

## The King Has Two Bodies: Howie Morenz and the Fabrication of Memory

Julie Perrone  
Concordia University

“Morenz looks as crafty and elusive as he was renowned to be,”<sup>1</sup> said Dave Stubbs on December 4, 2008, as the statue of Howie Morenz was unveiled on the sparkling new Centennial Plaza of the Bell Centre. A star of the 1930s who died very suddenly, Howie Morenz is often recalled as “hockey’s first *bona fide* superstar.”<sup>2</sup> The 2008 statue of Morenz, placed alongside those of Maurice Richard, Jean Béliveau, and Guy Lafleur, thus testifies to his importance in the “glorious”<sup>3</sup> history of the Montreal Canadiens. And hence, the name *Morenz* seems to command reverence, yet most people today have no idea who this hockey player was. His legacy is as elusive as he himself was and as his statue reveals.

In fact, Howie Morenz left behind two different images: he was an unknown and obscure player for some and a symbolic figure of hockey for others. On the one hand, Morenz was not a widely accepted hero during his time: he was booed by the Montreal fans, he was traded, and before the unveiling of this statue very recently, there was very little public material commemorative of him in the city. On the other hand, the honors bestowed upon him posthumously—a lavish funeral and a highly publicized memorial game—seem to demonstrate that Morenz had attained somewhat of an “exalted status,”<sup>4</sup> at least for those organizing the events, the National Hockey League (NHL) and the Montreal Canadiens. This duality took shape at the death of Morenz in January 1937 but grew stronger at his funeral and at the memorial game organized in his honor. This process of duplication will be examined through the study of newspaper coverage of the different events, but, before that, the context surrounding the events will be provided. It is important to contextualize the death of Morenz within hockey history, and the 1930s represents the most difficult time in the history of the NHL and the Canadiens.

The analytical section of this study of Howie Morenz should add to our understanding of key concepts in commemoration, the process of fabrication of memory, and the need for continuity that this process seeks to fulfill. The idealization of Morenz through his death, his funeral, and the memorial game organized in his honor distills the essence of what commemoration seeks to achieve, that is, to establish continuity with a past that has been modified to serve the present better.

---

Julie Perrone is with the Department of History, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, Canada.

## Hockey and the 1930s

The Great Depression started in 1929, and just a few years later some 27% of Canadians were unemployed.<sup>5</sup> During this difficult time, the National Hockey League was itself trying to cope with the financial squalor that had beset the nation; the League desperately needed the sport to become more widely recognized. Created in 1917, the league had a rocky beginning, enticing a mere 700 people to its first official game between the Wanderers of Montreal and the Toronto St. Patrick's. The league was in a constant struggle for players with both the Pacific Coast and the Western Canada hockey associations. The 1930s marked the first decade in which all Stanley Cup wins were awarded to NHL teams, but the league did not yet own the prized cup. The crash of 1929 caused four of the ten teams to fold because of poor attendance and intra-NHL competition for players' salary. The Montreal Canadiens (the Canadiens, or the Habs—from *Les Habitants*—as they were familiarly known) were in a similar situation and by 1935, their owner, Léo Dandurand, evaded bankruptcy by selling the team to the Canadian Arena Company, the owner and management company for the Montreal Forum. The arena itself ran into trouble in the same period, as "there was even talk of turning the Forum into a streetcar garage."<sup>6</sup> According to Brian MacFarlane, the team's performance in the 1935-1936 season was so horrendous that the NHL "gave the Habs' rights to all French Canadian players for two years," perhaps in the hopes that this privilege might contribute in building a stronger team.<sup>7</sup>

The NHL and the Canadiens were affected by the Depression in a bittersweet manner. On the one hand, attendance at games was low but players' salaries did not decrease, a combination that financially weakened both organizations. This was, for the most part, a legacy of the original owner of the Montreal Canadiens, J. Ambrose O'Brien, who was born wealthy and had no qualms about spending the family's money. He created a team in Renfrew, Ontario, and offered star players from other clubs more money than they could ever dream of. In doing so, O'Brien raised the average salary of hockey players enough that they began being called "the millionaires." This move in fact "made shambles of the economics of hockey"<sup>8</sup> and was directly blamed for the precarious situations of most teams in the NHL and elsewhere, especially during the Depression years. On the other hand, the notoriety of the sport was developing fast, because ". . . national broadcasts of NHL games found an audience hungry for inexpensive entertainment."<sup>9</sup> The radio broadcasts contributed significantly to hockey's rise in popularity in Canada; most people could not afford to see live games. This was a paradoxical situation: hockey was emerging as a truly national sport, people were listening to the games all across the nation, and, at the same time, its league struggled to stay afloat financially. Despite the fact that radio broadcasts might not have reached millions of people, they were still able to connect with a larger audience than was ever possible before. Before and during the Depression, the NHL sought to expand this audience and organized special hockey exhibitions in the United States in the hopes of "selling" the game to a potentially vast market.

Howie Morenz, born in Stratford, Ontario, started playing for the Montreal Canadiens in 1924. Léo Dandurand, then owner of the team, came to the small town to offer the young man an NHL contract. Morenz had doubts that he was indeed NHL material and he tried cancelling his contract a few days before he

was due at camp, telling Dandurand “I’m too light<sup>10</sup> and the league is too strong. I don’t believe I’m good enough to make a place on your team. . . . You’ll have to take the responsibility of depriving me from my livelihood and my amateur standing.”<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, Morenz reversed his decision and helped the team win its first Stanley Cup that same year. Until 1934, Morenz played center for the Canadiens, earning the Hart Trophy twice during that period, as well as leading the team in scoring for seven straight seasons.<sup>12</sup> He was, at that point, a star on which the NHL and the Canadiens administrations could count to sell the game to North American markets.

