

## **“The Rocket”: Newspaper Coverage of the Death of a Québec Cultural Icon, A Canadian Hockey Player**

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Through a systematic analysis of the English and French newspaper coverage of the May 2000 death of ice hockey great Maurice “the Rocket” Richard, this paper explores the cultural divide that continues to exist between Québec and the rest of Canada. We find that the French Québec media used the death to reassert the prevailing representation of Richard as a symbol of francophone identity and nationalism. For their part, the English Canadian media were willing to surrender this particular hockey legend to French Québec. The findings point to an enduring cultural gulf between Canada’s two solitudes that even the supposedly unifying symbol of hockey cannot transcend. The analysis also provides insight into how the media construct shared meaning for a defensively situated collectivity, as well as how such counter-hegemonic media discourses are received and negotiated by a dominant community.

En procédant à une analyse systématique des reportages parus dans les journaux francophones et anglophones à l’occasion de la mort, en mai 2000, de Maurice «Rocket» Richard, l’un des grands héros du hockey, les auteurs de cet article explorent la division culturelle qui continue d’exister entre le Québec et le reste du Canada. Ils constatent que les médias francophones du Québec ont utilisé la mort du hockeyeur pour réaffirmer qu’il constituait toujours un symbole de l’identité et du nationalisme francophone et que, pour leur part, les médias anglophones canadiens ont consenti à laisser au Québec francophone ce héros du hockey. Les résultats de l’analyse indiquent que le gouffre culturel qui sépare les deux solitudes au Canada existe toujours et que même le soi-disant symbole unificateur du hockey n’arrive pas à le combler. L’analyse donne aussi des indications sur la façon dont les médias forgent un sens commun pour une collectivité sur la défensive et permet de comprendre comment de tels discours médiatiques anti-hégémoniques sont perçus et traités par la collectivité dominante.

Two old races and religions meet here and live their separate legends, side by side.

Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*

We all wore the same uniform as Maurice Richard... We all combed our hair like Maurice Richard... We laced our skates like Maurice Richard, we taped our sticks like Maurice Richard. We cut his pictures out of all the newspapers. Truly, we knew everything there was to know about him.

Roch Carrier, *The Hockey Sweater*

The significance of ice hockey to Canadian culture is widely trumpeted within the popular and even academic realms. In a nation riven by virtually every social signifier, particularly language and, to an ever increasing degree, culture and ethnicity, the game of hockey is often heralded as the country's social glue, the "great unifying symbol ... at the core of the Canadian experience" (Beardsley 37). Richard Gruneau and David Whitson argue that the game maintains its salience as such even in an era where escalating diversity and political instability seriously challenge efforts to assert a unified, pan-Canadian identity:

Hockey has a capacity to induce the recollection of familiar experiences and to subtly connect this recollection to a seemingly less complicated image of Canadian society. In a time of uncertainty, and in a Canada increasingly characterized by difference, this comfortable familiarity and ability to convey an older sense of Canadian identity have an engaging and enduring appeal.

(Gruneau and Whitson 7)

Gruneau and Whitson further contend that hockey has been constructed as a sort of "popular theatre" reflecting deep-rooted tensions and rivalries in Canadian society (136). For example, games between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Montréal Canadiens have been represented to reflect the sociopolitical differences between Québec and the rest of Canada (RoC). The game has been used as a forum for playing out real world themes and conflicts in Canadian society – Western Canada versus Eastern Canada, Canada versus the United States and Canada versus the Soviet Union, to name only a few.

A prominent theme in the academic literature examining hockey's cultural importance in Canada is the role the media have played in cultivating the game's significance. In his detailed look at the legendary 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union, Neil Earle explores how the advent of televised hockey merged with the collective imagination (the "meaning-generating" capacity) of the Canadian people to elevate the game to an almost mythical cultural status. "Hockey,"

concludes Earle, “for all its regrettable ‘male-only’ encodements, its violence and occasional juvenility, serves as a primal source of identity-reinforcement for Canadians” (120). A somewhat more rigorous media analysis of the 1988 marriage of hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky to an American actress and his subsequent trade from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings adds implicit fuel to Earle’s contention. According to Steven Jackson (441), against the backdrop of the Canada/US free trade debate, this double loss was constructed as nothing less than a crisis of Canadian identity. Indeed, the luring of Gretzky to Los Angeles suggested that a bulwark of Canadian popular culture was threatened.

For better or worse, hockey seems to have served as an anchor of who *we* (as Canadians) are – a talisman of northern grace and toughness. But, in light of hockey’s roots in Québec and the enduring prominence of French-speaking players in the game, what about its unifying effects in the Canada-wide context? Does hockey transcend the cultural and political divisions of Canada’s traditional two solitudes? How, in other words, is hockey appropriated in Canada – in a *uniform* or *situated* fashion? That is, in the same way or different ways? The May 2000 death of hockey icon Maurice “the Rocket” Richard provides an ideal occasion for an exploration of such questions. Not only is Richard a hockey legend, for a time during his heyday he was a powerful symbol of French Québec’s identity and nationalism. Our aim in this paper is to offer a systematic examination of how the death of this highly celebrated athlete was represented in newspaper coverage throughout Canada.

### **The Rocket: Hockey Icon and Political Symbol**

Playing for the Montréal Canadiens in the 1940s and 1950s, Maurice Richard (4 August 1921 to 27 May 2000) established himself as one of the greatest players in National Hockey League (NHL) history. In 18 NHL seasons, the Rocket led the league in goal scoring five times, including an unprecedented 1944-45 season in which he scored 50 goals in a 50-game schedule. By the time he retired in 1960 he had amassed 544 regular season goals and 82 playoff goals, eight of which were scored in overtime. All these were NHL records upon his retirement. Along the way, he managed to spearhead the legendary Canadian teams of the era to eight Stanley Cup Championships. In a 1998 publication ranking the top 50 NHL hockey players of all time, *The Hockey News* ranked Richard in fifth place.

