

John Fraser has lived in Rome since 1980. Previously, he worked in England and Canada.

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People You Will Never Meet, John Fraser's latest work of fiction, consists of three thematically linked stories. In the first, two Palestinians escape to humble, even humiliating work in Belgium. They manage to set themselves up as a think-tank above a public dance-hall, and their lives divide between the search for a lofty principle and the drinking and music in the floor below. The link between the levels is provided by a fussy, garrulous first-person narrator, whose own adventures turn out to signify little. There is a party, where the upper and lower worlds mingle, the protagonist dressed as moths and butterflies. The Palestinians move on – one to a ruined Syria, the other to frustration in Europe. The second tale involves a bright country girl, seduced by her teacher with aspirations to a powerful career. She seeks speed, which does not end well for her. In the final tale, the hero aims higher still – a project for the human species. This involves journeying through Eastern Europe, and its underground. Its climax is the burning of a stranger's house, and a long long wait for a slow train...

About John Fraser:

'One of the most extraordinary publishing events of the past few 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. I can think of nothing much like them 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, Whitbread Award winning poet and Booker Prize nominee



PEOPLE YOU WILL NEVER MEET JOHN FRASER

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PEOPLE YOU WILL NEVER MEET

AESOP Modern Fiction



JOHN FRASER

'the most original novelist of our time'

John Fuller

'You can't be half anything, Irma,' Riya says. 'My parents gave me love – I don't need any more. You can be big or small, not fractional. My father was too big – he kept bets, and then they hid me. In a place so dark, I couldn't see.'

'To protect you?' Irma asks. 'Or kidnap?'

'Oh, if you go to jail,' says Riya, 'that combines them both, of course. This wasn't prison, though. It was so dark, I still can't see so well. I love the dawn – it doesn't last – you must get used to that. You're free, but what is there to see? There's no one round – yet there's everyone, they're all around, but it's like prison. There's too much humanity in jail, how you long for solitude, a lock upon the door, no love, no stories, no confidences. A bulb on all the time. A jailer, a dumb ape, who once a day, brings in your food. Oh Irma, I'd like to have a monkey. To keep it in a room, right next to ours. They say if you don't love them, they will die. Does it prefer the light? The dark? We'll slip our souls in him, and that will be a reason he'll live, we'll poke his food in once a day, and hear him – scampering and weeping, shouting out his prayers...'

from People You Will Never Meet

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