By the mid-1930s, his age as well as the constant physical efforts required by the game took their toll on Morenz and his trademark speed diminished. His poor performance caused him to be traded to Chicago in 1934, the trade enticing no negative reaction from fans or sports journalists. Morenz became a dead weight. His former talent was not realized with the Black Hawks and he was traded once again, this time to the New York Rangers. By then, the Canadiens were struggling, performing so poorly that they were not able to qualify for the Stanley Cup playoffs. Coach Cecil Hart decided to call Morenz back for the 1936-1937 season, a move that seemed to make sense since Morenz was able to reach the thirty-goal mark in mid-season. On January 28, 1937, Morenz’s promising return ended, as Earl Seibert, playing for the Chicago Black Hawks, inadvertently broke Morenz’s leg by falling directly on it. The fall alone did not explain the extent of the injury; however, what did explain it was the fact that in the impact Morenz’s ankle had become stuck, with his skate embedded in the rink boards in a very awkward way. The grueling details of the injury were unknown to the people who attended the game, as “... peu nombreux sont ceux qui ont vu comment s’est produit l’accident.”<sup>13</sup> Given the ultimate result of the injury, the memory of the event was slightly modified, as was reflected in this 1999 *Gazette* reflection: “The snap of Morenz’s left leg was heard from the Forum’s most distant seats. . . .”<sup>14</sup> Relatively new, the Forum in the 1930s was notorious for the semi-obstructed view it offered most of its visitors. Accordingly, it is more likely that the crowd of January 1937 had no idea what happened until the morning after, when they picked up the newspaper; therein they would have read that Morenz’s leg was broken in several places; this left no doubt that he would be out for the season.

Journalists, relatively rapidly, posited that the player’s career might be over: “ce triomphe fut très couteux pour le Bleu Blanc Rouge car le tricolore a perdu l’un de ses meilleurs joueurs pour le reste de la saison et peut-être pour toujours.”<sup>15</sup> Given the apparent gravity of the injury, it could be assumed that journalists would monitor Morenz, by following his progress and trying to guess if the player would come back, and if he did, when that would be. Surprisingly, Morenz’s name was rarely mentioned in Montreal newspapers between January 30 (the day following the reports on his injury) and March 8 (the day he passed away). In fact, in the rare occurrences where Morenz was mentioned, it was as a sports fact, that is, no more than an explanation for a poor performance of the team. In other cases, Morenz’s injury provides added value to a victory, actual or expected, without him: “...et malgré l’absence de Howie Morenz, qui sera empêché pour le reste de la saison à cause de son accident de jeudi soir, le club est confiant de remporter la joute....”<sup>16</sup> In addition, his status as just another player was confirmed in articles that listed him as part of a trio of injured players: “Morenz, Lépine et Buswell sont ceux qui

ne peuvent prendre part à la joute. . . .”<sup>17</sup> Pit Lépine was an ordinary player, who contributed some 8–10 goals a season, whereas Walter Buswell scored an average of 2 goals per season for the duration of his career. To be grouped with these two players as having a similar impact on the team was a telling sign of the fading talent, and recognition, of Morenz. The coverage of the injury was undeniably dramatic, albeit momentary, and became more so over the years. What the press review of the time tells us is that Morenz’s status as a star player was questionable and directly linked to his performance. His status changed on March 8, 1937, the day he died of what is now considered to be a coronary embolism, following a surgical operation on his broken leg.<sup>18</sup> The process of fabricating and embellishing Howie Morenz began shortly after he died.

### **Three Steps to Fabrication: A Death, a Funeral, and a Memorial**

Morenz’s death, his funeral, and the memorial game organized by the NHL and the Canadiens transformed and reinvigorated Morenz into the proffered status of a hero. But even through this process of fabrication of an idealized image, it is possible to distinguish the contradictions between the suggested image and the real one.

Given that hockey fans had not heard about Howie Morenz in weeks, the news of his death came as a total shock. One could assume that a regular update on the player might have enlightened the readers regarding Morenz’s exact condition at the hospital. His death happened with “stunning suddenness”<sup>19</sup> and only subsequently did final details of his stay at the hospital begin to pour out. Only after his death did people find out that “Howie has been brooding over his recent accident. So much so that he suffered a nervous breakdown.”<sup>20</sup> The death of the player was juxtaposed with a previous story that had been unequivocally positive. In the *Montreal Star*, one journalist opined that “apparently he was on his way to recovery when the end came swiftly”<sup>21</sup> and “yesterday he was supposed to have spent one of the best days in two weeks”<sup>22</sup> while the *Montreal Gazette* explained that “he was rallying from this complication.”<sup>23</sup> According to Bill Butler, it is indeed the obstacles or the enemies who really make the hero what he is; otherwise, “the good guy would consist of no more than human flesh and bone with the addition of a few superlatives.”<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that it is not possible to determine from the press coverage if Morenz was indeed getting better: he might have suffered from a condition that ultimately could have explained his death.

In 2008, journalist Ian MacDonald reported an interview with Morenz’s son in which the latter mentioned two possible causes for the death of his father: “I was at a meeting recently and after being introduced the fellow says to me, ‘Too bad your father took his life,’ Morenz said. [ . . . ] My father had died because of gangrene in his broken leg. There was never any story.”<sup>25</sup> Besides suggesting gangrene as a possible cause of death, this particular quote reflects the rumors suggesting that Morenz had in fact committed suicide, a version that dramatically could modify the legacy of Morenz as a hockey hero. In 1987, a new theory was suggested by Earl Seibert, who was blamed for indirectly causing Morenz’s death: “People said I killed him, but that really isn’t true. . . . But it was all his friends coming in to visit him, bringing him drinks and things, they were the ones who

killed him.”<sup>26</sup> In this case, a few weeks of partying were reported to have caused Morenz’s heart to fail. This would have tarnished the image of Morenz as a quiet man and a player dedicated to his career, and it is not surprising that this version was not publicized; it did not fit the narrative that was constructed at that moment. The cause of his death was important in that, notwithstanding the different theories, not one of them associated Morenz’s death directly to the injury he sustained while he was playing. A heart failure made him a passive hero, a drinking binge made him irresponsible; dying from his injury would have made hockey, and by association the NHL, responsible for his death.

