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

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## Where are we? Where are we going? What's in store?

John Fraser's The Answer considers these questions in four stories:

In The Colours of Air: many characters live in an apartment, a microcosm – intellectuals from Sartre to de Beauvoir, security experts, émigrés and refugees, traditionals from the country, all involved in strategies of survival. In the end, the question becomes to survive, what must be jettisoned, what has irrevocably been lost?

In Peace and War – chronicles couples, joining up and spinning off, East Europeans on the margin of a West where music and drink are the context – hiding and burying the dead is a main task – Pavel, the protagonist seems to find permanence in stonework, sculpture, but all wait expectantly for the sound of horses, horsemen and their messages. These characters are on the margin – there seems to be no core, though they are seeking it.

In **Interlude**: two displaced intellectuals are being vetted for their status, their security. The theme is 'space without freedom' – waiting, with expectancy, but without knowing what comes next.

The answer finally comes In **The Answer**. It's daring, a risk, a leap into the unknown, with probable disastrous results...

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 winner and Booker Prize nominee



t s - n b - s pother saw nether was mas a net vasn r : t wash r ten hawser ten aths new tiers van the s wa sheen wart s ante de venera a sare no a shrew ten ne answer hater news hear ews h three swan last remains were make with sheet warn hewn a hewn when rates when care than tares when care hewn rates hewn tares tares tares a hewn rest when a rest the worres are then res hens water hens we at hand we rau mens we yar than sewer than we res the wear the wares then wears shaw enter was a 'er hew rent hews a tern hews en rat hews en tar thaw wrens heat wrens thee warns nth a sewer nth as ewer nts as were nth raw see nth war see nth was ere nth saw are nth sew ear nth sew era nth awe res nth we ares nth we ears nth we eras nth we sear nth we res a ken rawest heh waser hen waters hen strew a hen wrest a hen raw set hen war set hen sew art hen sew rat

'The cinema! Distant hooves: candlestick cactuses, long guns, no reloads, the bangs get added later, hate is easy, but love the camera has to look separately into each set of eyes, so love's diluted, you must infer ... wow! - she lifts her silks, clean panties you can bet, he has no problem with his buttons, here come the fogs, day into night, Gabin's stone face, the clang of trams, the occupation, guys heaping into trucks and trains, politics, the baby dropped, easy to forget a little one, the letter is mislaid, subtitle you can't read, everyone so beautiful you can't tell who from witch - the old are crones or sages, villains wear tall boots, and there's the spooky song, don't pay the orchestra, you hear it but don't see - music stretches all along, those horns sound like trombones, the darkskins are in rehab, a chance to chant and dance, the fraudsters sneer, mistreat their secretaries and oh no, he's fondling her, the spy is shot, the boss is dropped, a satisfying splat, will the princess jump out the cake, her contract says ... freedom, puppets, other worlds...'

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