To refer to Maurice Richard as a mere hockey legend is an understatement. The Rocket was one of those rare athletes who managed to transcend his sport, at least in Canada and especially in Québec. To a francophone community politically and economically disadvantaged within an anglophone-dominated province and nation, the Montréal born and raised Richard became a symbol of strength and

hope (Di Felice 204; Dupperault 73-4). He was constructed to represent the emergence of a new French-Québec nationalism – a nationalism that gradually supplanted an outdated French-Canadian consciousness. This new, more militant nationalism demanded greater economic opportunity for French Quebecers and insisted that the provincial government take an active role in making the Québécois “masters in our own home.” Gérard Gosselin articulates Richard’s importance as a symbol of this transition:

[cette] admiration – parfois excessive – s’explique aisément. En Maurice Richard, nous admirons l’homme qui a su se dépasser et qui nous rend plus fier d’être homme... Il est ce que nous aurions voulu être, chacun dans notre sphère. Et c’est pourquoi sa gloire nous émeute tant. C’est pourquoi ses victoires soulèvent une admiration aussi passionnée dans la masse.<sup>1</sup>

(Gosselin 106)

In many ways, what Richard meant to French-speaking Quebecers paralleled what baseball legend Jackie Robinson or boxing hero Muhammad Ali meant to African-Americans. But, despite Richard’s popularity and status as a Québec hero or icon, his shy and apolitical nature kept him from becoming the spokesperson French Québec perhaps wanted him to be. As Hugh MacLennan noted, “Richard is an old-fashioned personality, utterly non-conformist, relying more on élan than on cunning, with a strange courtliness even in his ferocity” (40). As unassuming as he was, however, Richard’s apolitical character gave French Québec a blank page on which to forge the symbolic markings of an emerging political consciousness (Hickey C1-C2).

At no point was Richard’s status as a political hero in Québec more evident than during the infamous “Richard Riot” of 1955. In the 1954-55 hockey season, the Montréal Canadiens were pursuing first place in the NHL standings while Richard was chasing the NHL point scoring championship, the one individual title that managed to elude him in his illustrious career.<sup>2</sup> Known for a furious temper and on-ice aggressiveness, Richard became embroiled in a notorious incident in a game against the Boston Bruins on 13 March 1955. In the dying minutes of the game, which the Canadiens were losing by three goals, Bruins player Hal Laycoe struck Richard in the head with his hockey stick. When Richard realized that the attack had opened up a large cut on his forehead, he launched a vicious retaliatory attack on his opponent, striking Laycoe repeatedly with his hockey stick and assaulting an intervening official in the process. Two days later, NHL President Clarence Campbell suspended Richard for the remainder of the season including the playoffs, thus jeopardizing the Canadiens’ shot at a first-place finish and Stanley Cup championship, not to mention Richard’s chance to win the scoring title. As it turned out, all three of these goals, ravenously desired in hockey-mad Montréal, failed to materialize.

In handing out such a stiff penalty, Campbell uncaged a dragon in Montréal that reared its head in a game played at the Montréal Forum against the Detroit Red Wings on 17 March 1955. Campbell's decision to attend this contest incited the hometown crowd to fury. Arriving late, the league president became an instant target as soon as he took his seat, to the point where he was repeatedly assaulted. Finally, a fan hurled a tear-gas bomb into the lower level seats where Campbell was sitting. As the acrid fumes began to engulf the arena, the decision was made to forfeit the game to the Detroit team, which was ahead by a score of 4 to 1. As the enraged patrons poured out of the arena, they merged with an equally agitated crowd that had been demonstrating outside. The result was a frenzied mob of approximately 10,000 people that went on a rampage throughout downtown Montréal. When the dust settled, there were 70 arrests, 12 injured police officers, 25 injured civilians and \$100,000 in property damage (Pincus, Hochberg and Malcolm 86).

There is little doubt that the Richard Riot represented a battleground on which larger sociopolitical tensions between Québec and the rest of Canada were symbolically played out. It is also widely argued that the Québec media were largely responsible for infusing the events leading up to 17 March with emotionally charged meaning. According to Jean Dupperault, the French press constructed Campbell's suspension of Richard as "an attack on the Québécois" (77). The francophone Québec press was responsible for the riot, because its coverage of the Richard ordeal presented "its subscribers with [an] emotional copy which was laced with veiled threats and racist prejudice" (Dupperault, 82).

David Di Felice echoes this perspective. This scholar compared media coverage of the Richard affair in Québec and RoC. He discovered that the Québec media, particularly the French-speaking media, largely condemned Campbell for his decision and stood firmly behind the Rocket. The RoC media, on the other hand, applauded the NHL president for the move. The fact that Campbell was an Anglo-Canadian was seized upon by the French-speaking press, who portrayed the affair as a symbol of the long-standing oppression francophones faced at the hands of the anglophone majority. According to Di Felice, the media in Québec managed to convince many francophone Quebecers that this was yet another instance of an anglophone exercising his power to control the destiny of the francophone community in order to prevent it from achieving its goals. Campbell's undermining of the success of French Canada's most revered athlete and team was constructed to mirror the francophone community's lack of power within the larger economic and political realms. In the eyes of Di Felice and others, the Richard Riot represented the first major bubbling of the Quiet Revolution, the 1960s francophone movement that demanded the Québec government modernize its political structures and take

control of the province's destiny in order to maximize the opportunities available to a new generation of educated, upwardly mobile francophone Quebecers.

