

Fire on Water



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WRITINGS FROM AN UNBOUND EUROPE

FIRE ON WATER

Porgess and The Abyss



ARNOŠT LUSTIG

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Contemplations of survival by one of the leading Czech writers of the twentieth century

It occurred to me why I was able to forgive the Italians, but never the Germans. Was it because the Italians never slept on mattresses stuffed with the hair of Luster Leibling or Weltfeind Flusser?

In this pair of short novels, Arnost Lustig continues his lifelong project of creating a universe-at once concrete and dreamlike-to examine the horrors of the Holocaust and the impossible burden of living as a survivor.

The Abyss is the fragmented memories of David Wiesenthal, aged twenty, tortured by what he has witnessed and by the knowledge that luck-not skill, not courage, certainly not goodness-separated the survivors from the doomed. He seeks solace remembering the women he's loved or desired, even the one who represents his death.

In Porgess, the narrator recounts the life of the title character, "the most handsome boy in Jewish Prague" who was paralyzed on the last day of World War II. The two discuss their mutual fascinations-women, jazz, the significance of numbers-in sometimes bitter, sometimes sardonic voices, but always with the specters of the dead and the guilt of survival close at hand.

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