promoting Catholicism and French language. Led by the conservative priests and supported by an extremely high fertility rate, the French – Canadian community succeeded in preserving its cohesiveness and strength. The sudden
growth in population led a great number of Francophones to migrate to the New England states where employment from industrialization was readily available.

Anglophone dominance went unquestioned as long as Quebec remained rural and agrarian. By the beginning of the twentieth century significant changes like greater urbanization, growth of industry, hydro-electric power and capitalist demands for natural resources brought the French community into more contact with the Anglophone elite structures. This type of contacts increased as the century progressed, causing a sense of group consciousness and a sense of deprivation among the Francophone Quebecers.

The period from 1960 to 1966, in which Jean Lesage led Quebec into the modern era, is generally referred to as Quebec’s Quiet Revolution. Several economic and social reforms were introduced and it brought Quebec into the main stream of modern western economic development. Greater urbanization resulted in the growth of a working class of industrial workers and a new middle class of white collar workers who resented Anglophone dominance and sought changes in French-English relations. Quebec Hydro was nationalized and the French language Bureau was established. The newly created provincial Ministry of Education in 1964 replaced the church control of education with a new emphasis on engineering and technology. Parti Quebecois, founded in 1968 by Rene Levesque, advocated the independence of Quebec. Nationalism became a strong political force, which united the French-speaking population of the province, and the appellation Quebecois is no longer used only to refer to a resident of the Quebec city, but used to all those who belong to the whole province of Quebec replacing the more general, less nationalistic term the French Canadian.
The outcome of the Quiet Revolution was the formation of a truly modern Francophone society. By the mid-sixties a better control over the fields of social security, cultural affairs, immigration and international relations, and of course the capacity to raise revenues was established. Such was the new conception of Quebec and all public opinion polls would consistently indicate this trend.

When Parti Quebecois came to power in 1975, the victory was a sure sign that independence of the Quebec province was just around the corner. But, seven years later, when it became obvious, after successive referendums going against French nationalism giving no room for partition, the desired independence of Quebec was far from real. The general attitude of the elder people was disenchantment coupled with an almost universal rejection of values, showing only a preference for good life. The younger generation has rejected the elders’ nationalism in large part. They feel that the elders were content to secure good jobs for themselves, protect their own tenure and let the doors close for those to come after them. Many of them were inclined to think that the nationalistic movement was a total failure.

Quebec nationalism has realized a certain number of objectives. The old inferiority complex has gone to a great extent and they have gained a new confidence. They are much more self-assured than they were in the early sixties. The city of Montreal is also multi-ethnic. Quebec has better control over immigration and has been accepted by the immigrants as a Francophone society.

Quebec still enjoys a special status de facto if not de jure. The changes within Quebec reflected an intense desire to forge a new identity. All said and done, nationalism is bound to appear in Quebec one day or other, less than one form or other, for the very reason that a Francophone society in North America is bound to be
a fragile phenomenon. The linguistic issue has always been at the heart of Francophone nationalistic manifestations in Quebec. If the charter of the French language is not maintained in word and spirit by the government, if other provinces fail to recognize Quebec’s conditions for an agreement to the Canadian Constitution, Quebec nationalism is bound to appear again.

Looking at the history of Quebec, we can find that the feeling of the conquered people being ruled by a foreign power has always remained in Quebec. It has been sustained by the experience of real or imaginary oppressions such as economic, cultural and political. Even in 1970 with the proclamation of the War Measures Act and the dispatch of the Canadian army into Quebec, they felt that they have been invaded. Rick Salutin in his introduction to the play, “how do people deal with the sense of being perpetually conquered and occupied? How do they deal with the humiliation frustration and anger and defeat?” (Salutin 13). Of course they are a spiritual race, and have cultivated religious and intellectual activities. But they refuse to accept subjugation and they want to fight back. This happened throughout the history of Quebeck. Rick Salutin observes:

In fact, the entire history of French-English relations since the conquest can be seen as an interrupted history of resistance: the revolutionary movement of 1837 – 38; the Riel rebellions and the support they received in Quebec; the anti-Conscription movements of World Wars I and II; and a host of nationalist and independantist political movements. A continuing resistance, but at the same time, never a victory. They fought, but they did not win. (13)

As Red Fisher, sports editor of The Montreal Star pointed out, “if you fight, but don’t win, then you may try to win elsewhere in a form where you are successful. It
is not the same, but at least for the moment you do experience victory over your opponents” (13).

It has been said that hockey is probably Canada’s only universal cultural symbol. Red Fisher further observes that “ever since the Plains of Abraham, the French people have been number two, but on the ice, they’re number one” (12). In Quebec ice hockey as a cultural fact differs from what it means to outsiders. The play shows how the Quebecers find their cultural symbolism in a professional sport. The play also shows Salutin’s preoccupation with interpreting the present in the light of the past. The game played on fifteen November 1976, when the election victory of Parti Quebecois was announced, could be taken as a culmination, and perhaps a new beginning for that symbolism. In his introduction to the play Salutin says, “Act One would be myth: the myth of the Les Canadiens, standard-bearers of Quebec spirit; and Act Two would be the demythologization of Les Canadiens, and their replacement by the reality of just a hockey team” (LC 21).

Les Canadiens is a drama in two acts, dealing with “the repoliticization of a society” (Salutin, 20) and the demythologization of a hockey team. The name of the team is the title of the drama. The First Act is a sort of flashback, represented by a backward movement in time. The unities of time, place and theme are given a go-by in the first act, whereas in the second all the three unities are carefully observed. The events of one fateful day in Canadian history form the warp and woof of the second act.

Rick Salutin has given a name to each act. The First Act is called ‘Survival’. Desmond Pacey remarks that “her central thesis – that the distinguishing characteristic of Canadian literature is its obsession with survival is dubious” (28). The title is suitable as it deals with the survival of the French after the military defeat
on the Plains of Abraham. Similar to other collective creations, each scene in this act is structured episodically, in order to make its own specific point by combining the history of Quebec with that of its hockey team.