### **Québec/RoC Relations Since the Richard Riot**

The more than four decades that have passed since the Richard Riot have failed to witness a bridging of the two solitudes. Since the Quiet Revolution, Québec has demanded that Canada be viewed as a partnership between the country's two "founding" nations, a model in which Québec would enjoy powers equal to those of Ottawa. However, the federal Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau did not share this vision. Instead, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Trudeau Liberals pursued a set of policies designed to strengthen the federal government while simultaneously undermining Québec's efforts to secure special powers within the federation. Official bilingualism was an example of such a policy. This federal initiative was inimical to Québec's desire to emphasize a unilingual (that is, French only) province to combat the discrimination francophones had historically faced within the anglophone dominated provincial economy and elevate the status of the French language in Québec (Waddell 618). Multiculturalism was another federal policy with which Québec took issue. From Québec's standpoint, this policy represented an attempt to reduce the province's special status and interests to the same level as non-Charter ethnic minorities (Fleras and Elliott 120).

The implementation of the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms was the measure that drove a seemingly irreversible wedge between Québec and the rest of Canada. Québec saw the Charter as something unfairly imposed upon the province: it viewed the document's emphasis on equality of the provinces (by imposing a uniform set of principles on the entire nation) as inimical to its efforts to preserve its distinct language and culture. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Brian Mulroney's federal Conservatives twice attempted to secure an agreement that would bring Québec into the constitutional fold by offering the province the special "distinct society" status it had long coveted. Both agreements failed. Subsequently, the sovereignty movement in Québec gained incredible momentum. This was shown in the remarkable performance of the separatist Bloc Québécois in the 1993 federal election (the party achieved official opposition status in Ottawa); the 1994 provincial election of the separatist Parti Québécois (PQ); and a 1995 referendum in which 49.4% of Quebecers – including almost 60% of Québec francophones – voted yes when asked if the provincial government should renegotiate its relationship with the RoC and move toward separation (Levine 332). Where the RoC is concerned, the implementation of the Charter appears to have instilled a "rights consciousness" that has exacerbated its intolerance of Québec's demands for special powers over the constitution (Taylor 60; Longstaff 30).

The sovereignty movement in Québec appears to have been pushed into the background at the start of the twenty-first century, with the Parti Québécois government currently focusing more attention on economic matters (Morris and Changfoot 149). Evidence that the sovereignty movement has lost some steam in Québec includes the decline in the number of seats won by the Bloc Québécois in the 1997 and 2000 federal elections; the party lost official opposition status in the former. Many observers have construed the January 2001 retirement of premier and PQ leader Lucien Bouchard as adding further weight to this claim. In spite of the current relative calm, the PQ has not given up its goal of sovereignty (Morris and Changfoot 149). As we will demonstrate, on a cultural level, Canada's two solitudes remain deeply divided.

### A Word on Methodology

In analyzing the media treatment of Maurice Richard's death, we decided to explore how newspapers in different regions of Canada portrayed the hockey icon, paying particular attention to differences in English and French coverage. Our specific objective was to examine and compare French and English newspaper coverage and to note distinctions between Atlantic Canada, Québec, Ontario and the West.<sup>3</sup> We looked at nine newspapers: the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, *Le Devoir*, *La Presse de Montréal*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Vancouver Sun*. We tried to account for regional differences throughout the country. Within Ontario and Québec, we attempted to look at newspapers that appealed to various audiences. *Le Devoir* and *The Globe and Mail* appeal to an upper-middle class audience, the *Toronto Star* and *La Presse* appeal to a more general readership, while *The Montreal Gazette* attracts an anglophone Québec audience. *Le Devoir* is commonly seen as yielding a Québec nationalist voice, whereas *La Presse* is viewed as being federalist oriented.

In our content analysis of these papers, we looked at 22 variables.<sup>4</sup> For this article, we focus on six. These include: newspaper, section, date, length, figures mentioned and emphasis of the article. *Newspaper* is defined as the newspaper in which the article is found. *Section* is the section of the newspaper in which the article appeared. *Date* is the day the article was published. *Length* is counted by number of paragraphs five lines or longer, with the exception of a series of small paragraphs, where every set of three paragraphs shorter than five lines was counted as equivalent to one paragraph. *Figures mentioned* refers to types of figures cited in the article, including separatist and federalist politicians, hockey players, everyday people, celebrities and combinations of each. *Emphasis of the article* is the main point of emphasis in the article, including hockey accomplishments (50 goals in 50 games), Québec related socio-political issues (the significance of the 1955 Richard Riot),

Canada related sociopolitical issues (the Rocket as a symbol of Canadian character), the funeral (anything related to the ceremony) and combinations of these.

Our sample consisted of 290 articles. Of these, 181 belonged to French Québec papers, 48 to English Québec papers and 61 to papers in the rest of Canada. A total of 109 English articles were examined. The criterion for selecting articles was simple. We collected newspaper articles that appeared between 28 May and 1 June 2000. This time frame represents the period ranging from the day after Maurice Richard died to the day after his funeral. We chose the day after in both instances because newspapers tend to reflect the news one day after an event occurs (Koopmans 101). It should also be noted that our sample does not include special supplements devoted to Richard's passing, such as that found in *La Presse*. Unfortunately, such supplements were not included in the microfilms for the newspapers from which we collected our data roughly one year after Richard's death. Finally, when a newspaper issued more than one edition for the day, we sampled from the first edition.

To analyze the data we employed a combination of qualitative and simple quantitative techniques. We identified dominant themes in the coverage and chose quotations from the articles to illustrate these. The quantitative component involved computing frequencies and cross tabulations. With this analysis, we felt we would be able to provide humanistic insight (through the quotations) into the sentiment and meanings surrounding the death while at the same time (with the cross tabulations) revealing overall trends in the newspaper coverage. We hope the two forms of data complement each other.

### **A Québec Cultural Icon, a Canadian Hockey Player: Analyzing the Data**

Before engaging in a detailed analysis and discussion, it is important to outline some of the general trends we found in the newspaper coverage of Maurice Richard's death. We divided the papers into French and English. Although there is some qualitative difference within both categories, we found (as it pertains to this analysis) that Canadian newspaper coverage was more profoundly characterized by linguistic differences. In making such a distinction we paid particular attention to differences between French Québec and the RoC.

