

FROM "HUNKY" TO DON JUAN

The Changing Hungarian Identity in Canadian Fiction

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CANADA'S MULTICULTURALISM is vividly reflected in Canadian immigrant novels, many of which are about the characters' difficulties in a new country. These difficulties, according to the sociologist John Kosa, can be divided into two major stages, adjustment and assimilation. The first stage, adjustment, is economic; it includes all the necessary external changes involved in getting a job and making not only a living but a life. The second stage, though not always chronologically distinct, is much more difficult; assimilation demands internal, psychological change as the immigrant tries to identify with the new culture.¹

Tracing the twofold process of adjustment and assimilation in *Under the Ribs of Death*, John Marlyn's novel about pre-World War I Hungarian immigrants in Winnipeg, both Margaret Atwood² and Eli Mandel emphasize the hero's striving for economic success and his "yearning for identity and acceptance."³ They disagree on how completely Sándor Hunyadi, the hero, fails when he rejects his Hungarian identity, changes his name, and tries to turn himself into "Alex Hunter," a ruthless Canadian businessman. The novel ends with the Depression and Alex Hunter's bankruptcy. Whatever his degree of personal failure, his economic failure is part of the general disaster. But, although they do not agree in their evaluation of his fate, neither Atwood nor Mandel ever questions the basic premise that this pattern of painful change is, by definition, what the immigrant novel must always be about.

However, if we look at later fiction by and about Hungarian immigrants in Canada, we see that this premise is not applicable. In this later fiction we find characters radically different from Hunyadi-Hunter, who do not feel inferior to native Canadians and unsure of their own cultural values. They do not feel compelled to shed their Hungarian identities. They adjust, but they do not assimilate, and they criticize fellow-Hungarians who do. Although *Under the Ribs of Death* came out in 1957, its story begins in 1913 and ends in the early Depression years; thus its hero's attitudes mark him as characteristic of the Hun-

garian immigrants of that time. But fiction about post-World War II Hungarian immigrants reflects quite another set of attitudes. Such fiction has been written by both immigrants and native Canadians and in both English and Hungarian. Marika Robert's *A Stranger and Afraid* (1964)⁴ and Stephen Vizinczey's *In Praise of Older Women* (1965)⁵ are two novels by recent Hungarian immigrants. Vizinczey and his protagonist both fought in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Robert Fulford's short story "The Good Wife" satirizes another "graduate of the class of '56."⁶ The Canadian hero of Robert Kroetsch's novel *But We Are Exiles* (1965) is obsessed with the dead Mike Hornyak, "that crazy bohunk," who may or may not be a Hungarian.⁷ These works are all in English. An *Anthology of the Canadian Hungarian Authors' Association*, published in Hungarian in 1969, contains short stories by and about recent Hungarian immigrants.⁸ Comparing these works to *Under the Ribs of Death* means tracing a road from self-loathing to self-confidence.

Setting out on this road, let us consider three of the early scenes in *Under the Ribs of Death*. Sándor, a Winnipeg schoolboy, is "chased . . . home from school every day" by "the English gang," a group of English-speaking classmates. They chant, "Ya, Ya, Hunky, Hunky, Humpy Ya Ya." But their mockery does not mean that he can't write English. When he writes a prize-winning essay on the ironic topic of "Victoria Day — What It Means to Me," he is taken on a "triumphal tour of every class-room in the school to recite his composition." In reprisal the gang threatens "him with a beating . . . for daring . . . even to show his hunky face in their class-room."

But the greatest humiliation of being a "Hunky," Sándor feels, is the result of his difficulties with his Hungarian name. Describing his reaction to a Canadian woman who forgets his name, he is surprised that she doesn't "ask him to pronounce it; people he met for the first time nearly always did. But to tell her now was suddenly impossible. She would smile and there would begin again the feeling that he was exposing something naked and ugly to the world's gaze." Tormented by this physical, almost sexual, sense of self-loathing, he tells her his name is Alex Humphrey, but when he grows up, he changes it to Alex Hunter, and also persuades his father to change his name, although the elder Hunyadi insists that his son is "ashamed of the wrong things. . . ." It is wrong "to be ashamed of your name because you are Hungarian and . . . poor!" But Alex needs this name, not only because it is easy to pronounce, but also because it seems "to absolve him of all he had done in his previous existence." Reading his new signature, he feels "as though he could see the tattered husk of his former self. He felt he had left behind all that was worthless and had been born anew. . . ."

