

John Fraser was born in London. He wrote on and taught social and political theory (especially Marxism) in the UK, Canada and, after 1980, in Rome and Ferrara. Since 1982 he has lived in Rome and has also worked as a musician.

Also by John Fraser and published by AESOP Modern:

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One of the most extraordinary publishing events of the past four years has been the rapid, indeed insistent, appearance of the novels of John Fraser. There are few parallels in literary history to this almost simultaneous and largely belated appearance of a mature oeuvre, sprung like Athena from Zeus's forehead; and the novels in themselves are extraordinary.

Fraser is an English novelist, poet and university teacher who has lived in Rome since 1982. Originally interested in world politics and in the rich hopes and analysed regrets of failed revolutionary activity, in his recent work his settings have become more and more fantastic and apocalyptic. The limbo of putative activity and endless self-analysis that his characters arrive at is, in a paradoxical way, wonderfully absorbing and exciting. I can think of nothing much like it in fiction. Fraser maintains a masterfully ironic distance from the extreme conditions in which his characters find themselves. There are strikingly beautiful descriptions, veiled allusions to rooted traditions, unlikely events half-glimpsed, abrupt narratives, surreal but somehow apposite social customs.

Fraser's work is conceived on a heroic scale in terms both of its ideas and its situational metaphors. If he were to be filmed, it would need the combined talents of a Bunuel, a Gilliam, a Cameron. Like Thomas Pynchon, whom in some ways he resembles, Fraser is a deep and serious fantasist, wildly inventive. The reader rides as on a switchback or luge of impetuous attention, with effects flashing by at virtuoso speeds. The characters seem to be unwitting agents of chaos, however much wise reflection the author bestows upon them. They move with shrugging self-assurance through circumstances as richly-detailed and as without reliable compass-points as a Chinese scroll.

John Fuller, poet, novelist, Booker Prize nominee and Fellow Emeritus at Magdalen College, Oxford

Front cover:
Illustration by
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John Fraser ENTERPRISING WOMEN

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Enterprising Women – a sequence of stories of women in difficult circumstances, who contrive to avoid – and sometimes cause – the worst of consequences. In *The Flies*, the women are witness to violence and temptation. In *Landfall*, a spymaster, survives the loss and betrayal of her male companions and later prospers, with other female entrepreneurs, in a shady business. In *The Scorpions* a conservationist confronts a potentially disastrous situation – and ultimately survives.

From the book:

'They fight on everywhere,' Nestor says. 'In from the desert, capturing their old towns, their fortresses, once more. To you, it looks all sand. And snow. Those camel tracks of empires fallen in the wilderness. The rust. The dust!' he laughs, proud, amused with himself: 'Succession and secession, the best to oust the good, the bad is trailing there behind – no one's supposed to want it – how it lasts! The captains, moribund, come crawling up the beach – and then, they dance. See their top hats glint! Look, Julie – that is where there's beat, and fornication quite industrial. See them spring to life renewed – a verse, a poem, sets them off, see how their faces glisten with the paint, their beards jut out – no, not a danse macabre, a dance of death – Julie! It's life! Look! There goes the last fish, twisting out its ghost, maybe a curse – they gulp it down. There's nothing left, and on they dance, and sing, and call on gods and goodness. Would you have it otherwise, my dear? We must be there, still dancing, at the end, and round and round, and spit the bones in someone's hat, and on and on, and even when the end has come, we whirl and spin. And that is how it has to be, dear Julie! There is no other way.'

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