The historical characters, including players and owners are identified by name and the actors perform their multiple roles in accordance with the public personalities whom history remembers. The game itself is portrayed on the stage in a stylized way, with actors on roller skates demonstrating the familiar playing style of Les Canadiens. Two of English Canada’s national heroes, Wolfe and Macdonald, are burlesqued while Orangeman is also targeted. The play stimulates the game of ice hockey, turning sticks into a battle arena, and the clock countdown into a procession of important dates in the history of Quebec.

The second act is named ‘The Day of the Game’. The day is fifteenth November 1976. The game here may refer to the political game won by Rene Levesque but it is only reported through the election results. The game, which is shown, is between Les Canadiens and Maple Leafs. It is described as “a very natural culmination, fulfillment, transformation” (Salutin 19).

Dave Kirk is the hero of the game; Bowman is the coach. The team comprises politically conscious players. In this act, Salutin shifts ostensibly from the documentary elements established for myth-making purposes in the first act to what he identifies in his introduction as “a more traditionally ‘dramatic’ mode: unity around the central character and his problem. Here Salutin stresses what he calls “a more sculpted, fictionalized approach” (22). He primarily uses this as a polemical strategy for his encounter with English-speaking audiences over contemporary issues.
The British soldiers are attacking the French Peasants. A British Army officer, General Wolfe says proudly that they have won and the day is theirs. But they are still engaged by the enemy and there is more struggle in future. A Farmer shoots him with his musket. Wolfe falls and the Farmer’s son enters. The Farmer throws his rifle to his son and Aide comes to the assistance of Wolfe. The Farmer’s son is astonished to find Wolfe still alive. As the Farmer’s son catches the rifle, it turns into a hockey stick. He does not know what to do with it. He is gradually discovering how to use a hockey stick.

From the conversation between Sir Edward Watkin and John Macdonald, we understand that Sir Edward has come to build the railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Rink Owner, who was a small time businessman, enters to get the ice cleared. It is now rented out to the English regiment to play ice hockey. Presently and English regiment enters. They skate and play. The Farmer’s son, who, by now has gradually learned to use the hockey stick, grew more adept with it, grabs the ball from the Regiment and, by slicing off two parallel segments, invents the puck and hands it back to the Regiment. Presently we are through the Riel Rebellion. The time clock reads 19:09. Ambrose O’Brien, a millionaire sportsman, enters. He talks to the Rink Owner about the formation of the National Hockey League, and forms a French team, Les Canadiens. The Farmer’s son sings the theme song of Les Canadiens.

The goalkeeper of the Canadiens is Georges Vezina, the Farmer’s son. He has now become the greatest goaltender of all time. The play progresses against the background of the war. Presently both the teams exit. Vezina is left alone on the ice. He is worn down by the battle, and near the end of his career. Vezina who has been watching Morenz since his arrival, alternately encouraged and then discouraged, throws the stick-torch to Morenz. He catches it and carries on the tradition.
The Doctor examines Vezina and says that there are complications along with the original injury, and he should be admitted to hospital. He would recover soon as it is not serious. Rocket skates on, bringing the song of battle to a halt. Rocket scores his five hundredth goal and the TEAM celebrates deliriously returning to its victory march. The Rocket and Leaf fight for a puck and the referee interferes and separates them. Still they fight. The President of the National Hockey League Mr. Clarence Campbell enters and charges Rocket of this incident on ice. Rocket tries to justify his act. But Campbell says:

You’re suspended for the rest of the season, including the playoffs. Most probably this means that you will lose the scoring championship, your most coveted goal, now within your grasp. In addition, your team will probably lose the pennant and the Stanley Cup as well. (LC 109)

Rocket is on the ice. Rocket and Maurice Richard are suspended. The crowd is annoyed. Tear gas shell explodes in the Forum, and the game is cancelled. The scene changes to the street. The crowd pours into St.Catherine Street. A kind of street festival begins where singing and chanting are heard. The situation turns violent. A brick is flying through a store window. The anger against Campbell is extended into anger against the English storekeepers along St.Catherine Street. The Police arrive. Sirens are heard. There is scuffling. The time clock and the message board record the subsequent events, while the sounds of riot, protest and street fighting continue:


19:64 – Bombs in the streets of Westmount.

19:65 – Protest Against the Queen Crushed by Police.
19:67 – Huge Crowd cheers ‘Vive Le Quebec Libre’.

19:68 – Beatings, Arrests in Anti-Trudeau Riot.


19:70 – War Measures Act Proclaimed. (111)

The Army has moved in, the streets are quiet at last. The Form is dark and closed. The ice is empty without players and the lights are put off.

The second act takes place during a single day on fifteenth November 1976. In this act the time clock indicates the time of the day, not of the year. Dave Kirk, an all-star forward for the Canadiens, arrives at the Forum. He has come to take his French lessons along with three Anglophone Canadiens. The class progresses in a very grand manner, singing and learning. From their conversation one can understand that bilingualism can indeed be fun. The readers are aware of the conversation between Jean Beliveau, Dave Kirk, old-timers and other players. It’s a typical game day in the life of the team, with only a hit of tension, in the mildly unsettled expectations of the coming election. We come across broad comedy of the language lesson. Kirk wanders through the corridors of the Forum looking at the pictures on the walls of the old teams and stars, which opens up a panorama of Quebec history of the past. At 3.30 p.m. Kirk takes a nap which turns into a nightmare. The evening wears on. The players begin to arrive and the game begins at 8.00 p.m. At first the results from Montreal appear. Parti Quebecois begins to take a clear lead. The crowd is in a very happy mood. The players too comment on the political situation – Kirk dreams that he is in goal. He says, “Okay, guys. We’re the Canadiens. Les Canadiens. And tonight is going to be the biggest test we’ve ever had. Hey, what’m I
doing in here? I’m a winger. Where’s Ken Dryden? You gotta be crazy to play goal. Everybody shoots at you” (141).