Quoting this passage from the novel, Atwood analyzes the connotations of the new name: Alex Hunter, she says, suggests "Alexander the Great, conqueror of

the world, and . . . the predatory hunting-and-killing stance Sándor feels success requires. . . .” “Alex,” however, is merely a translation of “Sándor,” the Hungarian “Alexander.” So it is not a new name. But giving up the surname of Hunyadi is deeply ironic because Hunyadi was the name of two Hungarian heroes, father and son. János Hunyadi was the leader of the Christian forces that defeated the Turks in the Battle of Belgrade in 1456. His younger son, Mátyás, was elected King of Hungary in 1458. As Matthias Corvinus he became an embodiment of the Renaissance ruler, protecting learning and science and establishing “the Corvina,” one of the finest libraries in Europe. So Sándor’s own surname is rich in heroic and royal connotations which are his by right.

But of course it isn’t the legacy of a distant and glorious past that matters to Sándor. It is the terrible pressure of a daily struggle to dissociate his present and especially his future from a very recent past he rejects as shameful. When he and his father go to the Winnipeg railroad station to welcome his uncle, just arrived from Hungary with a large group of pre-World War I immigrants, Sándor is horrified by the possibility of being identified with them.

Sándor turned pale at the sight of them. They stood there, awkward and begrimed, the men in tight-fitting wrinkled clothes . . . unshaven and foreign-looking, the women in kerchiefs and voluminous skirts . . . exactly the way his grandmother looked in that picture in the front room. And it was this that was frightening. They were so close to him. Only a few months or years—a few words and recently acquired habits—separated his parents from them. The kinship was odious. He knew how hard it was for his parents to change their ways. But they were changing. They used tinned goods sometimes . . . now, and store-bought bread when they had enough money. English food was appearing on their table, the English language in their home. Slowly, very slowly, they were changing, . . . becoming Canadians. And now here it stood. Here was the nightmare survival of themselves, mocking and dragging them back to their shameful past.

The costumes of the women described in this passage, the kerchiefs and the layered skirts, clearly identify these immigrants as people from rural Hungary, as peasants.

IN VIVID CONTRAST TO THIS pre-World War I arrival scene is a scene describing the arrival of a group of 1956 Hungarian immigrants in yet another railroad station, this time in Rome. This episode is seen through the eyes of the first-person narrator of Stephen Vizinczey’s novel, *In Praise of Older Women*. Three hundred Hungarian refugees pour off the train, then fight their way into a hotel lobby filled with donations of expensive clothes from fashionable Roman department stores. András Vajda, the narrator, crams a suitcase with shirts, ties, shoes, suits, “six black pullovers and a smart overcoat.” So when he

arrives in Toronto in 1957, he looks so fashionably attractive that a Canadian woman immediately tries to pick him up.

But the difference is far more than a matter of international fashion. Vajda, a 23-year-old Freedom Fighter, is the son of an assassinated intellectual, has "*cum laude* degrees from the University of Budapest," is multilingual, and spends his time in Italy writing a dissertation on Sartre. Three years later he not only gets a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto but also has his dissertation published. In short, he is a professional intellectual, not a peasant. As Kosa points out, post-World War II Hungarian immigrants included large numbers of middle-class, educated, professional people who, in sharp contrast to the earlier immigrants, possessed intangible assets that soon helped them to fit into "a status comparable to the Canadian middle class." Large groups of students and professors were especially prominent among the refugees who fled Hungary after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. As a member of this educated class, Vajda has little trouble achieving success. Soon he is a philosophy professor at the University of Saskatchewan.