The death of Morenz represented the beginning of his “life” in public memory. Once Morenz was gone, the narrative was created, retold, reformulated, and reinvented. As an example, Morenz’s bad performance prior to being traded was justified: “The precipitous slump (his scoring records) was due to a season in which he was harried by injuries.”<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, there were no reports on any injuries during that time. His memory was appropriated by those who created “another” Howie Morenz, a symbolic one. The National Hockey League, the Canadiens administration, and the sports media, shortly after Morenz’s death, all contributed in fabricating a polished image of Morenz; this is illustrated best in looking at the funeral and the memorial game for which these administrations paid.

Two days after Morenz’s passing, the Montreal Forum was transformed into a grand funeral parlor, where thousands came to catch a last glimpse of their hero. For one day, on March 10, 1937, the boundaries within the Forum were subsumed: spectators walked alongside players on the ice, and any fan was able to look at Morenz from only a couple of feet away. The usual separation between the chosen ones (the Habs) and the mere mortals (the fans) was forgotten, somewhat taking the shape of a procession in which the “group and other loyalties are dissolved in favor of an intimate, visual, penetrating, and affective relationship.”<sup>28</sup> For many, this would be the only time they could step onto the Forum’s ice and the only time they would see a player, Morenz, from this close. The class boundaries seemed to have dissolved as well for the occasion, as it was suggested that Morenz appealed to everyone: “People came in expensive motor cars, in expensive furs. There were urchins from the street, business folk, workmen.”<sup>29</sup> People paid their respects during the day and some were even lucky enough to be granted access to the funeral ceremony taking place later. The ceremony was conducted by a reverend who presented Morenz as a hero, on ice of course, but mostly outside the rink, as an honest man who worked hard and was happiest when with his family.

Just like monuments and other forms of commemorations, funerals are perhaps more about the people attending than the person for whom they are gathering. In this case, it seemed that the news of Léo Dandurand attending the ceremony took on a singular importance in this context of mourning: “La scène la plus touchante: Léo Dandurand qui arriva de la Nouvelle-Orléans pour la cérémonie.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in *Le Devoir* we could read that “Léo Dandurand, ancien co-proprétaire des Habitants, est parti en avion de la Nouvelle-Orléans pour venir rendre hommage à son ancien ami . . .”<sup>31</sup> and in the *Gazette* the same news actually made the headlines.<sup>32</sup>

Why did Léo Dandurand get so much attention, on a day supposedly dedicated to Morenz? Several reasons could be suggested. For example, one could assume that Dandurand was a very important man in Montreal, and quite wealthy after he had sold the team. In fact, he sold the Habs for \$165,000 to the Canadian Arena

Company, whereas he had originally purchased the hockey club for a mere \$12,500 a few years before. Perhaps his presence added importance to the event and to Morenz. Another possibility is that it was expected, and perhaps even required, that Dandurand show up at this ceremony. The story of Morenz, repeated everywhere since his passing, mentioned that the player did not want to play in the NHL and that it was Dandurand who insisted. Morenz's pleading to Dandurand in 1936 that the latter would regret "depriving [Morenz] from [his] livelihood,"<sup>33</sup> was an interesting omen in hindsight: Morenz started his hockey career with concerns over the potential physical harm it could do to him. This might explain why the presence of the man responsible for Morenz's hockey career was so important. But most importantly, Dandurand was still considered a member of the Canadiens organization and was indirectly involved in the commemoration process. Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan recently have underlined the importance of the commemorators in public memory. In the story of Madeleine de Verchères's statue, it is Abbé Baillargé, a priest, who pushed endlessly to have the monument built in his parish, who seems to be remembered. Indeed, the Abbé became as important as Verchères herself: "Baillargé's interest in the statue provides evidence of the way in which a public monument commemorates those who supported it as much as it remembers those depicted in it."<sup>34</sup> The authors suggest a similar finding in their study of Laura Secord's commemoration: "Monuments are not less honorable to those who erect them than to those whom they seek to honor."<sup>35</sup> In the story of Morenz, it can be argued similarly that those who organized and attended the funeral were playing a primary role in the celebration of Morenz's death, at least according to the press coverage devoted to them. And as this article demonstrates, through the study of Howie Morenz's funeral, it is possible to learn a great deal about his commemorators.

The readers of *Le Devoir* were informed, the day after the funeral, of how impressive the funeral was because of the people it gathered:

Ce fut véritablement une cérémonie fort imposante et surtout très impressionnante car tous les magnats du hockey professionnel et amateur, les joueurs et représentants des divers clubs de la Ligue Nationale, les rédacteurs sportifs, [...] les représentants du gouvernement provincial, les membres du conseil municipal et des milliers de femmes et d'enfants étaient présents...<sup>36</sup>

The article goes on to name most of the people associated with the hockey business. The presence of these people seemed to provide legitimacy to the sport, through the media lens. In Montreal, owing to its hockey fanaticism, the funeral of a hockey player was an event that could not be missed by the social and hockey elite. And the people who were in the stands were much more important, in terms of event commemoration, than the individual in the casket.