Suddenly Kirk is on the television. In the midst of their lunacy, Kirk hears a voice. It is Sylvia Tyson singing in the gentle, lyrical ballad, “Four strong winds”. Dave Kirk is drawn to her as she sings, “Think I’ll go out to Alberta…” (141). As Sylvia Tyson sings, she turns into Pauline Jullien who is singing a rousing nationalistic song of Quebec in French. Suddenly the English and the French Sportcasters are back. Finally they exit. He searches desperately for help. He is a goal tender in goal and a prisoner before a firing squad. The message board changes after every game. The teams win alternately. The players try to concentrate on the game, but they cannot. The players forget about the game and all go out into the crowd to argue with the fans. The players say:

Look, we’re the Canadiens and you’re our fans. You gotta trust us. We’ve been the vessel of Quebec’s hopes for so long, the symbol of your aspirations… And we’re telling you, this separatism is wrong! Stick with federalism is a beautiful idea. Do you hear that? It takes people out of their narrow, self-centred nationalism and forces them to expand their horizons and join hands with others. (168)

In the meanwhile new election results pour in and the crowd begins to roar again. The players continue to appeal to their fans. “Listen to what we’re saying! It is for the good of all of us. Who could know better than the Canadiens what’s good for Quebec? Listen, you screaming idiots. Pay attention!” (168).

But the crowd does not listen to them. The players begin to skate again and with a magnificent effort score a goal. They raise their sticks and chant “Les
Canadiens! Les Canadiens! Les Canadiens” (169). But they look up and see that the eruption from the crowd has been for the final results of the election, not for their goal. The message board reads: “Victoire Parti Quebecois!” The crowd begins to chant, “Victoire Parti Quebecois! Victoire Parti Quebecois!” (169). The stage direction tells us that, “The Canadiens lower their sticks and look at them. They are no longer weapons handed down to them since 1759” (170). The crowd goes on chanting: “From today on, tomorrow is ours. A national today if we really want it…” (170).

The Canadiens then retreat from the ice. Only Kirk stays on. The crowd surges on to the ice and taxes over. The ice turns into a battlefield once again where, this time, the French celebrate their victory. By 11.00 p.m. the celebration has wound down Everybody is going to the Paul Sauve Arena for the victory party. Kirk asks the woman who is left alone on the stage, “What’re you gonna do now?” She says, “Us? We gotta go to work tomorrow… We don’t know what is going to happen” (172). Kirk then asks her the reason for the excitement and she replies, “We stood up. For many years, we let others stand up for us… Now we do it ourselves” (173). The woman goes away. Left alone Kirk says: “Being a Canadian used to be the greatest thing in the world. Before they stood up” (173). The time is 11:30 p.m. He walks home alone. Under a street light he comes upon a group of kids playing street hockey with a ball and broadcasting their own plays. He watches them play. The ball bounces away towards Kirk. The kids recognize their hero:

Kirk.

Hey, even though you don’t need us anymore, who’s still… on the ice… not anywhere else, but on the ice… who’s still number one?
The Kids. *puzzled, but responsive*

Les Canadiens.

Kirk.

Even though you don’t need us.

The Kids.

Les Canadiens.

Kirk.

Even though we’re just a hockey team.

The Kids.

LES CANADIENS! (177)

*Les Canadiens* resists formal closure and open out into the world the social formation, and the future. As Mary Jane Miller describes it, “In a wonderfully appropriate open ending we see a play within a play, a fragment of a game of shinny, narrated as if on television by a bunch of kids who suddenly collide with the play’s reality, an actual instantly recognizable hockey star. In this scene, the past, the present, and the future meet…” (68).

The author says that the motto of the first act is Brecht’s saying, ‘unhappy is the nation that has no heroes’, and that the motto of the second act is Brecht’s modified statement, “unhappy is the nation that needs a hero” (21). In the light of these remarks it is clear that the French nation in Canada has no reason to be unhappy. It has two hockey heroes. The Farmer’s son invents the puck and later becomes the
greatest goaltender as Vezina. Morenz, by virtue of his English descent, cannot be
described as the hero of the French in spite of his heroic exploits. Morenz is up
against the Maroon players and they strain every nerve to keep him in check.
However, he outwits them and his skating skills stand him in good stead and in spite
of the skilful defense nets a goal. Then he covers the field again to strike a goal.
Siebert catches him with the tip of his hip and Morenz crashes to the ground and lies
inert. That signals the end of his sporting career.

The honour of being an undisputed French hero goes to Maurice Richard,
better known as the Rocket. In order to see him play Maurice Duplessis used to visit
the playground. His opponents describe him as a Samson. He moves like a bulldozer
in the midst of his opposing players who pound, and shove, and slash and hammer
him and yet he manages to score a goal with surprising ease. People remember his
play. They cheer him up when he scores his fiftieth goal in 1944 and also when he
scores his five hundredth goal. He is revered as the Saviour of the French nation.

During a match, a Leaf player and Rocket fight for the puck and the referee
separates them. At that time the Leaf player uses an abusive epithet against Rocket
who becomes so furious that he attacks the Leaf player and throws him halfway
across the ice. The referee does not approve of Rocket’s action. According to the
Leaf player, personal affront should not be a cause for a fight. Only when a father or
a mother or a wife is abused and accused of social indecorum, a fight is justified.
Rocket is not convinced and he attacks the Leaf players and the referee. Clarence
Campbell, in the capacity of the President of the National Hockey League suspends
Rocket. The French crowd is furious over the suspension of this French icon. Rick Salutin writes:

The Campbell-Richard riot represents the height of the identification of the cause of Quebec with le club de hockey Canadien. Yet it also represents a sort of going beyond the symbol. By spilling out of the Forum and into the streets, the fans seemed to say, “This hockey arena will no longer contain the feelings we have been expressing within it. Such a change is explored in Act Two of Les Canucks.” (14)

This is the pictorial view of the structure of the drama under discussion. These are the factors that link the two acts of the drama structurally. First the ice hockey and its French players are prominent in both the acts, even though change overtakes them in subtle ways. Very important persons were once interested in witnessing the game; now they come to secure TV publicity for themselves. Once, the players were not well paid. Now they wallow in wealth. Beliveau is treated like god in Quebec city. His services are utilized in the sales promotion of consumer goods and he addresses meetings and earns a lot of money and gets cars as gifts. The second is that Miss Miron, the French teacher, remembers the Richard – Campbell riots. She was a little girl then. This memory is a link between the two acts. The third is that the characters of act one does not make an appearance in the succeeding act. However some of the hockey players of act one is shown in the form of portraits. Vezina, Morenz, and Rocket of act one are remembered in act two by David Kirk.