In addition to being a professional intellectual, he is also a professional Don Juan, a "philandering internationalist." His autobiographical novel, subtitled "the amorous recollections of András Vajda," is dedicated "To Young Men Without Lovers." The veteran of many exciting love affairs, all fully described, he makes himself the sexual mentor of provincial young Canadians humiliated by their inexperience and frustration. His main advice to all such young men is to steer clear of hysterical young virgins and, as Benjamin Franklin urged long ago, enrich themselves instead with the experience and gratitude so amply to be acquired from older women. Thus Vajda hopes to "stimulate a broader intercourse between the generations." But such broadly punning philosophy does not endear him to stuffy provincial professors. When one of his students proclaims in the college paper that "he couldn't care less whether a girl was a virgin," Vajda is suspected of corrupting him, and is indignantly denounced at "an emergency faculty meeting" for wearing "Italian pullovers" to class and flouting "morality" in an "atrocious accent." To keep his job, Vajda fires off a letter to the editor, sternly condemning the seduction of virgins. His book also satirizes sexually frustrated faculty wives, whom he finds just as ridiculous as their husbands. But soon he is pleasantly surprised by "the North American Sexual Revolution" and has "several love affairs concurrently." At the end of the novel he enjoys himself in "a newly opened Hungarian coffee house" in Toronto and takes "full credit" for all "the changes European immigrants were bringing" to "stuffy old Toronto." So instead of shedding his Hungarian identity and trying to become a Canadian, like Sándor Hunyadi, András Vajda, whose economic problems are swiftly solved, amuses himself by teaching Canadians how to be like him, and makes lighthearted fun of them when they finally start running to catch up.

In Praise of Older Women, therefore, is a funny, picaresque, erotic novel with an immigrant hero.

But perhaps Vizinczey felt that it was not taken seriously enough, because in 1969 he added a "Postscript to an Erotic Novel" in *The Rules of Chaos*. Here he defines Vajda the philanderer as an example of the absurd and alienated modern hero, a Don Juan *because* he is an immigrant. "Migration" and "historical dislocations," he argues, "have made millions lonelier as well as freer," because the uprooted man must make an "emotional adaptation to the age of discontinuity," and this adaptation takes the form of "multiplying rather than deepening experience." Labelling such multiplication the "episodic sensibility," he concludes that "the libertine has become . . . the representative hero of our time."⁹

But this argument sounds spurious as well as absurd. Although Vajda's amorous encounters occur in a variety of settings — Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Canada — most of his love affairs bloom in Budapest during his years at the university, and there, far from being alien or dislocated, he is very much an integral part of the social, cultural, and intellectual life of the upper middle class. Until 1956 the Communist regime remains only a dark shadow in the background. In the foreground Vajda hops merrily from bed to bed, and it is these erotic adventures that he contrasts so gleefully to the squareness and stuffiness of life in Toronto and Saskatoon.

A Stranger and Afraid, by Marika Robert, is another post-World War II novel in which the Hungarian protagonist is very different from Sándor Hunyadi. Although Kristina, the novel's heroine and first-person narrator, arrives in Canada six years before Vajda, she comes from an upper middle class background very similar to his. When she leaves this background and flees from Communist Budapest to Paris, she feels uprooted. "I had lost my place in a familiar society, because I had become a stranger who didn't belong anywhere." The 18-year-old Kristina goes to work for André Duval, a wealthy blackmarketeer who soon becomes her sadistic lover: he beats her and she adores it. Like Vajda, Kristina is erotically experienced; she is not promiscuous, but she understands her own strange sexuality. However, when André is accidentally killed, she and a friend, another young Hungarian woman, begin to think about emigrating to Canada. At first they are both very dubious. "Whoever heard of anyone going to Canada?" her friend asks. "I thought only farmers and lumberjacks went there and men who got girls pregnant and wanted to escape the responsibilities. Where is this Canada anyway, are you sure it exists?" Kristina considers the idea of Canada "rather repulsive" because "the mere word made me shiver. I could see endless snow-covered mountains and ten million people skiing up and down on wild slopes, summer and winter. It was a dreadful thought."