An example and justification of this can be seen through the importance English papers and RoC papers placed on the event. Table 1 shows that French-Québec newspapers tended to cover the story in the first section of the paper, which is normally devoted to the top news. For example 97.4% of the articles in *La Presse* and 88.5% of those in *Le Devoir* were in the first section of the paper. That is compared to 47.9% of the articles in *The Montreal Gazette* and 34.4% of the articles in the three western Canadian papers. Among the English and RoC papers, there was



**Table 1: Cross Tabulation of Section of Article by Newspaper**

Section	Newspaper									Total
	LP	LD	MG	HC-H	TS	GM	WFP	CH	VS	
A	151	23	23	8	10	7	3	5	2	232
B	4	2	6	2	1		1	5		21
C		1	3				4	4	1	13
D			2		1			1	1	5
F									1	1
G			14						1	15
S						1				1
Unknown				1		1				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>290</b>

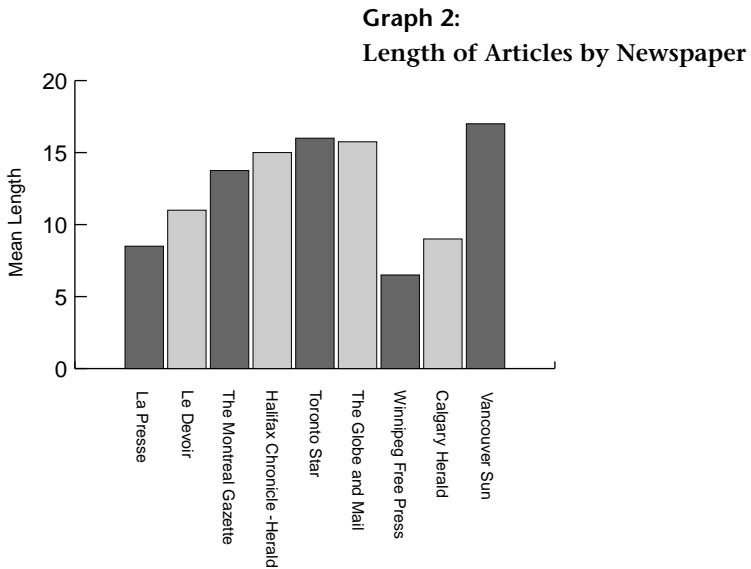
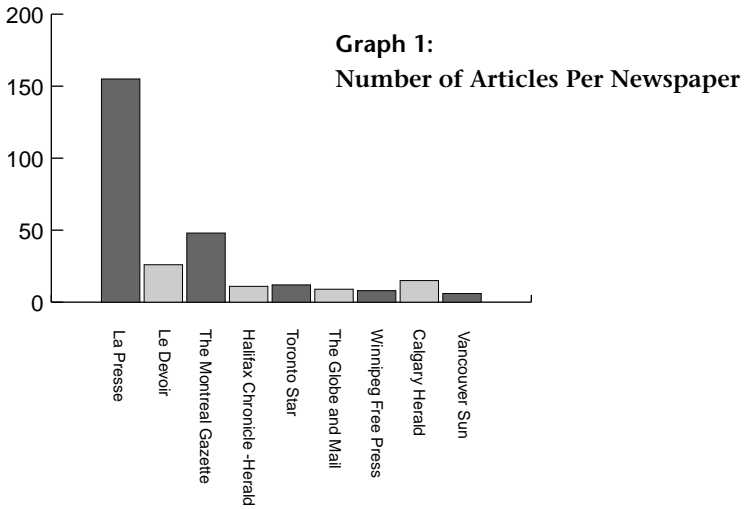
**Key:**

LP	La Presse de Montréal	GM	The Globe and Mail
LD	Le Devoir	WFP	Winnipeg Free Press
MG	The Montreal Gazette	CH	Calgary Herald
HC-H	Halifax Chronicle-Herald	VS	Vancouver Sun
TS	Toronto Star		

variation. The two Toronto papers and the *Halifax Chronicle* placed more importance on the event by having most of their articles in the first section. Even so, when we look at other patterns in the coverage we see more similarities than differences across the RoC. The more pointed differences were between French Québec and English RoC coverage. Although there were nuanced differences within each of the two solitudes, that is, between regions, they tended to be minor in comparison to differences between French Québec and the RoC.

We found that the French newspapers published more articles, but the articles tended to be shorter than their English counterparts. The relationship between the number of articles and length is an issue of quality versus quantity; the French papers tended to focus on one or two issues, whereas the longer English articles tended to be more comprehensive and detailed in their coverage. Moreover, the English papers tended to share articles and information. Many of the papers printed Associated Press, Southam and Canadian Newswire articles, which appeared in more than one English or RoC daily. This may reflect the fact that English newspapers, in particular western newspapers, placed less importance on the story.<sup>5</sup>

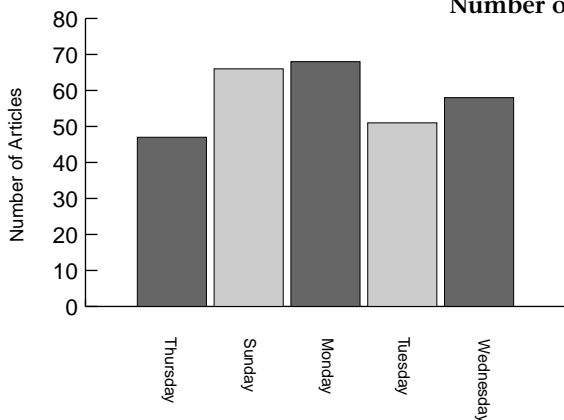
*La Presse de Montréal* by far had the most articles, 155 published over four days of coverage. By contrast, *The Montreal Gazette* published 48 articles over the same



four-day period. The English papers combined published only 109 articles for that period, of which only 40 were published outside central Canada.