Another telling consideration is the change in the number of people who attended the funeral. The day after the funeral, *Le Devoir* counted "plus de vingt mille personnes [qui] ont tenu à rendre un dernier hommage à Howie Morenz," 12,000 or so inside and more than 8,000 waiting on the sidewalk.<sup>37</sup> By 1983, the number escalated to 50,000, most likely because the author of the article counted the people who came during the day.<sup>38</sup> In this story, 15,000 people were standing on the tiny sidewalk on Ste. Catherine Street. Four years later, exactly fifty years after

Morenz's death, the number of mourners was inflated to "200,000 [who] lined the route to the cemetery."<sup>39</sup> In May 2000, the funeral's actual size was greatly reduced to a mere 25,000 people.<sup>40</sup> One could posit that since the decreased number was compared with the number of attendees at Rocket Richard's funeral, a lower number would have provided a stronger contrast. It is clear that "death has a specific meaning for the social consciousness; it is the object of a collective representation."<sup>41</sup> How important a funeral is seems to determine how important the dead person was. In the era of Richard's tremendous popularity, the exaggerated Morenz numbers needed to be diminished, by comparison, for the collectivity.

As 8,000 or 200,000 fans crowded Ste. Catherine Street, the player's bier was carried to a funeral car and the cortege began its short drive to Mount Royal cemetery, with fans forming a small procession beside the moving cars. Yet again, this was an instance of public representation, as "the funeral procession to the cemetery is a symbol that acknowledges and pays homage to the importance of the deceased, and the more cars moving with the cortege, the more honor is perceived to have been demonstrated."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the variations in the number of mourners could be translated into the perceived status of the player: people who thought Morenz was great might have rounded up their numbers a bit higher than those reporting on an event in which they were not interested. The procession confirmed the dissolution of boundaries that had been witnessed in the Forum, as people walked beside the casket, without any particular order, to follow Morenz to his final resting place. It seemed to be a way to continue (and internalize) the relationship with Morenz until the very end, a form of "resistance to accepting biological death as a self-contained event, and a desire to prolong the departure from the dead through a process of phased transition."<sup>43</sup> This level of attachment might have been compounded by the fact that Morenz left so suddenly.

The Morenz funeral was broadcasted nationwide, an illustration of the NHL's decision to use national radio to publicize and further popularize the sport, and its struggling teams. According to Katherine Verdery, to parade "dead bodies of famous men" is, in fact, to use their "specific biographies to reevaluate the national past,"<sup>44</sup> or in this case to perhaps "invent" a common past. Hockey did not become our national sport naturally: it occurred, among other factors, through the contrived work of NHL administrators that resulted in the sport growing in importance. The respect paid to Morenz in this funeral ceremony acknowledged the escalating importance of hockey to Montreal society and, via radio, invited the rest of the nation to enjoy the sport and perhaps take part in the action. The NHL was on the brink of disaster; a national broadcast using the widely known name of Morenz, even if it had lost some of its luster, was sure to draw an audience and portray the humanity of NHL administrators. Then again, the CBC had been created just a few months before and claimed to reach only 50% of Canadian radio listeners.<sup>45</sup>

A funeral is, according to Jacqueline Thursby, "a cultural performance"<sup>46</sup> in which a community expresses itself. In this particular case, it was the hockey community that was invited to show its grief. As Thursby further proclaims, "funeral rituals follow ancient patterns and folk customs; it is a time for the celebration of a life, and it is organized by and for a particular community."<sup>47</sup> An event such as Morenz's funeral was an occasion to rebuild the hockey community and perhaps enlarge it. The NHL and the Canadiens covered the full costs of this ceremony, a surprisingly altruistic move for a corporation, especially in the context of the

Depression. But there was a clear advantage in doing so; the Forum was now packed with people instead of empty seats. The team was booed in the weeks prior to the funeral, Morenz included. This invitation to mourn the hockey player was a way to capitalize on grief and to illustrate (or create) by its strength the attachment people had to Morenz, to the Canadiens, and to hockey. The ceremony to remember Morenz was in fact a night for people to remember their old team and to come encourage them. For a journalist of the *Gazette*, what people remembered on that day, sitting in the quiet and mournful Forum were “exciting nights when the Canadiens were fighting hard and bringing fresh glory to Montreal . . .”<sup>48</sup> rather than Morenz. It is doubtful that saddened fans thought of great games rather than the departed player; perhaps this was wishful thinking on the part of the hockey community, or an obvious attempt to make the event about hockey and not Morenz. The death of Morenz undoubtedly reinforced, or rebuilt, Montrealers’ love for the Habs; the NHL’s special event was instrumental in this process. The funeral can be seen as a way for the NHL to strengthen an “imagined” community and by doing so, to push for a greater sentiment of belonging.

The day after the ceremony, it was suggested that the emotional outpouring of so many people could be translated into a fitting memorial for the player:

Something in the way of a plaque [...] that will be a living reminder of him and the place he held in hockey would be suitable. Major professional hockey has several trophies but there is always place for another to commemorate the deeds of the famous Canadian [sic] star.<sup>49</sup>

The plaque called for in 1937 did not eventuate until 1978 when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada created it inclusive of the modest inscription that Morenz was a “Montréal Canadiens hockey star, helped the team win 3 Stanley Cups.”<sup>50</sup> As for the trophy, it never materialized.

Several months after the Morenz funeral, the NHL and the Canadiens organized a memorial game in the honor of Howie Morenz, in the hopes of amassing enough money to provide for his family. For this special home opener, the Montreal Canadiens and the Montreal Maroons combined their members to play against a team made up of star players from the remaining teams of the NHL. As one could imagine, this game was yet again another celebration of other people more than it was a time to remember the departed player. The excitement before the game was directed toward the all-star roster that was set to play “the great ‘dream game’ of hockey,”<sup>51</sup> while the opening ceremonies were, in fact, awards ceremonies for other players. Because this was the first game of the year, the annual trophies were remitted to players before the game, celebrating the players, alive and well, who stood out from the rest. The focus was as much the players on the ice as people in the audience: “Hon. E.L. Patenaude, Mayor Raynault among thousands who will pay homage to the memory of Howie Morenz, most glamorous hockey star of his ages.”<sup>52</sup> Esioff-Leon Patenaude arguably was an unsuccessful politician: he had miserably lost in a federal election as a conservative but continued to hold office thanks to former Canadian Prime Minister Arthur Meighen. In any case, he accepted the presidency of the event and his name appeared in almost every article pertaining to the memorial game. As Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, Patenaude did contribute the prestige of his title to the evening, but most importantly, he legitimized the

event as a national rather than local celebration. Just as in the funeral, the people in attendance served to legitimize Morenz as an important figure.