In Toronto she finds that it is immigrants who are considered dreadful. A woman who helps her find a room tells her that "immigrants shouldn't be . . . fussy, you should be happy to be allowed in, though if they asked me, we wouldn't let you. Who needs all these foreigners? They're only taking away the jobs from Canadians." When Kristina gets a job, a female superior complains that Toronto "is becoming a babel of languages; wherever I go I can hear those dreadful yappings. Why can't they learn English?" Even worse are "sidewalk cafés in Toronto, what will come next? Open Sundays, I bet. That's what these foreigners would like to have, drinking parties, Sunday movies. . . . They're trying to change our way of life instead of assimilating. Toronto will never be the same again. Why didn't they all stay at home?"

But Kristina's male superior, Neil Albright, does not feel this way. The first time he kisses her, he is so excited by her expertise that he proposes. Her marriage to a young executive takes care of Kristina's economic problems but creates others. She feels culturally superior to "a Canadian husband whose great-grandfather fought Indians and slept on animal skins at the time when my great-grandfather fought duels over perfumed ladies and arranged lavish soirées for them." She is astonished that Neil not only cooks well but shares all the chores, hands over his paycheck, always tells her where he is going, and defers to her on every decision. He certainly *is* "all-bright," but since neither Hungarian husbands nor French lovers behave like this, Kristina finds him slightly ludicrous. In bed he is worse than that. Making love to him, his kinky wife feels, means "changing the wavelength from pagan rituals to silent calisthenics." Because he considers intercourse merely "a natural function," Neil makes love "in . . . pitch-black silence." After a frightening affair with a sadistic lover and a whirl at psychotherapy, Kristina decides to accept her masochism instead of fighting it. This decision helps her to feel, rather improbably, that she is no longer "a stranger and afraid" in Canada. Caustically funny about this novel, Atwood dismisses it because of Kristina's masochism. But it is important to reiterate that here again the protagonist does not try to change, because she does not feel inferior to Canadians; rather, she is convinced that she is both culturally and sexually superior to them.

SO IS ALEX HRADAS, the Hungarian husband of Sylvia, "The Good Wife" in Robert Fulford's short story. But his name is not convincing: it is not an *echt* Hungarian name. Although the Austro-Hungarian Empire was an uneasy, polyglot mixture of many nationalities, whose diversity continues to be reflected in Hungarian surnames, art is not life. So an author wishing to create an unmistakably Hungarian character ought to give him a Magyar name. To clarify by analogy, an unmistakably English character should not be named

Emlyn Lloyd-Thomas, for the English reader would inevitably think of him as Welsh. The fact that Fulford gives Hradas a Czech name instead of a Magyar name points to the most important difference between this story and the preceding three novels: the author is a Canadian, not a Hungarian. Therefore, we see the immigrant not from the inside, but from the outside, and the picture is sharply critical.

Like Vajda, Hradas is a young Freedom Fighter who immigrates to Canada and earns a graduate degree at a Toronto university. Sylvia, a Canadian coed, meets him when he delivers a lecture "on the aesthetics of George Lukács." Impressed — *she* doesn't even understand Northrop Frye — Sylvia surrenders her virginity to Hradas because he makes love in a "curt way, . . . the way a European intellectual should make love." Although not charming like Vajda, since he isn't describing himself, he is obviously an expert seducer, and they soon marry. Kosa notes that another important difference between earlier Hungarian immigrants and post-World War II immigrants is that the latter, instead of marrying Hungarians, "show a tendency to marry into the Anglo-Canadian stock." As the Canadian half of a Canadian-Hungarian couple, Sylvia becomes the female counterpart of the good husband, Neil Albright, but also something of a masochist. She longs for children, but for ten years she loyally supports Hradas while he dabbles at writing. Unlike Vajda, he does not achieve success. Although he publishes "three slim volumes" of poetry, "sharing the costs . . . with his publishers," gradually Sylvia begins to feel that the image she fell in love with, "that of a serious, arrogant and confident European intellectual," is a sham. Hradas likes calling himself "*un homme des lettres*," but his enemies consider him "a poseur and an egomaniac," patronizing and condescending to established authors with major reputations. One of these authors is Michael Turner, an English professor who, Sylvia senses, treats her husband as "a kind of pet," because "Alex was, after all, an immigrant, never really to be accepted in the world Michael was born to. Alex was part of multi-culturalism, an idea Canadians like Michael admired without exactly embracing." But in spite of Alex's lack of real acceptance in the world, Sylvia feels that both she and Michael are "intimidated by Alex's sense of European superiority, his unspoken but clear belief that a tragic accident of history had placed him in a community of barbarians." If the story stopped here, it would show a sympathetic perception of at least one reason why "pet" immigrants become egomaniacs. But the two Canadian characters' ambivalence toward Hradas is dramatically resolved in a climactic scene demonstrating how completely wrong they are to feel intimidated: the *Hungarian* is the barbarian.

