

PILVAX

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Jon Tarnoc was born in 1964 in Budapest. He has lived in Greece, Canada, Spain and Israel, and writes in Hungarian and English. His first English book *Midnight* was published in Toronto in 1992, the second, *Merz* was published in 2000 in Tel Aviv, Budapest, and Toronto simultaneously. He is the co-editor of an anthology of contemporary Canadian poetry, *Crystal Garden*, published in 2001 in Budapest. His selected poems in Hungarian, *Őszország* came out in the summer of 2005.

Poems from Encyclopaedia Merz

by Jon Tarnoc

The Tower of Silence

It happened. The farmers left the village,
the shepherd the sheep, the hunter the deer.
No one stayed. And the land showed its face, clear,
crumpled, and a cloud covered the cleavage.

Or nothing happened, and it is the same
as if convulsion had shaken the earth.
The tower stood there still, inside the birth
of silence and the death of words and pain.

Speech was broken into pieces, scattered
on the ground, and the rotting, empty waste
soiled time and space throughout the ages.

In the beginning there was quietude.
Then Logos was born, spellbound and amazed
by the sight of stars and iron cages.

Arrow and Bow

terza rima for Dante

Conscious suffering is of value,
says the master in the book,
being able not to hurt you,

that's me hanging from a hook.
Where there is no place to go,
towards which the sages look,

I am going there you know,
you sent me out to desert island
with an arrow and a bow,

while you went to far-away-land.
You've got saddle, I'm the horse,
I'm the poet, you the garland.

The only thing we use is force.
When I'd like to give you rhyme,
rhythm becomes your recourse.

So we waste our precious time.

Teiresias to Oedipus

I've been here since Cadmus old,
seven generations or nine, blind, the
unwilling seer, the Truth I prophesize.
Guardian of the gates of Thebes, seven
above in Olympian, one below in Plutonian
reality: I hold the key. The door's one
through which we enter, exit, as the bed
you sleep in cannot be two. Most men are
asleep; though the palace has many rooms,
you find the king in his chamber.
You behold the form, but I know your nature,
a half-breed, demigod you are, who must
wander on, the eternal slopes you have to
climb, away from this war-torn town, an
exile from your mother's house, your wife's.
Why would you need more than this? And
why would you want to know more? Why?