The Canadiens administration assumed, and so did the Montreal press,<sup>53</sup> that the throngs of fans that paid their respects back in March would be thrilled to attend a memorial game in November, in honor of Howie Morenz. The *Montreal Gazette* proudly boasted that “half the Forum is already sold out”<sup>54</sup> and that the hopes of reaching between \$25,000 and \$30,000 could be easily attained. The press, and perhaps the Canadiens administration as well, were counting on a last-minute rush for tickets: “Given a final strong demand for tickets today and tomorrow, it is expected that a near capacity crowd will attend tomorrow night.”<sup>55</sup> Despite this enthusiasm on the part of the press, the sale of tickets waned. In fact, the insistence of sports journalists in Montreal that “while there will undoubtedly be a sellout, no one should stay away from the game for fear of not getting accommodation”<sup>56</sup> leads the reader to surmise that perhaps the game was not as popular as the NHL and Canadiens administrators hoped for. As for the money collected, the amount differed from one newspaper to the next. The *Montreal Star* confirmed that the \$25,000 objective would be reached,<sup>57</sup> whereas *La Presse* talked of an amount close to \$11,000<sup>58</sup> and *Le Devoir* reported that “les recettes se sont élevées à environ \$14,000.”<sup>59</sup> The amount differed according to what was counted as part of the Morenz fund. Some included the sale of tickets, which amounted to over \$10,000; this number meant that the Forum was not filled to capacity. From this evidence, it appears that the last-minute rush for tickets simply never happened: “True. There were yawning gaps in spots but the result is highly satisfactory.”<sup>60</sup> Added to the ticket sale were donations from hockey clubs or individuals, the sale of Morenz’s hockey equipment, and the evening programs. There was also mention of some money amassed through preseason games and donated by the Canadiens’ administration. What this seemed to demonstrate was that the evening did not produce as much as the organizers had wished. The “donation” from the Canadiens guaranteed the success of the memorial game it had itself organized. The fact that another memorial game was organized shortly after in Stratford, hometown of Morenz, confirmed that funds were needed to provide adequately for the family. This game brought the Morenz “survival fund” to \$26,000.<sup>61</sup>

The money was to be “placed in a trust fund, of which Frank Calder was to be the head. From this fund, the Morenz family will be cared for.”<sup>62</sup> Calder was the president of the National Hockey League and was in no way related to the Morenz family. It seemed peculiar that the fund was managed by the NHL, somehow keeping the family dependent upon Morenz’s former employer. Moreover, Calder was to be the trustee until Marlene, the youngest of the Morenz children, reached 25 years of age. Morenz’s widow had absolutely no say in how the money was managed and how much she could obtain on a daily basis. And according to her son, “There wasn’t a great deal of money. The trouble was, all the money that was collected had to be put in a trust fund and it just earned 3 per cent interest a year. Mother could have done much better, but, by law, she wasn’t allowed.”<sup>63</sup> The memorial game had been organized so that “hockey in part repaid the great debt owed the departed star,”<sup>64</sup> but the fact that the NHL held the money seemed to illustrate that the Morenz’s family would be indebted to the organization for most of their lives. The memorial game was a mitigated success. The Great Depression definitely contributed in keeping the fans home but perhaps the idealized image

of Morenz did not resonate with the public, who actually remembered well that Morenz was not a star anymore.

The memorial game was apparently a new concept, a “happy inaugural for the all-star game idea.”<sup>65</sup> It is believed, by some, that the Morenz memorial game was the first of its kind, although two similar events had been organized before 1937.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps what this “fétichisation des origines”<sup>67</sup> means is that this was the first game dedicated to a “real” star, and part of a developing NHL that acknowledged the game as its first. According to this narrative, the Howie Morenz memorial game was the beginning of an “invented tradition.”<sup>68</sup> For the *Montreal Star*, the game was a harbinger of a much more altruistic gesture on the part of the NHL: “From now on the game will be played each year for the benefit of players in distress, or former stars of the game in need of help.”<sup>69</sup> Of course, the All-Star game is still played today and is a must-see for any hockey fan. Because of the sheer size of the hockey-playing population of today, the *grand public* is asked to vote for their favorite player and the ones with the most votes get to play in the vaunted game. Needless to say, this is absolutely not a benefit game and whatever proceeds are obtained go straight back into NHL coffers. The memory of Morenz thus lives on quietly: many celebrate the All-Star game, but few are aware of its early beginnings. By using the name of Morenz and the needs of his family as an underlying reason, the relatively new game concept was given legitimacy.

Howie Morenz, despite some problems at the end of his career, ended up being ceremoniously celebrated by the NHL and the Canadiens administration. The funeral and memorial game were contrived, large events, made for a larger-than-life individual, which Morenz was not. The public response to these commemorative celebrations confirms this and suggests that perhaps the fabrication of a new image of Morenz was not that successful. The fact that it worked or not matters little to our understanding of public memory because it is the process of fabrication, not the result, that is important. The following section discusses this process and the underlying need for continuity that it seeks to fulfill.