Turned down three times by the Canada Council, to which he applies for grants, Hradas rages, "My God, why did I ever come to this country? I'd have been better off in Budapest." On the evening of Hradas' third rejection by the

Council, Michael Turner and his wife come to dinner. Hradas makes fun of Michael's "gentlemanly little essays . . . deploring censorship. . . ." What does *he* know about censorship? When Sylvia tries to defend Michael, her husband accuses her of considering him "paranoid," of "secretly" believing he is "nothing," and of being barren. Humiliated, she reminds him of his insistence on contraception, but he shouts, "We would have had children if you'd been the kind of woman I deserved. I could have had *sons!*" Then he shouts at their guests, "Remember what drove you away: an honest man speaking the truth at last." The Turners gone, Hradas looks smug, like "a man who had done a hard piece of work exceptionally well."

FULFORD'S STORY OBVIOUSLY expresses the native Canadians' resentment of the real-life counterparts of confident characters like Vajda, Kristina, and Hradas. Another Canadian writer who creates a Hungarian husband married to a Canadian wife also resents him — or makes his protagonist resent him — but in a much more complicated way. Mike Hornyak, the dead man who dominates Robert Kroetsch's first novel, *But We Are Exiles*, is a very mysterious and charismatic figure. Fraser, Hornyak's father-in-law, is not sure of Hornyak's nationality. He refers to him as "that crazy bohunk or Polack or whatever he is. . . ." "Bohunk" is another term for "Hunky," but includes people of Bohemian as well as Magyar extraction; either way, Hornyak, like Hradas, *could* be a Hungarian name. But there is a difference: here the uncertainty about Hornyak's name adds to his aura of mystery. Kettle Fraser, Hornyak's widow, has no idea where he comes from or even what his middle name is. His great wealth is also mysterious: he is "the young baron" of the frozen fish trade. In addition, like Vajda, he radiates sexual charisma. Here the Hunky and the Don Juan are the same person, and Hornyak's name very obviously suggests the latter role.¹⁰ Peter Guy, on his way west to see his girl, is picked up by Hornyak, and watches in admiration as Hornyak gets out of his Rolls Royce and strides into small town "beer-parlour" like "some great bloody redeemer. . . ." He redeems "lonely women in dry prairie towns, dreaming of an adventure with a stranger who blazes like a comet out of the short luminous night. . . ." But Guy's admiration for this Hunky Don Juan quickly turns into resentment when Hornyak beds Guy's girl, Kettle Fraser, and eight days later marries her. His resentment is partially responsible for the accidental riverboat explosion which kills Hornyak: Guy, subconsciously desiring Hornyak's death, fails to warn him in time.

But his death is only the beginning of the two men's complicated relationship. In the opening scene of the novel, which is narrated largely in flashbacks, Guy is dragging the Mackenzie River for Hornyak's corpse. He doesn't find it; he sees only his own reflection in the water, which he studies "as if not sure whom

