

ON THE NEEDLES OF THESE DAYS

*To Toyen*



Jindřich Heisler •

Jindřich Štyrský •

## ON THE NEEDLES OF THESE DAYS

TRANSLATED FROM THE CZECH BY JED SLAST

TWISTED SPOON PRESS

PRAGUE • 2024



Your gaze dies in the terror of lunatic nights that bring only dreams like the frost roses on windows, or dreamless plains like the metal of lowered shutters.

And while one kindhearted corner of the quilt covers the lowest lines of a newspaper, sewage evaporates from the street and climbs the floors where the dank stench of mold spreads.

Nothing is as stifling as evenings compressed into the space of a coffin, and no joy will cloak their specter,



just as no helmet will cover the blazing brooms of love  
and no chimney sweep will free it from its curse.

One fairy tale after another lights up the windows in  
enchanted castles and the soot of night falls onto the  
sobs of children and onto the groans of their mutilated  
toys.

And yet midnight will be profoundly natural, like  
electricity, like the movement of a bell's tongue, until a  
marshal's baton, steeped in bloody memories, ends up  
sitting like a moth by a tomb of chain mail,



until the white work of tyrants praying for the health of their holy ghosts withers away like an old tin can at the bottom of a ripped shark's belly.

But the times are peaceful still and the timorous phantoms of duty silently wander through a Sunday's museum quietude, and remorse hopelessly bumps into objects.



Rejoice ensconced in your hidden copses juddering  
with the beating heart of spring, and the shifting refuse  
chokes the scorched places where a strong acid has  
erected little turrets, hard and white, around craters.

Fire, today so sedulously contained, will burst out  
and spread widely, passing from hand to hand.

Maybe it's the fingers of these days, unraveling mon-  
strous snarls, homespun skeins tousled by worsted waves  
and matted with seaweed, freely displaying their vast  
expanse of hope.

JINDŘICH HEISLER (1914–53) was a poet and visual artist born into a Jewish family in the small Bohemian town of Chrast. Later moving to Prague, he befriended Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen, and joined the Surrealist Group in 1938. During the Nazi occupation Toyen, primarily, Karel Teige and others kept him hidden in their apartments (he ignored the summons for deportation to the concentration camp). After the war he collaborated with Toyen on a number of projects, contributing the poetic texts to her series of drawings *War*, *Hide Yourself* and *Shooting Gallery*. The two left for Paris in 1947 to participate in the International Exhibition of Surrealism, and neither returned, becoming active in the Paris Surrealist Group. Heisler was part of the editorial team and graphic designer of the group's magazine NEON published from 1948 to 1950. He lived with Toyen until his sudden death in 1953 in Paris.

JINDŘICH ŠTYRSKÝ (1899–1942) was a painter, poet, photographer, collagist, and book designer, who also wrote extensively on both Arthur Rimbaud and Marquis de Sade. A member of the avant-garde artist's group Devětsil from 1923, he participated in the collective exhibitions and in 1928–29 served as director of its drama wing, the Liberated Theater. Active as an editor as well, Štyrský launched the *Erotická revue* in 1930 and *Edice 69*, a limited private series of erotic texts and illustrations, in 1931, and co-edited *Odeon*, where many of his shorter texts appeared. He was a founding member of the Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia and remained active until his death.

JED SLAST, a native of Richmond, Virginia, lives in Prague. His translations from Czech include *The Tender Barbarian* by Bohuslav Hrabal, *Dreamverse* by Jindřich Štyrský, and *Edition 69*.

## ON THE NEEDLES OF THESE DAYS

Text : Jindřich Heisler [1941]

Photographs : Jindřich Štyrský [1935]

Translation copyright © 2024 Twisted Spoon Press

Translated by Jed Slast from the original Czech  
*Na jehličích těchto dní* first published clandestinely  
in 1941 by Edice Surrealismu in a handful of copies  
and officially published in December 1945  
by Fr. Borovy in Prague

ISBN 978-80-88628-04-0

Layout based on Karel Teige's original design  
Set in Garamond Premier Pro by Silk Mountain  
Printed and bound in the Czech Republic by Akcent

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2024 IN A LIMITED EDITION OF 700

TWISTED SPOON PRESS  
P.O. Box 21 – Preslova 12  
150 00 Prague 5  
Czech Republic  
twistedspoonpress@gmail.com  
www.twistedspoon.com

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from Twisted Spoon Press.*