

## Randall Maggs. *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems.*

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presents an engaging and detailed portrait of a fascinating city. Yet, it never really convincingly realizes the potential of any of these elements; part of the problem may be that it simply takes on too much in too few pages. That said, it is often quite witty and engaging, with a number of humorous incidents, and is never less than readable. If Butler can build on the strengths of this novel, then his future novels could be quite memorable. Although not a success, *Return of the Native* demonstrates that Butler is a voice with the potential to contribute much to Newfoundland writing.

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Randall Maggs. *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems*. London, ON: Brick Books, 2008, ISBN 978-1-894078-62-7.

19 FEBRUARY 2008 WAS one of my best days as a sports fan. That afternoon I watched my beloved Liverpool, who up to that point had been having a rather mediocre season, score two late and improbable goals to upset undefeated Inter Milan in the first game of the Champions League quarter finals. Later that evening, I watched my other love, the Montreal Canadiens, score *six* late and improbable goals to rally from a 5-0 deficit to defeat the New York Rangers 6-5 in a shootout. In between these games, I attended the launch of Randall Maggs' *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems* at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. It was like no other book launch I have ever attended. The Ship Pub and Corner Brook's Casual Jack's have their charm, but it certainly was something to watch Maggs discuss his poetry in front of the sparkling Stanley Cup and the images of NHL Hall of Famers (a curator later informed me that the Cup on display was a replica, but I had already had my moment).

If I may talk first a little about aesthetics, Maggs' book is beautifully packaged. The cover sports the poet's subject in the near twilight of his career as a Toronto Maple Leaf. Sawchuk's mask is on the crown of his downturned head, turning the goaltender into a modern day Janus, the two faces alluding to the many facets of one of hockey's most fabled and tragic characters. A faded "1967" runs down the left side of the front cover, a date any Leafs fan (or anyone who has had to listen to a Leafs fan) can tell you is the last time the team won the Stanley Cup. That date signifies both victory and defeat: the triumph over the highly favoured and much younger Montreal Canadiens, and the accumulating shame of every passing year this team fails to repeat that victory. The text is illustrated throughout with some excellent photographs of Sawchuk at all stages of his career. There is a picture of Sawchuk and Johnny Bower after winning the Cup that I am sure my father would love to enlarge and hang in his den. Those who bought the book at the launch were also given hockey cards detailing the "stats" of both Maggs and Sawchuk (Maggs, it is noted, shoots left but writes right).

The more interesting statistics, of course, are Sawchuk's. Most notable are his record 103 regular season shutouts — a record being steadily approached by Martin Brodeur. But if and when Brodeur eclipses Sawchuk, I am sure Maggs and many of his generation will remind us that it is "not the same." Even in the cold numbers of Sawchuk's stats one sees a compelling story. He won the Calder Trophy as rookie-of-the-year in 1951 and went on to win the Vezina Trophy as best goaltender in 1952, 1953, and 1955. After a ten year span, Sawchuk would win it again (albeit a shared victory with Bower) in 1965. Sawchuk won the Cup in 1952, 1954, and 1956 but had to wait another 11 years before winning that final and fabled series in 1967. The feast-or-famine aspect of these statistics already reflects before Maggs' poetry begins the size of this man's legacy, his victories, and defeats. Eleven years is a long time to be away from the promised land in a six team league, and Maggs captures all the wanderings of this tortured soul whose career would rise and fall, resurge and fizzle out.

This is not a "hockey book." This is Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, if Billy the Kid played for the Red Wings. There are those game romanticizing moments one comes to expect from books focused on hockey — Maggs must at some point meditate on the true but somewhat clichéd separation and isolation of the goaltender: "Denied the leap and dash up the ice, what goalies know is side to side, an inwardness of monk and cell." But Maggs is too aware of his subject to get too romantic. There are no comparisons to ballet, or memories of backyard games. Maggs shares the realistic cynicism I imagine is possessed by those who have actually played the game professionally — especially in the face of reporters in search of "the story" behind the game, or writers looking for modern gladiators and gunslingers. Asked by a reporter what was going through his head when he let in a weak goal, Maggs' Sawchuk is not philosophical, not even reflective: "Christ, boys. Stop the bloody puck. What the hell else would you want on your mind?" (171). Maggs is aware he has selected as his subject a man who would roll his eyes at the notion of a poetry book based on his life, as I believe most professional players would — with the exception, perhaps, of Ken Dryden, which only further proves what oddities goalies are.

In truth, a hockey goaltender is peculiar, and therefore perfect for poetic reflection. He is only on the bench with his teammates if he has been pulled from a game he is losing or has been deemed not good enough to start. The oversized jersey, the large pads, the exaggerated block and glove, the ornate masks (on modern day goalies, anyway) make him look more like the team mascot than simply another player. He is the first to be congratulated in victory, most often the most criticized by the media in defeat. Combine with this mystery and mythos Sawchuk's life-long war with alcoholism, his life-long war with a game that caused him severe emotional strain (he retired once, at twenty-seven, only to be lured back the following season), and his tragic and shadowy death at 41, and one has to credit Maggs for not drenching his poetry in pathos.