he might see. . . ." The reflection of his own face where he expected Hornyak's face to float up to him links the two characters closely. And the reader has already been alerted to the symbolic significance of this scene by the novel's epigraph, a quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* describing Narcissus gazing at his watery reflection. The prophecy uttered at Narcissus' birth, that he will live a long life if he does not know himself, equates seeing oneself with knowing oneself. But it is soon clear that it is Hornyak that is not destined to live long: he is supremely sure of his own identity. He tells Guy, "My trouble is that I know my own mind. And that's a terrible thing. . . ." It is Guy, the young Canadian, who does not know who he is, and the novel he narrates is his journey to the realization that he must assume Hornyak's identity. On the last page he recalls discovering Hornyak in bed with Kettle. Just as Guy sees his own face reflected in the river in the opening scene, in this last scene he remembers seeing the lovers' bodies reflected in a mirror. He sees himself where he expects to see Hornyak; he sees Hornyak where he expected to see himself. By this time, however, Guy has not only become the widowed Kettle's lover but has also taken Hornyak's place in death. After recovering his corpse and putting it in a canoe, Guy remembers Hornyak's betrayal of their friendship and throws the corpse overboard. Then Guy crawls into the tarp-covered canoe, his only shelter in a storm, and figuratively dies, "slammed . . . into darkness" and "silence." W. F. H. Nicolaisen says that Guy "can substitute for . . . Hornyak," but Guy does more than that.¹¹ He *must* assume Hornyak's identity; he becomes Hornyak. This switch is especially significant in ethnic terms. Poor Sándor Hunyadi is so humiliated by Canadians that he feels compelled to shed his Hungarian identity, to die, and be "born anew" as the Canadian Alex Hunter, ruthlessly determined to be rich. In dramatic contrast, here it is Peter Guy, the young Canadian, who feels so humiliated by Hornyak, the rich and ruthless "bohunk" who casually steals his sweetheart, that he must abet Hornyak's accidental death, lie down and die in Hornyak's canoe-coffin, and even then fear that he will only "be playing puppet to a dead king" if he marries the woman who originally belonged to him.

TURNING FROM FICTION by Canadian authors writing about Hungarians to fiction by Hungarian-Canadians writing for and about themselves in their native language, we find that the Don Juan doesn't appear. But because the audience is clearly defined, the insistence upon retaining a Hungarian identity becomes even more emphatic than in Vizinczey's and Marika Robert's novels. This insistence, the major theme in several short stories in the *Anthology of the Canadian Hungarian Authors' Association*, is obviously addressed to readers who, in the writers' opinion, are assimilating too rapidly.

In László Szilvássy's story, "I Write Lcttrs," the narrator, the editor of a Hungarian literary newspaper, satirizes a letter from a second-generation Hungarian girl. In an atrocious mixture of stilted business English and misspelled, unidiomatic Hungarian, she inquires about the meaning of her father's furious Hungarian curses. Where does he keep telling her to go? The editor doesn't enlighten her, but wonders why her father hasn't cursed the wretched girl even more. What makes her a wretch to the editor is her inability to write decent Hungarian. She also sounds ignorant of English grammar and Canadian geography, but he doesn't care about that.

A similar satiric story, "In the Bookstore," is set in a Hungarian bookstore in a Canadian resort. János Miska's narrator, a university librarian, discusses the bookstore customers with the proprietor, who admits to not being very well read, but is all the more disgusted with the pretensions of the local Hungarians. Somewhat like the poseur Hradas, they assume aristocratic and professional titles and sprinkle their conversation with highbrow allusions, but secretly they read only trash. Even worse, they are rapidly turning into Canadians: they have good jobs, so they spend money on homes, furniture, cars, and motorboats, but they no longer buy Hungarian books. His *raison d'être*, to supply them with Hungarian culture in Canada, becomes ironic.

The protagonist of "Cleaner," another story by Miska, also acquires a good job, but with different results. Outwardly his life improves; inwardly it remains unchanged. The personality of Béla Telegdi has been "ineradicably marked" by four years in an AVO prison. (AVO is the acronym of the Hungarian Secret Police.) Telegdi is presented in two brief scenes: in 1959 he is a cleaner scraping soil marks off the wall of an Ontario hospital; in 1969 he is lunching in the dining room of "the Soil Institute." His economic success seems assured: he has just submitted his doctoral dissertation on permafrost to the University of Toronto. His superior now addresses him as "Bill," but in spite of his new status and new first name, his psychological identity has not been altered. Ironically, his life is still shaped by soil and seems "permanently frozen"; thus he is incapable of assimilation.