We argue that the RoC and English media surrendered the Rocket as a cultural icon or symbol to French Québec. The Rocket's death reflects a divide in terms of cultural myth-making between Québec and the rest of Canada, which in turn fuels the existence of separate identities or spheres of being. This lack of shared

**Graph 3:**  
**Number of Articles by Day**



icons or markers as well as the lack of negotiation over their meaning(s) contributes to the perpetuation of what Hugh MacLennan called the two solitudes. In other words there is a lack of what Andrew Kim (257) identifies as a pan-Canadian civil religion – a set of beliefs and shared symbols that binds the country together from coast to coast and from solitude to solitude (see also Bellah 16).

A related consideration is the length of articles by newspaper, an analysis of which reveals that the articles in the RoC papers tended to be longer than those in the three Québec papers, both English and French. Even so, among the RoC papers, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* had shorter articles than the papers in Vancouver, Toronto and Halifax. The two French papers, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse de Montréal*, had shorter articles than the English paper *The Montreal Gazette*. We believe this is symptomatic of the different ways the two solitudes perceive the Rocket's legend. The Anglophone papers tended to discuss the Rocket in general terms, not highlighting any single aspect of his life, blurring his political significance in Québec with his hockey accomplishments. This was in contrast to the French papers, which tended to highlight specific, often non-hockey aspects of Richard's life and legend without counterbalancing or blurring them.

In covering the event, most of the papers followed a similar pattern. They tended to have heavier coverage in the first two days after the Rocket's death and waning coverage up to the day after the funeral. Most of the papers had more articles on Richard in the first two days after his death, the exceptions being *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Globe and Mail*. We think these particular English newspapers may have been slower to cover the death because they did not recognize the significance of the event. They may have only come to realize its importance as

Richard was lying in state, when 115,000 people paid their respects at the Molson Center, the current home of the Montréal Canadiens.

In spite of the important place hockey is said to occupy in Canadian culture, the Canadian media outside Québec were inclined to surrender this particular hockey icon to Québec's francophone community. There were occasional pleas from columnists or fans, politicians or hockey personalities insisting that the Rocket meant as much to Canada as he did to French Quebecers. There is an example of this in an article in the *Calgary Herald* that characterized Richard's funeral as a context where federalist prime ministers and separatist premiers met and put aside their differences. The article quoted renowned hockey personality Don Cherry as suggesting, "People in Québec loved the Rocket, but he was our [RoC's] hero, too" ("Au Revoir, Maurice," A3). In the same article Toronto Maple Leaf coach and general manager, Pat Quinn, echoed the sentiment:

He was a symbol of struggle to all Canadians, not just Quebecers.... For my generation, he symbolized the desire to get out from under the British flag, that we were no longer a colony and we had to stand on our own as a country. He made us proud to be Canadian. (A3)

Another example is an editorial by Lawrence Martin in *The Montreal Gazette*, where he compared the Rocket with Trudeau, noting that both were outliers of Québec and Canadian society. Treating Trudeau and Richard as both Québec and Canadian icons, Martin argued they filled a void, even though neither reflected the people of their times in either context. Instead, they were people who symbolized periods of transition, or what the people were to become in Québec and Canada (Martin B2).<sup>6</sup> However, articles that attempted to represent Richard as a pan-Canadian cultural symbol were few and far between. By and large, the RoC and English media made little effort to appropriate the francophone legend.

The English articles that did look at Richard's political significance tended to place him on the same pedestal as Parti Québécois founder René Lévesque in terms of his significance to Québec society and nationalism. As Shauna Richer writes in *The Globe and Mail*:

It is true that in Québec hockey is bigger than religion, and that in his day Maurice Richard was bigger than the Pope. It is also no surprise that one of the grandest funerals this province has ever witnessed honoured him. (S3)

But most English-language newspapers tended not to produce articles that afforded Richard a similar status within Canada as a whole. Instead, they were satisfied in treating the Rocket as a Québec symbol and a Québec hockey player.

While the anglophone media were reluctant to embrace Richard as a Canada-wide icon, the Québec media not only exalted him as a hockey legend, but also imbued him with the status of a sociopolitical symbol and hero for French Quebecers. A *Le Devoir* editorial by Jean-Robert Sansfaçon illustrates such an encodement:

l'homme n'était plus seulement populaire, il avait été hissé, malgré lui, au rang des pères fondateurs du réveil canadien-français ... Maurice Richard aura été à fois l'idole, le symbole, et le miroir de ce peuple qui l'a vu grandir avant de s'en faire un modèle.<sup>7</sup> (A8)

This sentiment was echoed in an article in *La Presse* with the headline "The Last of the Heroes" ("Le dernier des héros"). The article proclaimed "Maurice Richard est mort. Et le Québec un peu aussi" ("Maurice Richard is dead. And Québec is a bit also") (Foggia A5). In another *La Presse* article, Jean-François Bébin and André Duchesne, note:

C'étais un personnage un peu mythique, qui a marqué le Québec comme Félix Leclerc et René Lévesque et le cardinal Paul Émile Léger. Il a marqué l'imaginaire et l'agir des Québécois.<sup>8</sup> (A6)

A recurring theme in both English and French media coverage was the portrayal of the former hockey star as a symbol of hope and strength for French Quebecers – a larger than life figure who elevated the self-esteem and consciousness of a historically oppressed community. Randy Starkman illustrated this point in a *Toronto Star* column:

He was the one who brought the French Canadian discontent with their English bosses to the surface. He gave French Canadians confidence they could compete and win. He was bigger than religion. (A1-A2)

A quote from a Montréal hockey fan bolsters the meaning attributed to Richard in this regard: "[Richard] symbolizes the ability of the French Québécois people to stand up, to succeed. He represents courage, tenacity, pride" (McKenzie A1-A3).

