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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. He has also worked as a musician.

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**HARD PLACES – three visionary novellas by John Fraser**

In Fraser's fiction 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 Fraser 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



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JOHN FRASER

HARD PLACES

AESOP Modern Oxford

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# HARD PLACES

## JOHN FRASER

### RED SNOW

### THE ROCK

### THE SEA

'Then the killing sprees. Why does that word, "spree" cling on, not used in any other place – why should it signify having a good time?' I ask.

'There's a symmetry, an up and down – my granddad says, they fled from times so terrible they knew those times would soon be back. He said that just before the war – the Patriotic War – they had a festival, with cannons, filled with water, shot it in the sky, and down it came! Quite out of season. Down from the clouds. Red snow,' she says.

from *Red Snow*

'The rock's already naked,' I say. 'There it lay, sleeping within the others. I bought it, ripped it out – it hadn't been expecting that.'

He persists, 'Most people like to think there is a mystery – a flower, an animal, even a skeleton that's trapped inside.'

I say, 'They're wrong. There isn't. Mysteries – they're better left as such.'

The Greeks, the chips of marble that they've left us ... They managed; abundance of tied help, the gods would lend a hand – some chiselling, a striking-down of rivals. Now, with God-in-a-book, we have no need for pictures. 'Don't go back to God,' says Finn.

'Touch of the numinous, nothing more,' I say, from *The Rock*

There's bigger, heavier birds round – they must be from the sea. And now, the mangroves end. It is the sea. The sea, the sea!

So we embrace, and weep, and there it lies, a bigger and a calmer thing than we have seen before. No people, that's a blessing, just ticking over, waves regulated, colours programmed, I suppose, a bit monotonous, and sure – to venture on it would be foolish – but, after all, the Sea! the Sea!

from *The Sea*

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