The most explicitly anti-assimilation story is István Nagy's "Meeting." Its narrator is not identified as a professional intellectual but only as a Hungarian immigrant in Winnipeg, Sándor Hunyadi's town. At a bus stop he meets a Canadian soldier who, although raised in China by a Hungarian father and a Russian mother, considers himself a Hungarian! He can't speak the language and has a Canadian wife, but he has not changed his triple-barreled Hungarian name. Neither will he let his wife work, for only by staying home with their children can she teach them the meaning of a Hungarian home. This chance encounter evokes the narrator's denunciation of Hungarians who *have* changed their names. He is angriest with the ex-Freedom Fighters who have "denied"

their Hungarian heritage by taking more easily pronounced names. He also criticizes Hungarian husbands who allow their wives to work. Unlike the egocentric, unemployed Hradas, he feels such men have misled the Canadians who welcomed them, but it is not a question of intellectual pretensions. The Canadians believe that the Hungarians gave up their native homes with aching hearts. But the Hungarians cannot maintain the credibility of that story if they do not value their new homes enough to make their wives stay there. The narrator concludes with a rhetorical question: "What can we expect from the world if even we ourselves forget that we are Hungarians?" The message of this hortatory tale is clear but paradoxical: only by retaining their own language, their own names, their own cultural values, in short, only by remaining Hungarian can the immigrants be good Canadians. By these new, intellectual, intensely self-conscious immigrant-writers, Sándor Hunyadi's painful, ironic metamorphosis is condemned and rejected.

Waiting for his son's birth, Sándor dreads the child's contamination by books and music. The namesake of the king who treasured books is afraid of their power. "Books are even worse than music," Sándor thinks. "They'll fill his head with crazy ways of living and make him wonder if things couldn't be different. They'll ask questions they can't answer and confuse him and make him dissatisfied. But he's got to believe in himself and in the way things are, and be happy in his work. It's not such a crime to be ignorant. It's worse to be a failure." But failure can be defined in many ways. In Sándor's definition, deliberately anti-intellectual, failure is synonymous with being a poor and despised "Hunky." Paul Jonás, a 1956 refugee who is now a professor at the University of New Mexico, defines the term another way. He notes that the economic positions that took earlier immigrants two or three generations to achieve, the 1956 refugees have arrived at in twenty years. But he argues that "history will not remember us as successful immigrants but as exiles, miserable, unhappy, and failed," with no "real friends," no "strong and emotional relationships," and "children who do not know what the revolution was" and who do not speak Hungarian.¹² It is this sense of exile and emotional failure among Hungarian immigrants in America that these Hungarian writers in Canada seem to be struggling to avert: *they will not sell their birthright for a mess of pottage.*

NOTES

¹ *Land of Choice* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 93.

² *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), pp. 152-54.

³ "Introduction," *Under the Ribs of Death* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), p. 9.

⁴ (Garden City, New York: Doubleday).

⁵ (New York: Trident Press, 1966). A Canadian edition appeared in 1965.

- ⁶ *Toronto Short Stories*, ed. Morris Wolfe and Douglas Daymond (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1977), p. 204.
- ⁷ (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 44.
- ⁸ János Miska, ed., No. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Hungarian Authors' Association). All translations are my own.
- ⁹ (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 214-15.
- ¹⁰ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "Ordering the Chaos: Name Strategies in Robert Kroetsch's Novels," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 11 (Summer 1978), 55-65, discusses many of the characters' names in *But We Are Exiles*, but does not comment on Hornyak's name.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ¹² "Home Thoughts from Abroad," *Harper's*, April 1977, p. 21.

THIS IS THE LAST NIGHT

Roo Borson

Night drips tar into the grass.
Lamps fall onto the pond, making
accordions of light, but no sound
ever comes of that. Hills
are like the cool brows of dead soldiers;
they don't look back.
Trees are offered up out of the ground, helpless bouquets.
The light of each star comes hurtling,
but the earth never breaks, there's no way
to kill what you most want. All around
the small towns are lighting up or going dead,
whatever they do best, and the frogs begin creaking.
The soft flash of a fish
makes pilgrims of us. It takes so little.
It is the last night, the moon hails on the pond
with no sound, the canoe navigates
through ruins of trees. How am I to tell you
the only thing I know? On the bank
a wild violet opens. A small purple cavern
that no one walks out of.