Maggs bookends his collection with two testaments to the toll hockey took on Sawchuk. The man's autopsy report begins the text. There are over 30 lines dedicated to the description of scars on Sawchuk's face. The face itself concludes the collection, looking like the proverbial roadmap, or the scarred post-game ice on the back cover of Maggs' book. This is the face of a man who tended goal without a mask, a face that has been rearranged by slapshots from the likes of Bobby Hull and "Boom Boom" Geoffrion:

In the deep slump of his body you see his agony  
and sagging spirit ...  
He was flat on his face for fifteen minutes.  
He'd only just come into the game when Hull  
wound up and let one go. It looks at first as if his head  
is gone (145).

There are some raw and beautiful passages here, especially when Maggs details that impossible-on-so-many-levels 1966-67 season. Claimed on waivers by the Leafs a few years earlier, Sawchuk, along with Bower (their combined ages at seventy-nine) would win the Stanley Cup that year, the last season of the six-team league. As Maggs paints it, it was a season of battles. Particularly poignant are the poems detailing a game in Chicago in which Sawchuk relieved Bower prior to the second period and stopped 37 shots to defeat the much better and relentless Blackhawks. Hurt in an earlier game, Sawchuk is taunted by the Blackhawks: "You better stay down, Terry" (147). The legendary Chicago players surge forward and assault the goaltender with overt slapshots and subtle bodyshots:

They came in waves then, Hull and Mikita, Maki and Mohns  
with a heavy shot of his own, hulking Esposito, speedy Wharram,  
then Hull again ...  
The heavy traffic didn't seem  
to faze Terry either, Hull flailing with his elbow at the mask (149).

The poems are a remarkable observation of a man's growing confidence being fed by the shrinking bravado of the opposing team. Pierre Pilote, who told Sawchuk to "stay down" is already visibly shaken before the end of that shift: "By the time he stepped off the ice, he was having second thoughts himself ... *Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.* And hadn't he felt those eyes on him all the way back to the bench" (147).

Some of the best poems and passages are not about Sawchuk, but observations on the game or the retelling of other's hockey stories. There are many joys for the reader here. At times Maggs is the poet finding *le mot juste* to describe this game, as he does in "Different Ways of Telling Time": "both goalies eye the clock, one's for zero, the other likes infinity, but things can change. *Get going clock. Slow down slow down.* No one in the building likes time's pace" (49). At other times Maggs is

the voice of the veteran of the game, the coach, player or referee who has seen it all. There are times when the reader longs for a coffee or a beer and a comfortable place to listen to these people tell their inside stories. Poems like "Guys Like Pete Goegan" about a man who would "put out your eye as soon as shake your hand" or the long prose piece "Big Dogs (2)" in which Red Storey reminisces about the game get the reader past the romance and the pretense and onto the bus or into the locker room (125).

Maggs' collection is impeccably researched. He has an insider view at times thanks to interviews with retired players (his acknowledgements read like a roster for a Hall of Fame game). No doubt having a brother who actually made it to the NHL helped him establish the verisimilitude (Darryl Maggs played 135 games for the Blackhawks, California Golden Seals, and the Leafs). Most interesting is a series of poems based upon a Newfoundland tour taken by the Boston Bruins in 1956. Maggs' leg work shows here as he renders several intimate and interesting moments from that tour, including the tale of one man who scored on Sawchuk during a shoot out. Such moments add levity to a collection that could be dismal, but also make more tragic the fall when it finally comes. *Night Work: The Sawchuk Poems* is a genre bending book to be enjoyed by both hockey fans and poetry buffs, and how often can that be said about a piece of work?

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Amy Louise Peyton. *River Lords, Father and Son: The Story of the Peytons and the River Exploits*, 2nd ed. St. John's, NL: Flanker Press, 2005, ISBN 1-894463-51-X.

IN RECENT YEARS THE NUMBER of small publishing houses in Atlantic Canada has grown, resulting in the publication of a large number of notable works of poetry, literature, local history, autobiography, and family history. This is a true liberation of the spirit of writing: freed from the agenda of publishing-house bean counters and curmudgeonly academic press barons, local authors have filled the book store shelves with rich, colorful studies. Amy Louise Peyton's second edition of *River Lords: Father and Son* is one such valuable contribution to the genre. Drawing on the collection of family papers in the possession of her husband, Peyton has assembled a combination regional history and family memoir which raises important questions regarding life on the frontiers of the Atlantic economic system in the eighteenth century. Much material in this book has been unavailable to academic historians, and it is wonderful to see it coming to light.

John "the Elder" Peyton first traveled to Labrador with George Cartwright, and after a couple of years on that coast he moved to Fogo, where he settled down in the cod fishery. He eventually spotted opportunities in the dangerous but lucrative salmon trade, and set up a salmon facility on the banks of the Exploits. The salmon