The fourth is that the running commentary on the hockey-match is given by two sportscasters in both the acts. One is English and the other is French. These functionaries are a common feature linking the two acts. The fifth is that women
characters are French and they stand for the political assertion and autonomy of the French. They do not approve of the craze for hockey that their young men possess. This femininity is a binding force between the two acts.

The sixth is that Dave Kirk is an avatar of Vezina, Morenz and Rocket in this sense he carries the torch thrown by failing hands and he is the most powerful link between the two acts. He is fictionalized character, a substitute for Ken Dryden. Mary Jane Miller says, “Salutin did not intend Kirk to be a hero, a star” (65). If so, inspite of Salutin, Kirk has become a hero and a star, playing the roles that the three heroes of act one played. In this nightmare, Dave Kirk, a forward player or winger, becomes a goaltender like Vezina. Like Morenz, Kirk is an Anglophone and matches him in the speed of his game. In popularity and the art of prolific scoring and support for federation, Kirk measures up to Rocket. Kirk’s popularity is not confined to the adults. Kids are crazy about him. The English guard secures Kirk’s autograph for his own grandson. The play concludes with hockey-crazy kids standing awe-struck in his presence. Kirk enjoys the respect of his goalkeeper for his brilliant play and scores a classic goal. The crowd reserves its cheer not for him but for the victory of the Parti Quebecois at the polls. The way Rocket is treated by Campbell is similar to the way the crowd treats Kirk.

Kirk embodies the values of the old veterans of the past is unambiguously clear by bringing him and their pictures together. He appreciates Newsy for his commitment to the game and Vezina for his skill; and he sympathizes with Morenz for his Stratford origin; and he admires Rocket for the height he scaled. The importance of Kirk is making clear in the following dialogue:

Kirk: But you guys…that team… You meant so much to people.
Lionel: You too! (138)

Lionel was a team-mate of Rocket. In this sense, this exchange connects the two acts of the drama. The present pays its tribute to the past and the past returns the compliment. The opening speech of Dave Kirk is a link between the two acts. The hockey team, Les Canadiens, and its fortunes form the themes of both the acts. Dave Kirk realizes that a member of this hockey team is aware of his self-importance when he is the cynosure of all eyes on the day in which the game is played. The sense of self-importance is enhanced to such an extent that he feels that Montreal is encompassed by him. The player’s sense of self-importance exceeds the Pope’s sense of self-importance in his own domain of the Vatican city.

In his mastery of French language, the Pope is superior to the Anglophone learners. The third Anglophone learner accuses him of being a brown-noser who wants to ingratiate himself with the French players and the French crowds. He wants to be an apostle of emotional integration between the two language communities. Kirk thinks that the English sportcaster’s description, He is a lonely, heroic figure refers to him. In the nightmare, Kirk says, Nobody like me and in front of Morenz’s portrait, he asks, “Howie, did you ever feel in your days that people didn’t (like you) just because you were from (the Anglophone community of Stratford, Ontario?)” (134). In his sense of loneliness, his identification with Morenz, his mission of maintaining the unity of the team, his frustration with the apathy of the players and spectators, Kirk emerges as the most sophisticated character of the whole drama.

General Wolfe is a soldier whose heart is not in military victory but in poetry with its haunting melody and hoary wisdom. He is a victor who is vanquished by a Farmer’s bullet. The Farmer has a gun, and as MaoTse-tung believed, power flows
from the barrel of a gun. Just as the past changes into the present, the gun changes into a hockey stick. The subtle change in form does not change its essential power. The hockey stick is no less lethal than a gun. The hockey stick has victories no less renowned than the gun. The rich symbolism enshrined in the change from a long straight gun into a long, straight stick recall one of the miracles of Moses who emancipated the oppressed Jews from the imperialism of the Pharaoh. The stick of Moses becomes a snake and vice versa. The stick of the Farmer’s son has the liberating force and the liquidating potential.

The nightmare of Dave Kirk in the second act culminates in a ghoulish scene. Dave Kirk feels that Madame Benoit has cooked and transformed him into a dessert and his team-mates are eager to devour him ravenously. Eating of his body has echoes of a religious experience. It may be a sub-conscious realization that nobody likes him. Lionel’s remark on old Canadians who eat and drink may have had its effect. The French sportscaster talks of the tricolor. It reminds the Indians of their national flag with its three colours.

Rick Salutin writes, “For years the Anglophones of Quebec have identified with the rest of Canada and assumed thereby the sense of being a majority. Now, whether independence actually comes to Quebec or not, they are faced with the need of making the transition from majority to minority” (22). This observation is hypothetically relevant to the Hindus of Kashmir in case the state of Jammu and Kashmir gains independence. Thus, it is clear that the play has a theme, which fascinates the Indians.

Ambience of Hockey
Rick Salutin creates the ambience of ice hockey by referring passion to several teams noted for their skills in ice hockey. The dominant team is, of course, Les Canadiens as the whole play hinges on it. The other teams are Maple Leafs, New York Yankees, Stratford, Montreal Wanderers, Maroons Chicago, Brothers of the Sacred Heart, Colarado Rockies, The Bruins and The Flyers. Of these, Les Canadiens established their unmatched superiority by winning the Stanley Cup, a prestigious cup by all standards, five times consecutively during the Fifties.

