

READING GUIDE:

Henry Adam Svec's *Life Is Like Canadian Football and Other Authentic Folk Songs*

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Dear Reader,

I am grateful that you have elected to read my book, *Life Is Like Canadian Football and Other Authentic Folk Songs*.

When I first started to play the role of Canadian folk song collector, back in 2008, my mischievous desire was to subvert the conventions of the singer-songwriter stage, where personal authenticity is highly valued. Although I had written that first batch of songs from the point of view of Canadian football players, I was thereby able to achieve even greater distance between myself, Henry Adam Svec, and the tall tale-telling folk song collector "Henry Adam Svec." The act was an alternative history of my life as a creative person, and perhaps also an alternative history of creativity per se. Sometimes my audiences responded with applause, and other times with kicks to the leg (Toronto) or boos (Sudbury).

A book is not a singer-songwriter set, especially not a novel, which is what I ultimately have decided to call this text combining songs, stories, scholarship, and more. However, in a way, the transformation of my folk song charade onto the printed page has involved getting closer to "Henry Adam Svec" by finally revealing the behind-the-scenes experiences and emotions and events that have led him on his particular way. And here I have drawn in no small part on my own life, too: from my time working as a translator for a Slovakian folk symphony, to my time as a graduate student, to my time on the road as a performance-artist-cum-folklorist. The academic/folkloristic framing had been an effective means of refusing identification; and yet, ironically, as the work morphed into a novel, I managed to reacquire the proximity between art and being that I had for so long disdained. Indeed, I have poured myself into this book.

Some questions, then, that might serve as fuel for your discussions: What does authenticity mean in the twenty-first century? As readers of fiction, what sorts of truth are we permitted to desire? Is it enjoyable, on some level, to be hoaxed or bamboozled? When does that enjoyment cross over into something else? Have you ever been taken in by a hoax?

I wish you luck as you navigate my *Volkskunderoman*.

Yours sincerely,
Henry Adam Svec