## **The Commemoration of Howie Morenz as a Case Study**

The case study of Howie Morenz reveals several key concepts about commemoration, confirming that public memory consists of a process of fabrication directed toward fulfilling the need for continuity. These two ideas are not only central to the understanding of commemoration, but also equally central to the process of creating history as a whole.

As a central element in the study of commemorative events, the process of fabrication is a fascinating but intricate examination of the underlying reasons for commemorating someone or something. In this case, what the press review seems to confirm is that there were two concurrent images of Morenz in 1937: one was publicly presented and the other was publicly perceived. In other words, there was a process of fabrication taking place, but the assumed consumers of the fabricated image did not respond as expected. This process of creating a public persona can be referred to as “the king’s two bodies,”<sup>70</sup> a theory developed by Ernst Kantorowicz suggesting that English kings had two bodies, one physical and the other political.

According to him, the king as a man was not perfect and to remedy this, an imagined persona had to be presented to the public. This enabled the king to project a perfect image, albeit a completely fabricated one. It is, in effect, a “remaniement même de la mémoire.”<sup>71</sup> In this Morenz case study, a similar process transpired in which the regular hockey player was promoted to a martyr-like status within the hockey realm to dramatize and capitalize upon his story. This is not to say that Morenz was not a great individual. But it appears the media sometimes is forced to gloss over more negative aspects of a hero’s life, limited in this way by the strict and narrow process of heroization.

This idea brings to the forefront the concept of reality versus representation. Kantorowicz analyses the power of symbols, metaphors, imitation, and rituals in the construction of an everlasting powerful and essentially positive image.<sup>72</sup> According to Michel Foucault, the two “bodies” are created at the same time: “Pour que le signe, en effet, soit ce qu’il est il a fallu qu’il soit donné à la connaissance en même temps que ce qu’il signifie.”<sup>73</sup> What Foucault seems to suggest is that the king becomes king at the very moment in which his representations take on a life of their own. This is what happened to the image of Morenz, as it was only after his death that the narrative was appropriated by others and transformed: the new, fabricated Morenz lives on as the original one dies.

A central aspect of this concept is that of power, that is, the power to create an image. Any commemoration entails the shaping of memory by the commemorators, as H.V. Nelles established in his study of Quebec City’s tercentenary celebrations: “Power to define the event, of course, rested ultimately with those who would foot the bill. . . .”<sup>74</sup> It was those who organized these celebrations who had the power to create this “new” Morenz, especially because “financial concerns . . . played an inevitable role” in early twentieth-century commemoration.<sup>75</sup> A different approach of Kantorowicz’s concept of the king’s two bodies has been suggested by Pierre Bourdieu; the latter approach explains, in a way, how the memory of Morenz ultimately overshadowed him. According to Bourdieu, the two bodies go through a mutual process of legitimization: “le langage d’autorité ne gouverne jamais qu’avec la collaboration de ceux qu’il gouverne.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the previous star status of Morenz was necessary in order to create an idealized image of him. Inversely, this fabricated image legitimized Morenz and this is perhaps why his name is still recalled in the press. What this means is that the commemorators do have the power to shape the memory they wish to celebrate, but in the end, they are constructing this “memory” on relatively solid foundations.

For Ralph Giesey, the two bodies concept demonstrates the underlying need to show the immortality of the regime of the dead king. According to him, the political body acts as a way to deviate from the fact that kings were mortal and to focus the attention on the everlasting memory and continuity: “Le roi possède donc deux corps lors de la procession des funérailles : l’un enfermé dans un cercueil...; l’autre, une image de lui-même qui paraît éclatante de vie. . . .”<sup>77</sup> In the case of Morenz, it could be argued that what was to be everlasting was the tradition of hockey. The bier was in the Forum, placed on center ice and then carried by hockey players. The funeral was about hockey more than about Morenz. In a similar fashion, the memorial game was a staged celebration of star players of the time and used Morenz as a pious pretense to entice people to come watch a hockey game. The “duplication” of Morenz was necessary to produce a symbol for hockey, a reason to gather people

in the name of hockey. The idealization of Morenz was an illustration of the need to establish the continuity of the sport amid economic problems.

This idea of continuity is central to public commemoration. As D.J. Sherman establishes, “commemoration seeks to restore the socio-cultural order that the commemorated event has disrupted.”<sup>78</sup> In Howie Morenz’s story, the commemorative events were indeed staged in order to restore a somewhat more stable financial situation for the NHL and Canadiens administration. Continuity is also at the basis of the concept of “invention of tradition” proposed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and becomes salient in this present case study. For Hobsbawm, an invented tradition is “taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed . . . which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>79</sup> It could be argued that the funeral organized for Morenz set a precedent for how the Canadiens administration would treat its players: Maurice Richard’s body lay in state in the Bell Centre in 2001 and Morenz’s son-in-law, Bernard Geoffrion, had his jersey retired the day after he died in 2006, transforming the ceremony into a memorial. The Morenz memorial game can also be considered a newly invented tradition. Despite the fact that there had been similar games before, it was only after the Morenz one that journalists call for an annual celebration of the sort. But more importantly, it was hockey as a national sport that was invented while Morenz was commemorated. As it was suggested earlier, both the National Hockey League and the Canadiens team were struggling entities in the 1930s, and so was the sport, to a certain extent. It had been partially professionalized and slowly was becoming somewhat of a national interest through radio broadcasts. Seeing as the commemorative events for Morenz were also a premise to strengthen the budding hockey community, it seems that this was an attempt to establish somewhat of a traditional attachment to a relatively new sport. Hobsbawm has determined that there were three types of invented tradition:

- a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior.<sup>80</sup>

He rightly acknowledges that these types are often overlapping, which is what can be observed in the case study of Howie Morenz. The “invention” of hockey as a national sport was undoubtedly a fascinating *mélange* of the three traditions: group cohesion for an emerging hockey community, a legitimizing tool for the sport, and the establishment of rules and representative values. At the heart of this need for invention is continuity with the past, albeit a “largely fictitious”<sup>81</sup> one. Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieu de mémoire* adds to our understanding of the need for continuity and helps explain in part the process of fabrication of Howie Morenz. It can indeed be argued that the “political body” of Morenz was also created as a *lieu de mémoire*, as the Morenz name was, for a few months, made sacred and symbolized.<sup>82</sup> For Nora, a *lieu* is a sacred and liminal space between memory and history, and it exists “pour bloquer le travail de l’oubli.”<sup>83</sup> It can be a person as much as a place, as long as it is imbued with a symbolic aura. A *lieu* exists because there is a will to remember and it fades away when nobody maintains it; this explicates, in part, why the memory of Morenz has since dissipated considerably if not almost completely.