Along with the names of the teams, there are references to the most eminent players who have secured a niche in the hall of fame through their achievements. Maurice Richard, known popularly as Rocket, steals the show. His brother, Henri Richard, is quite at ease both in holding the hockey stick and in wielding the pen in the service of politics. Maurice Richard attracts Maurice Duplessis, the most important politician of his time. Ken Dryden, Vezina, La londe, Howice Morenz, Jean Beliveau, Dave Kirk lend an irresistible charm to the ambience of ice hockey that Rick Salutin conjures up in the two acts of the play. Joe Malore scored seven goals in one game and forty-four in a season. The record was broken by Rocket. He scored fifty goals in a season. He scores five hundred goals. About the players and the teams, this comment is relevant, “Those guys on all those great teams never thought about anything except winning the game. Nothing else mattered. Nothing else still matters. That was the Canadiens. That is the Canadiens” (LC 160).

In addition to teams and players, use of terms associated with ice hockey is the third device invoked to get a feeling of the particularity of the occasion. The first term used is the hockey stick and that too as a transformation of the rifle. The farmer, Gérard, uses the rifle to kill the General who defeats the French on the Plains of Abraham; the same implement in the hands of Gérard’s son becomes a hockey stick.
with which the son beats the English in ice hockey to secure a sense of pride and neutralize the French sense of humiliation in the political arena. The other terms are – skating rink, ice hockey, scores, skates, puck, goal, swing, slide, Stanley Cup, goal tender, blue line, net, wrist shot, freeze, slot, shoot, score, flip, slap shot etc.

The French teacher, Miss Miron, teaches the Anglophone students French terms for the objects worn by the hockey players. Dandurand waxes eloquent and becomes lyrical when he says, “Behold, the Montreal Forum, the eighth wonder of the world” (63). Dave Kirk describes the Forum as ‘the cathedral of Hockey’ (116), making the biblical influence on the drama explicit.

A feature that is usually neglected in the literary appraisal of the play is the subtle influence of the Bible. Canada is a predominantly Christian country and the Anglophones and the Francophones share the country between themselves. Both of them have Christianity as a common factor even though their denominations may be different. This denominated difference is not so pronounced as the linguistic difference, and consequently provides no obstacle in forging unity.

Dave Kirk is a name rich in Biblical connotation. Kirk as a Scottish word for church and Dave as an abbreviation for David reflect a unifying force, a congregational harmony, a symbol of triumph over the Goliath of divisive forces. He is a team man and he tells Miss Miron that the French and the English guys sink their linguistic differences and were hand in glove for the sake of the team. The unity of the two linguistic groups has been legendary. The domination of English as a medium of communication between the two is recognized as unfair and, to make amends, the Anglophone Canadien players make a sincere attempt to learn French and they have Dave Kirk’s blessings. After all, the French guys learned English to develop
understanding with the English players who are now under an obligation to return the compliments.

The Christian symbolism is extended to the Forum. Dave Kirk describes it as the cathedral of hockey. A hockey player like him walks into the Forum as a member of the team and feels as though he were the Pope in Rome. Leo Dandurand, a Montreal man-about-town and a small-scale operator, feels offended when he is asked if he is from the track. To him such a question is as absurd as the question, ‘Is the Pope a catholic?’ This question is repeated by a French Rink Attendant in response to the surprise of Morenz that the Rink Attendant speaks English. This question underscores the fact that there is no element of surprise in the Catholic nature of the Pope and there should be no surprise if a Francophone knows English in Montreal.

There is yet another question, which may occur to any member of any nationality. He would have preferred to enhance his sense of pride if a loveliest figure like Jesus had ever been a member of his nation. J.Ambrose O’Brien, a millionaire sportsman, asks, ‘Why wasn’t Jesus Christ born in Quebec?’ The question finds an echo in the bosom of the Rink Owner and he repeats the question. O’Brien seems to have a ready-made answer, ‘They could not find three wise men and a virgin!’ Quebec is impoverished as for as wisdom or virtue concerned, but abounds in the skills of ice hockey. O’Brien is interested in raising a French hockey team. He says, “I want a team here. A French team” (48).

Certain echoes of the profound Biblical observations contribute to a sense that the Biblical influence is profound too. When General Wolfe explains, ‘A time to ac and a time to reflect on action’, a reader cannot but recall Ecclesiastes, chapter 3. It reads, ‘For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a
time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted’.

Mother praises Rocket in glowing terms, “And you showed us the way and a light and a life” (99). The Biblical influence is also seen in the change that the rifle of Gerard, the French farmer, undergoes. With his last breath he throws his rifle to his son. The son catches it, it turns into a hockey stick. This transformation of a symbol of war into a symbol of sport will not be surprising to the Christian audience. A dead object changes into a living object in this extract. An immobile object becomes mobile; an object held in the land becomes an object moving on the ground. In the drama of Rick Salutin, a rifle changes into a stick but they are objects held in the hand and they symbolize competition, struggle, and a desire for survival with the senses of triumph whatever be the place a battlefield or a playground.

Identity Change

In fact, metamorphosis seems to be a favourite device of the author throughout the drama. Everything is in a flux. This identity change is a device to demonstrate that the political situation prevailing in Canada is redeemable. The inflexible stance of the two linguistic groups is not likely to be a permanent phenomenon. The walls of misunderstanding are likely to collapse and a sense of unity forged by Les Canadiens is likely to emerge, even though the team is demythologized and the players are just players and they cease to be the apostles of Canadian federalism. The ideals they represent will ultimately prevail.
General Wolfe defeats Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham and proposes to be
magnanimous in victory. He abhors his military prowess, which he possesses in
abundance and yearns for political creativity, which is conspicuously absent in him.
There seems to be a sense of frustration with the life that he lived at the last moment
of his life. This is indicative of a desire for a change in identity. In the hour of
victory, the identity is lost at the hands of a farmer, who, according to his wife, never
could shoot. It is a quirk of fate that a doughty warrior is laid low by a farmer
uninitiated in the skills of warfare. General Wolfe gains Quebec but loses his life and
identity.