Within this context, Richard's accomplishments were held up as evidence that French Quebecers were capable of much more than the agrarian pursuits to which they were largely relegated when Richard played. As Lysiane Gagnon, a francophone writer for *The Globe and Mail* and *La Presse*, wrote, "Richard was their champion, the toughest scorer in the world, the living proof that French Canadians were not born to be hewers of wood."<sup>9</sup> (The hewers of wood phrase was used in two other RoC articles to illustrate the same point; in many of the French articles the Québec people were referred to as the *p'tit peuple*, or small people.)

**Table 2: Cross Tabulation Figures Mentioned by Newspaper**

Figures Mentioned	Newspaper									Total
	LP	LD	MG	HC-H	TS	GM	WFP	CH	VS	
Celebrities	20	1		1				2	1	25
Combo All	6	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	29
Everyday People	24	3	8		2			2		39
Federalist Politicians	5		1	2						8
Hockey Players	47	10	20	3	2	2	2	6		92
Hockey Players and Federalists			1			1				2
Hockey Players and Separatists	3	1	1				1			6
No Mention	31	5	7	2	2	3	3	2	3	58
Other	5		1							6
Separatists Politicians	11	1	2							14
Separatist and Federal Politicians	3	2	3		3				11	
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>290</b>

In further reifying Québec's construction of the Richard legend as a symbol of Francophone identity, a repeated emphasis in both the French and English newspaper coverage was the Rocket's closeness to the people – a rare icon who was not distanced from the masses in terms of class or proximity. The words “simple” and “modest” were frequently used in reference to Richard in spite of their seeming contradiction with the simultaneous claim that he was a figurehead of francophone

political consciousness (Goyens and Orr 9). As Gagnon writes, Richard was a simple, unsophisticated man who never got very rich – he was a hockey star at a time when hockey stars were not treated like royalty, and could have been your next-door neighbour if you lived in the lower-middle class neighbourhoods of Montréal. (A3)

In their portrayal of Richard, the Anglophone media reflected much of the sentiment articulated in Québec's French-language newspapers. However, the Québec media took pains to illustrate this theme through frequent interviews with everyday people. *La Presse*, for example, interviewed people on the street ("Un Leader, un ambassadeur pour les Québécois" A12), people who grew up in Richard's boyhood neighbourhood<sup>10</sup> (Trottier A3), people in retirement homes ("Le Rocket a marqué sa génération," A11) and young people in public places like the Graffiti Café or the Tam Tam<sup>11</sup> ("Des jeunes graffiteurs rendent hommage au Rocket," A4). Although Richard stopped playing more than 40 years before, his appeal and image were strongly reflected among young francophones, revealing that his image transcended generations. Overall, for the French papers, it was important that the people contribute to the construction of the Rocket's meaning.

French Québec celebrities were also frequently quoted in the French Québec newspapers. Celebrities were mentioned or quoted in 21 of the French Québec articles (20 in *La Presse* and one in *Le Devoir*) compared to only four in the RoC papers (one in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, two in the *Calgary Herald* and one by the *Vancouver Sun*). The quoting of celebrities is probably symptomatic of the closeness and perceived importance of the Rocket by French Québec papers compared to RoC or English papers. In North America, when an important event occurs we often look to celebrities to interpret its meaning and significance. Thus, having celebrities, particularly French Québec ones, comment on the Rocket's death reaffirmed that the Rocket was indeed an important symbol in Québec, particularly for everyday people. The Anglophone media, by contrast, tended to rely on interviews with federal politicians and former professional hockey players to illuminate Richard's significance.

In blurring the division between Richard and the masses who adored him, the French Québec intelligentsia (celebrities, academics, newspaper editors, politicians) constructed the Rocket as a sort of counter-hegemonic symbol in the Gramscian sense – a symbol or individual who originated from the community and was represented in a way that helped to awaken, mobilize and reaffirm a subaltern political consciousness.

Another interesting point of difference between the French and English media coverage was the issue of Richard's legendary temper. A few English articles touched upon this, while the French Québec media virtually ignored the issue. Damien Cox acknowledges that there was "a dark side to Richard, a vicious temper that combined

**Table 3: Cross Tabulation Emphasis of Article by Newspaper**

Emphasis of Articles	Newspaper									Total
	LP	LD	MG	HC-H	TS	GM	WFP	CH	VS	
Canada			2							2
Funeral	20	6	8	3	3	2	1	4		3
Funeral and Hockey			1			1		1		3
<b>Hockey</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>68</b>
Hockey and Quebec	29	6	5	3	1	1	3	3	1	52
Hockey and Canada	1									1
Hockey, Quebec, Canada	4		3		1			1	1	10
Media	12	1		1						14
Other	33	2	2	1	1			1		40
Quebec and Canada			2		1					3
<b>Quebec</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>290</b>

with the relentless on-ice assaults of enemy players to produce a long series of ugly incidents that would culminate in the infamous riot" (A7). In a column in *The Globe and Mail*, former NHLer Howie Meeker wrote of why he disliked playing against Richard.

I had grown to hate the guy and everything he stood for in hockey. He knocked out more than a few of my teeth with his elbows, bruised my body with his stick and never let anyone get away with hitting him. I remember the night in 1954 when he carved up Bob Bailey on our team. Bob had simply dared to check him into the boards. Then there was the night he actually scalped Cal Gardiner. He swung his stick across the top of Cal's head peeling back his scalp and exposing his skull. (A13)

Thomas Axworthy, writing for *The Globe and Mail*, put an interesting spin on Richard's notorious temper by portraying him as a figure through which a frustrated francophone community vicariously vented its anger toward its anglophone oppressors. Axworthy wrote, "Even his famous temper was admired – he took no guff and when the Rocket stood up and hit back Francophones cheered" (A17).