Thus, public commemoration is a process of fabrication, an idea that seems to suggest that memory, and perhaps history, is unstable, constantly shifting, and absolutely relative. But what this process aims for is to provide the continuity that is lacking by bridging the present with the past, albeit an imagined past. Continuity is key in any history: “Il faut bien qu’il existe, dans l’humaine nature et dans les sociétés humaines, un fonds permanent,”<sup>84</sup> and hockey history is no exception. In times of social upheaval or instability, as in the years of the Great Depression, the need to provide stability becomes more pressing.

## Conclusion

Howie Morenz is now part of the Canadiens history, being named ever so often in the Club’s centenary celebrations.<sup>85</sup> Looking at the press coverage, one can see that Morenz was not well considered during his time and is not well remembered today. His death, his funeral, and the memorial game organized in his honor seem to portray a different man, one larger than nature. When looking at the context of hockey history, one can understand that the dire situation of the Great Depression called for creative ways to get hockey fans into NHL arenas. The large celebrations organized for Morenz were definitely larger than him, if only because his later life arguably did not warrant as much. The NHL and Canadiens administration hoped to use the name in order to bring some attention back to the sport. The commemorative events were to gather people in mourning but also in celebrating those who lived on and tried to make a living out of hockey. Because they were the ones paying the costs, both administrations inevitably shaped the memory of Morenz but it seems they were not able to control what people actually remembered.

It was demonstrated that the events were more about hockey survival than they were about commemorating and honoring Morenz. The funeral and memorial game were clever ways to turn the attention away from the somber mood of the Depression, but it was definitely self-serving and reoriented the focus toward hockey and the people trying to make money from it. In the end, the only thing remaining of this fabrication is the name, as part of a larger narrative of glory of the Montreal Canadiens. It is D.J. Sherman who said that “names [are] a linchpin in the continuity of a patriotic discourse emphasizing glory and sacrifice,”<sup>86</sup> a statement pertaining to soldiers of the First World War, but words that can also be heard to reverberate in the story of Morenz. His case study illustrates several key concepts of commemoration, namely, the fabrication process and the need for continuity. Memory is always fabricated in order to anchor oneself to the past: Howie Morenz was built up to be someone else, someone embellished to represent what hockey might be in order to survive the Depression. The past thus belongs to the present and memory belongs to those who have the means to remember.

## Notes

1. Dave Stubbs, “Canadiens’ majesty immortalized in larger-than-life statues,” *National Post Mobile*, December 4, 2008.
2. Legends of hockey website.
3. One of the many nicknames for the Montreal team is “Les Glorieux,” fitting when the team was winning. The nickname is rarely used now.

4. Legends of hockey website.
5. Government of Canada website, "Key Economic Events" section.
6. "Requiem from the rafters; Montreal's fabled Forum will forever be remembered for its hockey," in *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 9, 1996, G1.
7. Brian MacFarlane, *The Habs*, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1996, 56.
8. D'Arcy Jenish, *The Montreal Canadiens*, Montreal: Double Day Canada, 2008, 20.
9. Richard Gruneau and David Whitson. *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993, 103.
10. At 5'9" and 165 pounds, Morenz was hardly a lightweight. For hockey in the 1930s, he was taller and heavier than most of the NHL players.
11. Dean Robinson, *Howie Morenz: Hockey's first superstar*, Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1982, 48.
12. *Ibid.*, 50–52.
13. English translation: "Few are the ones who have seen how the accident happened." *La Presse*, January 29, 1937, 26.
14. "The death of a legend," *The Gazette*, November 14, 1999, B3.
15. English translation: "This triumph came at a great price for the red, white and blue, as the tricolour might have lost its most valuable player for the season, and maybe forever." "Howie Morenz se fracture la cheville", *Le Devoir*, January 29, 1937, 12.
16. English translation: ". . . and despite the absence of Howie Morenz, who will not be able to play for the rest of the season because of last Thursday's incident, the club is confident that it can win the game. . . ." *Le Devoir*, January 29, 1937, 11.
17. English translation: "Morenz, Lépine and Buswell are those who will not be able to play tonight. . . ." *Le Devoir*, February 1, 1937, 9, also in *The Gazette*, February 4, 1937, 14.
18. See the following websites: Joe Pelletier's Greatest Hockey Legends ([www.greatesthockeylegends.com](http://www.greatesthockeylegends.com)), Hockey Hall of Fame ([www.legendsofhockey.net](http://www.legendsofhockey.net)), and CBC Archives (<http://archives.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/clips/16403/>).
19. "Howie Morenz, Canadian Star dies suddenly," *The Gazette*, March 9, 1937, front page.
20. *The Montreal Star*, March 9, 1937, 21.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Ernie Savard, cited in "Hockey heads pay tributes to great star", in *Montreal Star* March 9, 1937, 20.
23. "Howie Morenz, Canadian Star dies suddenly," *The Gazette*, March 9, 1937, front page.
24. Bill Butler, *The Myth of the Hero*, London: Rider, 1979, 18.
25. Ian MacDonald, *Leader Post* (Regina, SK), August 9, 2008, C7.
26. Earl Seibert cited in "Life in fast lane too much for Morenz," *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 1987, C5.
27. "Campaign of Morenz as top scorer ends," *The Gazette*, March 9, 1937, 14.
28. Roberto Da Matta, "Carnival in Multiple Planes," in John MacAloon, ed., *Rite, drama, festival, spectacle: rehearsal toward a theory of cultural performance* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues), 217.
29. *The Montreal Star*, March 10, 1937, 24.
30. English translation: "The most touching scene: Leo Dandurand arriving from New Orleans for the ceremony." *La Presse*, March 12, 1937, 22.