The transformation of identity functions as a metaphor to create order out of
chaos and reality out of imagination. This metaphor moulds characterization as much
as it transforms events. At the level of characterization it is most evident in certain
major characters. The Farmer’s son is such a major character in whose hands his
father’s rifle is transformed into a hockey stick and the credit of inventing the puck
goes entirely to him. The Rink Owner calls him George, his own mother calls him
Georges and Jacques to emphasize his French identity, and the author prefers to
transform him into Georges Vezina. This name makes its first appearance through an
announcer’s mouth and Vezina has become the greatest goaltender. The very first
sentence that he utters, “Papa, Papa, Mama wants you home” (LC 31) holds the key to
his characterization. He is the messenger of his mother and he carries the message to
his father that the mother wants her husband to return home. Home has rich
symbolism; it may be a place of residence where father, mother, and son live as a
well-knit and emotionally integrated family; it may also refer to a dream of seeing
Quebec transformed into an exclusive home of the French without the undesirable
domination of the English people. The first sentence spoken by the Farmer’s son also
emphasizes in no uncertain terms the fact that the mother controls the son and orders her husband. Her wish and her personality represent the French femininity embodying French aspirations for survival, freedom and victory. The concept of an independent home and country for the French and its importance is hinted here.

Mother’s effort to wean her son from indulgence in ice hockey is to assert her authority, to inculcate in him a new sense of priorities, and to espouse the cause of French survival. She says to him: “You got no pride? You know what they’re doing to our people in the West? You care? What’s this got to do with us? Show me” (45). This type of exhortation cannot fail to produce the desired result. The Farmer kills the General and sets an example and throws a torch from his failing hand to his sons to keep the torch aloft. The anti-English sentiment is deeply ingrained in the son who resents Frenchmen playing hockey for the English, and is not enthused at the prospect of the emergence of more English hockey teams. He does not answer the question posed by O’Brien if he does not like the English. However, it is clear that he does not; still he does not go to the extent of using abusive epithets against the English as his own father and mother do.

He has musical talents and he sings a French song in praise of Les Canadiens. He is extremely proficient as a goaltender and the Wanderers are demoralized by his proficiency. However, his is not lucky like his father who could pass his rifle to him; he has no successor to whom he could pass the rifle-turned-hockey stick. When he gets one that his successor happens to be an Englishman – Howie Morenz. He is the fastest hockey-player, a Twinkletoes and succeeds in scoring a goal against the Maroons. But his mother does not think that Morenz is a worthy successor to her son, simply because Morenz ‘carries the name of an Anglais’. She knows that Morenz is
an Englishman and yet she tells an English fan that ‘Morenz is French’ because her
anti-English bias cannot see any merit in an Englishman.

Dave Kirk is actually a winger but in his nightmare he plays the dual role of a
goaltender and a prisoner. The rival team appears to be a firing squad; the shooting of
a punk appears like the shooting of a gun. The identity-change takes place in a
nightmare; it may be transitory; the shooter’s role is reversed into a goaltender’s role
and in this reversal of roles is the sympathy an English player feels for the
predicament of the French. The player whose main aim is to close ranks and to forge
unity in a team comprising members of two linguistic groups is made to experience
disillusionment when his teammates turn into tormentors. This role reversal seems to
be a demonstration of empathy.

The Farmer’s wife is a dominant character who has many counterparts in the
drama. In fact women are given prominence even though they are few in number.
Invariably they are French by language and nationality and they bring more powder.
They see the mess in which they are caught. Their youngsters are conscripted or they
prefer to play ice hockey. The French women want their peasant husbands to take
interest in farming while they themselves keep the home fires burning. After the
death of the Farmer, she is no longer described as Farmer’s wife, but she is
transformed into mother. This is again an identity change. Her heart’s cry is that the
home, school and church have lost their relevance to her son. She is perturbed by her
son’s interest in a game. Her questions reflect this mental state: “Is it important? Am
I missing something? Is there something else here?” (45). What she is actually
missing is the surrogate victory that the French seek in hockey in order to neutralize
the effect of shame and defeat that the military victory of the English has brought in
its wake for them.
Mother is the same and is not the same. In her anti-French and anti-hockey stance and in her habit of putting questions she continues to be the same whereas she is not the same in the sense that her son is not the same. The Farmer’s son has become Vezina, the greatest goaltender of all time. Her self-questioning persists, “What about us? What about the farm? What about Quebec?” (56). Mother remains the mother because she wants another son, whom she would so rear that hockey should be loathed by him. When the young people forget the needs of the community and are crazy about hockey, the country is impoverished according to Mother.

Mother’s dramatic monologue addressed to the invisible son emphasizes that fact that she is prepared to concede that the French can have a church or a language but she is not prepared to concede that the French can have a team of their own. Her concern for her son is reflected in these words spoken in her son’s bedroom, “Now go to sleep. And God help Quebec!” (75).

The desire for another son seems to have been fulfilled but Mother is not successful in keeping him away from hockey. Mother is not the same because she has become a lover of hockey, a Canadien. She does not like the victory of the English. The son is not the same. He is prepared to give up hockey and join the army and fight for Canada and not for England. He is not interested in learning Mathematics and English. He seems to be pre-Vezina and pre-Morenz son.

Even a minor character like the English businessman undergoes an inner change. He proposes to start a brewery and rejects Dandurand’s suggestion to buy a hockey team by saying, “Now that is no investment. You want to look for something that fills people’s needs and has a growth potential” (83). From the time clock reading 19:39 to the time clock reading 19:54, a profound inner change takes place.
The same businessman, who refused to invest a million and a half now pays four millions to buy the hockey team, Les Canadiens.