Perhaps the most interesting difference between the English media and French Québec media in their coverage of Richard's death can be seen in the aspects of the Rocket's life and legacy they chose to emphasize. As much as the anglophone media were willing to concede the Rocket as a French Québec political hero, they emphasized Richard's hockey exploits. When his political status or meaning was mentioned within this realm, it was often buried amongst recollections of his 50-goal season, his more than 500 career goals, and so on. The English-speaking media in Québec shared this tendency in their coverage of the death. To the French-Québec media, Richard's hockey accomplishments and his significance as a political figure were given roughly equal billing. These trends are depicted in Table 3. The cross-tabulated figures show that the anglophone papers placed the most emphasis on Richard's hockey accomplishments, as 39 out of 109 (35.7%) articles emphasized hockey compared to 16 articles (14.7%) that portrayed Maurice Richard exclusively as a symbol of Québec identity or as a Québec or French-Canadian icon. It should be noted that of those articles, 10 were from *The Montreal Gazette*. On the other hand, in French Québec papers, 29 out of 181 articles (16%) emphasized his hockey accomplishments and 38 (20.9%) focused on his status as a Québec symbol or icon. There is a converse relationship in the emphasis of the articles between the French Québec and the English-language papers. Simply put, Québec newspapers in general were more likely to focus on the Rocket's status as a Québec cultural or political symbol. It is clear that the Rocket was more than just a hockey player to francophones. The English-Canadian media, however, displayed a (subtle) tendency to play down Richard's cultural and political significance.

That Richard's meaning in this regard was not emphasized in the anglophone media coverage is illustrated by the fact that none of the RoC English newspapers focused on the views, interpretations or opinions of separatist politicians alone. A look at Table 2 shows that, of the 109 articles in the English-language papers, only two (both from the *The Montreal Gazette*) mentioned separatist politicians alone. Only six articles (from the *Toronto Star* and *The Montreal Gazette*) made mention of them while also mentioning federalist politicians. And 20 articles cited separatist and federalist politicians while also mentioning hockey players.

By contrast, of the 181 articles that appeared in the French Québec papers, 12 (6.6%) mentioned separatist politicians alone, whereas only nine (4.9%) cited separatists and federalist politicians as well as hockey players together. One example of a French Québec article that focused solely on the views of a separatist politician is "Une puissante source d'inspiration, dit Lucien Bouchard" ("A powerful source of inspiration, says Bouchard" A4). The article contained the reactions and comments of Lucien Bouchard, then premier of Québec, and illustrates how comfortable the French Québec media were in allowing Québec separatists to construct the meaning of Richard's death. Even *La Presse*, known as a suburban federalist

paper, appeared to (consciously or unconsciously) strongly reflect the perspective of French Québec nationalists in its coverage of Richard's death.

The reliance of the French-speaking Québec media on separatist politicians in their coverage of Richard's death illustrates Stuart Hall's claim that broadcast or media professionals "are linked with the defining elites not only by the institutional position of broadcasting itself as an 'ideological apparatus,' but also by the structure of *access* (that is, the systematic 'over-accessing' of selective elite personnel and their 'definition of the situation' in television)" (136-37, emphasis in the original). This, according to Hall, is largely how the media tend to reproduce "the hegemonic signification of events" (136), in this case, the significance imputed upon Richard as a symbol of Francophone strength, identity and nationalism.

Moreover, many scholars, for example Todd Gitlin or Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, argue that the media construct frames of reference through symbols and media events, and these frames of reference help create or reify a common sense of identity. This is how the mass media contribute to the construction of a shared experience. Some scholars, such as Benedict Anderson, go further and argue that the media play an essential role in using symbols, figures and heroes to construct a national identity or imagined community where such an identity or community may not have existed before (37). Thus, by investing (by most accounts) a politically hollow or apathetic figure with powerful symbolic meaning, the Québec media reinforced a sense of unity and shared experience among francophone Quebecers.

While the English-Canadian media were willing to surrender the Rocket as a symbol of Québec identity, their selective use of particular authoritative voices represented at least a mild attempt to negotiate this meaning. More specifically, while the Québec papers tended to value the perspectives of Québec politicians, celebrities and everyday people to encode the Rocket with a more nationalist meaning, the anglophone newspapers attempted to subtly mitigate this significance by portraying Richard through the eyes of federalist politicians and, even more prominently, apolitical athletes. They further attempted to counterbalance Richard's sociopolitical meaning through an emphasis on his hockey accomplishments. In all, while generally accepting the cultural and political meanings vested in Richard by the francophone Québec community, the English-language media presented a relatively watered down portrayal of the former athlete's political significance to the province. Rather than negotiating where Richard's trans-hockey significance lies as a Canada-wide or French Québec cultural symbol, French Québec constructed a cultural and political symbol for their own community, which the RoC accepted while making subtle attempts to drag the Rocket's legend down to that of a mere hockey icon.

## Conclusion

In the wake of Maurice Richard's death, French Québec newspapers reasserted the existing sociopolitical meaning that Québec nationalists conferred upon him as a symbol of French Québec identity and nationalism. The media in the rest of Canada largely echoed this discourse. While the willingness to surrender the Rocket to French Québec reverberated throughout the RoC coverage, newspapers outside central Canada placed considerably less emphasis on the death than did the Toronto papers. This is evidenced by the greater reliance on wire service stories in the western Canadian coverage as well as the appearance of fewer articles in these papers.

At a time when Québec nationalism can be seen as waning, or at least entering a more latent phase compared with what Canadians witnessed in the first half of the 1990s, the French Québec newspapers' coverage of Richard's death illustrates the underlying nationalist sentiment that still exists in French Québec. It is a sentiment that exists despite the great changes that have occurred within Québec society since Richard played, changes such as the heightened socioeconomic status of Québécois and the increase in cultural diversity within the province. Moreover, the sentimental nature of the coverage of Richard's death in the French-language newspapers can be seen as a longing for a past version of the Montréal Canadiens that was perceived as better representing French Quebecers, that is, before the influx of European and American players, the Canadiens' loss of proprietorial rights to the best French-Canadian players in the game and the purchase of the Canadiens' franchise by an American corporation.