31. English translation: "Leo Dandurand, ex-owner of the Habs, is arriving from New Orleans to pay homage to his dear friend." "Les funérailles d'Howie Morenz cet après-midi", *Le Devoir*, March 11, 1937, 11.
32. *The Montreal Gazette*, March 10, 1937, 14.
33. Dean Robinson, *Howie Morenz*, 48.
34. Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine des Verchères and Laura Secord*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 81.
35. *Ibid.*, 95.
36. English translation: "It was a truly imposing ceremony and very impressive because all the big names in professional and amateur hockey, players and NHL club representatives, sports writers, representatives of the provincial government, members of the city council, and countless women and children were present." *Le Devoir*, March 11, 1937, 11.
37. *Le Devoir*, March 12, 1937, 13.
38. *The Globe and Mail*, December 3, 1983, S6.
39. *The Gazette*, March 6, 1987 D1.
40. *La Presse*, May 31, 2000 A5.
41. Antonius C.G.M. Robben, ed., *Death, Mourning and burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 197.
42. Thursby, *Funeral festivals in America*, 41.
43. Robben, *Death, Mourning and burial*, 9.
44. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 20.
45. Frank Peers, *The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting 1920–1951*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969, 135.
46. Jacqueline S. Thursby, *Funeral festivals in America. Rituals for the living*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006, 17.
47. *Ibid.*, 17.
48. "Morenz honoured in rites at Forum" in *The Gazette*, March 12, 1937, 12.
49. *Ibid.* Brackets mine.
50. Government of Canada website, Historic sites.
51. "Notables to join throngs at Forum for all-star game," *The Gazette*, November 2, 12.
52. *Ibid.*
53. See "Clancy will play in Morenz Game; Hopes High of Reaching Fund Goal," *The Gazette*, November 1, 1937, 19 and "Notables to join throngs at Forum for all-star game," *The Gazette*, November 2, 1937, 12.
54. "Clancy will play in Morenz Game; Hopes High of Reaching Fund Goal," *The Gazette*, November 1, 1937, 19.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *The Montreal Star*, November 2, 1937, 27.
57. *The Montreal Star*, November 3, 1937, 26.
58. *La Presse*, November 3, 1937, 22.
59. *Le Devoir*, November 3, 1937, 12.
60. *The Montreal Star*, November 3, 1937, 26.

61. Dean Robinson, *Howie Morenz*, 127.
62. "Notables to join throngs at Forum for all-star game," *The Gazette*, November 2, 1937, 12.
63. Howie Morenz Jr. cited in "Life in fast lane too much for Morenz," *The Globe and Mail*, March 7, 1987, C5.
64. *The Montreal Star*, November 3, 1937, 26.
65. Ibid.
66. The first event of this kind was in the honor of Hod Stuart, a player from the Montreal Wanderers, who drowned in 1908 shortly after winning the Stanley Cup; the second was to benefit the family of Toronto Maple Leafs player Ace Bailey who suffered a head injury in 1933 that ended his hockey career. The press coverage surrounding the Morenz Memorial Game leads the reader to assume that this game was the first of its kind, perhaps a way to draw in more people with the "novelty" effect. See *The Montreal Star*, November 3, 1937, 26.
67. Paul Zunthor, quoted in Patrice Groulx, *Pièges de la mémoire. Dollard des Ormeaux, les Amérindiens et nous*, Montréal: Éditions Vents d'Ouest, 1998, 65.
68. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 1.
69. *The Montreal Star*, November 3, 1937, 26.
70. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 26.
71. English translation: "a rehandling of memory" Pierre Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire" in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Vol. I, Gallimard: Paris, 1997, 40.
72. Ibid.
73. English translation: "For the sign, indeed, to be what it is, it had to become known at the same time as the signifier." Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, 74.
74. H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: pageantry and spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 63.
75. Coates, *Heroines and History*, 71.
76. English translation: "The language of authority governs only with the acquiescence of those who are being governed." Pierre Bourdieu, "Le langage autorié. Notes sur les conditions sociales de l'efficacité du discours rituel," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 1 (1975): 187.
77. English translation: "The king has in fact two bodies during the funeral procession, one in a casket, and the other, an image of him bursting with life. . ." Ralph E. Giesey, "Modèles de pouvoir dans les rites royaux en France," *Annales, E.S.C.*, vol. 41 (1986): 587.
78. Daniel J. Sherman, "Bodies and Names: The Emergence of Commemoration in Interwar France," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, no. 2 (April 1998): 446.
79. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1.
80. Ibid., 9.
81. Ibid., 2.
82. Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 37.
83. Ibid., 38.
84. Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien*, Paris; Armand Colin, 2002, 63.
85. Besides having a bronze statue inaugurated in December 2008, Morenz now figures in the newly created "ring of honour," which will "forever perpetuate the careers of 44 legendary players and 10 great builders and be an invaluable source of inspiration for the players and a source of pride for Canadiens fans every time they walk into the Bell Centre." From the Montreal Canadiens website.
86. Sherman, "Bodies and Names . . ." 443, brackets mine.