This inner identity change is not confined to individuals. It overwhelsms an institution like Les Canadiens. In fact, this change from a hockey team as a representation of Canadian federalism into a mere hockey team is the unifying factor of the two acts of the drama. Parti Quebecois demythologizes Les Canadiens and deprives it of its political pretensions. Thus the inner identity change plays a vital role to indicate that there is hope for the federal political set-up of Canada, in spite of the victory of Parti Quebecois under the leadership of Levesque. This note of hope is sounded by the French kids who wish to defeat even a Russian hockey team. These kids hold Dave Kirk in awe and give him a message that Les Canadiens are still number one as a hockey team, notwithstanding its insignificance and irrelevance in the political game of the country.

**Political Scenario**

A landmark in the political subjugation of the French in Canada is General Wolfe’s military victory at the expense of his own life on the Plains of Abraham. Smarting under this ignominy, the French seek balance, parity, rehabilitation, and retrieval through various means. They pour their hearts out in choice abusive epithets. If the French Farmer calls the English bastards, his wife not only echoes him but also adds another abusive expression pigs. She is virulent in her vitriolic use of language. She says that the English are never satisfied, they have been on the prowl in Europe and America and now their predatory nature is extended to Canada. She does not conceal her hostility, and tells an English fan that the English “gotta own everything” (80). Her son resents the fact that the French play hockey for the English.
The Rink Owner aptly says that “the French hate English” (48). When the national anthem is sung, Mother does not rise and when she rises reluctantly, she sings a different song. She is incapable of seeing anything good in an English player. Morenz is an English player but she prefers to think that he is a Frenchman from Switzerland. She snubs an English fan, and ignores him.

The French find it difficult to pronounce English names like Watson, McMahan, O’Connor and Getliffe. The English find it difficult to pronounce names like Boucher, Lamarche. Dave Kirk cannot pronounce Lise correctly. This mispronunciation of names is a factor that mirrors the social divide between the two linguistic communities of Canada. There is no agreement on the pronunciation of even the name of the hockey team between Rink Owner and O’Brien.

It is stated that the English hate the French. But the English do have mental reservations about the French. The English sportscaster describes the Canadiens as rough and tough. O’Brien says that Quebec does not have three wise men and a virgin; Dandurand tells Morenz, “Those things you heard about the French Canadian girls… A lot of them are true” (68). If Dandurand thinks that the French are lazy and stupid, the English fan says that the French are not physical types, they are small, and spiritual and that is the looniest thing to have a hockey team of Frenchmen. Watkin describes the Quebecers as ‘rowdy Quebecers’. Reverend Peachtree says, “Montreal is the devil’s den” (59). Rick Salutin writes, “Quebec always seemed to be a troublemaker. Those French-Canadians were fractious, rambunctious – they fly in the ointment of Canadian history” (Salutin 22).

The English have a clear edge over the French, inspite of the unflattering comments. For example, the English are conscious of their affluence, business
acumen, and political power. They try to be generous towards the French. One English businessman offers a job of building a brewery to a French businessman; an English fan offers to buy a souvenir programme for Mother. Such offers are disdainfully treated by the French.

Clarence Campbell, President of the National Hockey League, tells Maurice Richard the Rocket, “I have nothing against you. Or any French-Canadian player. Or any player” (LC 106). England was once described as a nation of shopkeepers. Clarence Campbell, a typical English man in Canada says, “Hockey is also a business” (107).

As the election results are being announced and it becomes increasingly clear that the party espousing French causes is emerging as a winner, the first player, known as Peter, is willing to assume a French version of his name Jean-Pierre Mahlovich. The overwhelming domination of English language makes the English feel guilty. The Anglophone players attend classes to learn French. The classes are few and far between; the French teacher finds the room unsuitable and strange to learn French; she does not permit them to use English in the French class. However, the third Anglophone Canadian says that the English players have volunteered to learn French because, “We work with guys who speak English to us; we wish to speak French to them” (127). The official language of the team, according to Kirk is English.

Miss Miron seems to have a pedagogic policy of teaching French through the Direct Method and she does not enable the students to learn French without tears. She is proud of her mother tongue, which has produced Moliere. She is proud of the French player, Rocket and she likes the Parti Quebecois but she mentions the party
last in order to hide her preference for it before the Anglophone students. She teaches
the language through singing and introduces the French terms for the items pertaining
to the uniform and the game of hockey.

Miss Miron is important to the extent that she responds to the voluntary
gesture of the Anglophone players to learn French in order to reciprocate the
sympathetic attitude of the Francophone players towards English. She is not a
counterpart of Mother. In the absence of any actorial hint in this regard, it is too
much to assume as is done in the following extract: “The woman becomes an irate
French teacher who is less than committed to the linguistic ineptitude of the class until
she discovers belatedly that they belong to Les Canadiens” (Salutin 143). It is to be
noted that no character from the first act is given a berth in the second act. Rocket
may be mentioned; Vezina’s portrait may be there; they are made to appear ethereal;
that is all.

Patriotic praise for the whole country of Canada comes from either the English
or the players of Les Canadiens. Henri Richard, brother of Maurice Richard, known
as Rocket, is an ex-player. He says, “Look, this is the greatest country in the world to
live in. It gives you the best chance to get what you want” (158). He wanted to be a
member of Les Canadiens and he wanted to own a tavern. He realized both his
dreams. This realization reinforces his patriotic fervor and he writes an article in
support of the Liberal Party, even though people do not expect him to do so for he had
suffered much at the hands of the English Coaches. The fourth player who is a
Fancophone voted for the Union Nationale, a separatist party, but people realize that
such a voting decision divides the anti-Parti Quebecois votes and so the contest
narrow down to just two parties federalists represented by the Liberals and
separatists represented by Rene Levesque and his Parti Quebecois. On fifteenth November, 1976, the Parti Quebecois gets solid backing from the people of Quebec.