That the English-Canadian media did not contest the dominant thesis of the Richard-related discourse articulated by French Québec newspapers reflects the salient divide between the two solitudes, a divide that even the supposedly unifying symbol of ice hockey cannot entirely transcend. If the RoC did attempt to appropriate the Rocket as a pan-Canadian cultural entity, federalists could take solace in the fact that the two communities were playing with common symbols, a scenario implying that an overarching cultural order was being negotiated. This does not appear to be the case. The question that begs an answer, then, is why did the RoC press make little effort to present alternative representations of the Rocket? Given the importance of hockey to Canada, why not attempt to claim this particular hockey icon as a Canadian symbol?

Hall may once again provide an explanation. He argues, "encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate" (135). Applying Hall's thought to this discussion, the Québec media invested Richard with particular meaning derived from a larger hegemonic outlook within the province. This construction of Richard was, of course, almost six decades in the making, with his death providing the grounds for a loud reiteration of

it. Through this reifying process, hardened over time, Québec set certain ideological limits and parameters within which the RoC and the general English-speaking media could decode or (re)interpret Richard's meaning. The anglophone newspapers negotiated the French Québec media's hegemonic construction of Richard to some degree, specifically through journalism that employed somewhat subtle means of attenuating the political meaning that Québec society had conferred upon him. By and large, however, the fact that the RoC made only scant attempts to appropriate the Rocket as a Canada-wide cultural icon reflects just how wide the gulf between the two solitudes remains.

Another important conclusion to be gleaned from the analysis is that the sport of hockey is not the pan-Canadian glue it is often trumpeted to be. Instead, hockey's role as a unifying cultural form is complex and contradictory. A case could be made that Canadians from the two dominant linguistic communities are drawn together every week by a shared interest in "Hockey Night in Canada" telecasts on the CBC. This is particularly the case during the Stanley Cup finals and special international events, such as the 1972 Summit Series, Canada Cup and World Cup tournaments and the Olympics. In such instances, hockey demonstrates the fluidity of the boundary between the two solitudes.

Nevertheless, the newspaper coverage of Richard's death reveals that, at other moments, the game is appropriated differently by RoC and French Québec. Indeed, the RoC media's rather passive willingness to surrender Rocket Richard to Québec contrasts greatly with Jackson's analysis of the media coverage surrounding Wayne Gretzky's 1988 marriage to an American woman and, more importantly, his trade to a US based hockey team. The Gretzky issue, according to Jackson, was constructed by the English-speaking media throughout Canada as a crisis of Canadian identity – clear evidence that Canada was under threat from its "overbearing southern neighbor" (441).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, while Québec mourned the loss of Richard, the RoC media were content to portray the death as Québec's loss. Hence, picking up on Gruneau and Whitson's characterization of the sport as a form of popular theatre within Canada, hockey is clearly a cultural phenomenon comprised of situated symbols and identity markers. While the walls between the two solitudes are to some degree torn down by the game of hockey at particular moments, the situated aspects of the game serve to resurrect these barriers at other moments. Rocket Richard was an example of the latter scenario, as this hockey legend was clearly a political and cultural icon for French Québec but for the most part a mere hockey player for the rest of Canada.

## Notes

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1. This admiration, sometimes excessive, is easily explained. In Maurice Richard, we admired a man who surpassed himself and who made us feel even more proud to be a man. He was what we wanted to be in our own domain. That is why his glory touched us so much. That is why his victories brought out such a passionate admiration in the masses.
2. In ice hockey, points refer to a player's goals and assists added together.
3. Ideally, it would have been nice to look at more newspapers. In particular our study would have been aided through the incorporation of more French-Québec and Maritime papers. Moreover, the study may have gained further insight by incorporating some tabloids, like the *Journal de Montréal*. Unfortunately we were bound by time and finances and were forced to limit the scope of our analysis. It is our belief that the papers we did choose offer a relatively accurate and varied account of the coverage given to Richard's death.
4. The variables included: newspaper; date; page of story; section of the paper; length of story; number of photographs; type of photographs; type of article; figures mentioned; Richard's role; emphasis of article; symbol of the funeral. As well, nine dummy variables looked at symbols of Richard's life: significance of the 1955 riot; 50 goals in 50 games; 500 goals; 1955 riot; 96 standing ovation; coach of the Nordiques; dispute with the Canadiens; Rocket's eyes; reluctant hero; Richard bigger than religion.
5. One reason this might be the case is that it appeals to a wider audience than *Le Devoir*, whose audience tends to be an élite or intellectual readership. Moreover, *La Presse* appeals to a federalist readership, *Le Devoir* a sovereigntist one. Also worth mentioning, *The Globe and Mail* and *Vancouver Sun* do not print on Sundays. Even so, this does not account for such a stark difference.
6. Equally ironic is that later that year Montréal, Québec and Canada mourned the death of Trudeau as well.
7. Richard wasn't just popular, he was elevated against his will to the level of the founding fathers of the French-Canadian dream. Maurice Richard was the idol, symbol and mirror of this people, who watched him grow before making a model.
8. "He was a mythic personality, that left a mark on Québec like Felix Leclerc, René Levesque, and the Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger. He left a mark on the actions and imagination of Québec."
9. It is worth noting that the article was printed twice, once in English (in *The Globe and Mail* 1 June 2000: A3) and once in French (in *La Presse*, 2000: B3)

10. Maurice Richard grew up in a working-class north Montréal neighbourhood, Bordeaux, continued to live in such neighbourhoods as he played, and returned to the north Montréal neighbourhood of Ahuntsic in his retirement. He was an idol who lived among the people.
11. The Graffiti Café is a wall in the east part of the city, which is predominantly francophone, reserved as a prosecution-free graffiti zone. The Tam Tam is an event that takes place most Sundays in Parc Jean Mance at Mont Royal. People come to dance, beat drums and explore alternative lifestyles.
12. Jackson did not examine French-Québec media coverage of the Gretzky-related events.

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