The speech is addressed to the limited number of spectators present after the voting is over and when the results are being announced. It is not without significance that Miss Miron does not go to vote whereas Mademoiselle Chapleau does. The link between England and Canada is represented by Sri Edward Watkin and he wants to play his role in making one country out of Canada through the railroad laid from coast to coast, or as he prefers to describe it from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The national system will become large enough to make the English investment in the railroad economically viable. As a non-Canadian, an Englishman uses the term ‘rowdy Quebeckers’ which a Canadian Englishman will never use. Rick Salutin says, “In high school history class, I recall that Quebec always seemed to be a trouble-maker” (22). So Watkin’s description of the people of Quebec is a stereotyped version.

Macdonald argues that Canada must remain one country with the facility for local governments. The local autonomy will be confined to subjects like “education and the like” (40). He wants neither a confederation of states nor a republic nor a monarchy. Further he does not like the idea of a federation too. Time moves too fast for Macdonald and the independence movement gains momentum in different parts of the country. Macdonald begins to doubt the wisdom behind the policy of giving them their own little province and leaving the nation-building to the English. He is jittery about the fissiparous tendencies in Quebec but then it is a worry not only for him but also for the Liberals. His fear comes true on fifteen November, 1976 when the Liberals lose the election to Rene Levesque’s Parti Quebecois, which restores a sense
of self-respect. The sentence “We stood up” sums up the spirit of the electoral victory.

The Archetypal Value of the Theme

While reading the play, we can draw the conclusion that the play, though reflecting an intensely local sensibility, has an extremely universal relevance. The French-Canadians in search of identity, freedom and victory, are not an isolated group managing to survive in the close proximity of the forbidding North Pole. Instead they symbolize and represent aspirations shared by several groups throughout the length and breadth of the planet. Corsica wants to assert her identity against the French mainland; the Irish Catholics in Belfast are pitted against the British majority; the people of Bosnia Herzegovina do not want to be a part of the greater Serbia; parts of Georgia in the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics show their resentment against Georgia time and again, and Chechnya has resorted to violence and bloodshed to secure independence from the federalism of Russia. In recent times, unrest is sweeping across African countries as a symptom of a search for identity. Darfur in Western Sudan is symptomatic of that search for identity leading to a humanitarian catastrophe. The African Muslims have not bonded with the majority Arab Muslims.

The French-Canadians seeking a surrogate victory through ice hockey to overcome a feeling of inferiority as second-class citizens, has a symbolic significance even for the people of South Asia. This significance has been artistically exploited by Aamir Khan, who in his Hindi film, Lagaan, registers victory over the British colonial masters in the very game, cricket, which encapsulates the British ethos and temperament in a richly symbolic way. This victory manipulated on the celluloid, despite its artificiality, turned open the floodgates of suppressed joy to such an extent
that the film became a runaway success. In fact, it has become a land mark, a classic, and so it shows that the theme of *Les Canadiens* has something in it to touch the chords of the human heart everywhere, particularly the sensitive chords of the people nursing a grievance, real or imaginary, against a numerically advantaged neighbourhood.

The Canadian ethos is reflected in the remark of a Canadian Prime Minister who declared that, he would not follow in Abraham Lincoln’s footsteps and start a civil war if the French people wanted to secede from the rest of the country. Mrs. Madeleine Albright, a former Secretary of State of the USA, declared that personally she would prefer to concede without hesitation all demands for freedom wherever they are irrespective of the viability of the states that would be formed as a consequence. These widely publicized opinions of the people that matter mirror a certain mellowness and maturity, born as a reaction to violence and a war mongering that the World Wars unleashed.

The play, though almost four decades old, has a special relevance in India. The centripetal and the centrifugal forces are very much in evidence across the national spectrum. Some have lost their militant intensity and the passion like the Khalistan Movement. Some other movements in the north and the north-east have fluctuating with varied levels and intensities of militant agitations. The desire to break away from the national mainstream is kept aflame by forces of non-native origin. Quebec stands out prominently by its historical memory of its trans-Atlantic roots; the series of Anglo-French skirmishes right from 1066 and their extra-continental versions in the colonies of Asia and Africa have left their indelible mark on the Quebec psyche.
A similar spectacle is manifest in India. The post-colonial scenario is coming
to grips with a resurgent and renascent India with her yearning for the recovery and
restoration of Vedic glory. The European forces left their impact upon different parts
of India; the cultural values of the west have been imbibed by the elitist classes and
the ever-growing status of English-medium schools is a phenomenon that the loyalists
and devotees of regional languages have to contend with; the Angrezi-hatao agitation
in the north of India has lost some of its sharpness but the phenomenon remains. The
three-language formula has not found favour in some parts of the country. However,
most Indians are quite comfortable with their bilingual identity. Quebec is not quite
comfortable with it bilingualism; the problem may be due to the presumed superiority
of French not being recognized in the Canadian scheme of things. Tamilians in India
will empathize with the people of Quebec because they too wait for the national
recognition of Tamil as a classic language, a language that has not only stood the test
of time but also triumphed over historical vicissitudes. Now Tamil is not just a
language with a past but a language in command of itself, carving its own glorious
destiny.

It is not this phenomenon of bilingualism alone that brings Indians and
Canadians closer. In the first act of Les Canadiens time moves backward, ‘the
seconds click downward’; this brings to mind its similarity with the yearning for the
Vedic times, the desire to put the clock back. The Vedas reflect that there is a time to
act and a time to reflect on action. The Bible reflects that to everything there is a
season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. The Vedas in India and the
Bible in Canada enjoy a similar status. The British soldiers are against Canadian
peasants are in conflict because of their different national backgrounds. Lal Bahadur
Shastri, a former Indian Prime Minister, gave a slogan, ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan’ (Victory
to the soldier, Victory to the farmer). He saw the same classes of people but he saw them in conjunction and not in conflict. The soldier and the peasant are not seen in terms of less advantaged or more advantaged or in terms of the exploited and the exploiters. They are integral parts of the same nation, dedicated to the cause of national survival against a natural calamity like drought or a man-made catastrophe like an invasion.