

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

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STRANGERS AND REFUGEES

John Fraser's latest work of fiction follows the refugee Khalil in two related stories, 'The Refugees' and 'Travels with Strangers'.

We are all refugees seeking an entry to somewhere when we've left somewhere else. Our knowledge is a raft that's carried us on lumpy seas. We can forget all that when we arrive. It doesn't serve. We don't, of course, stop being refugees, not ever, but we have a lot of living to do while we're forgetting where we were before.

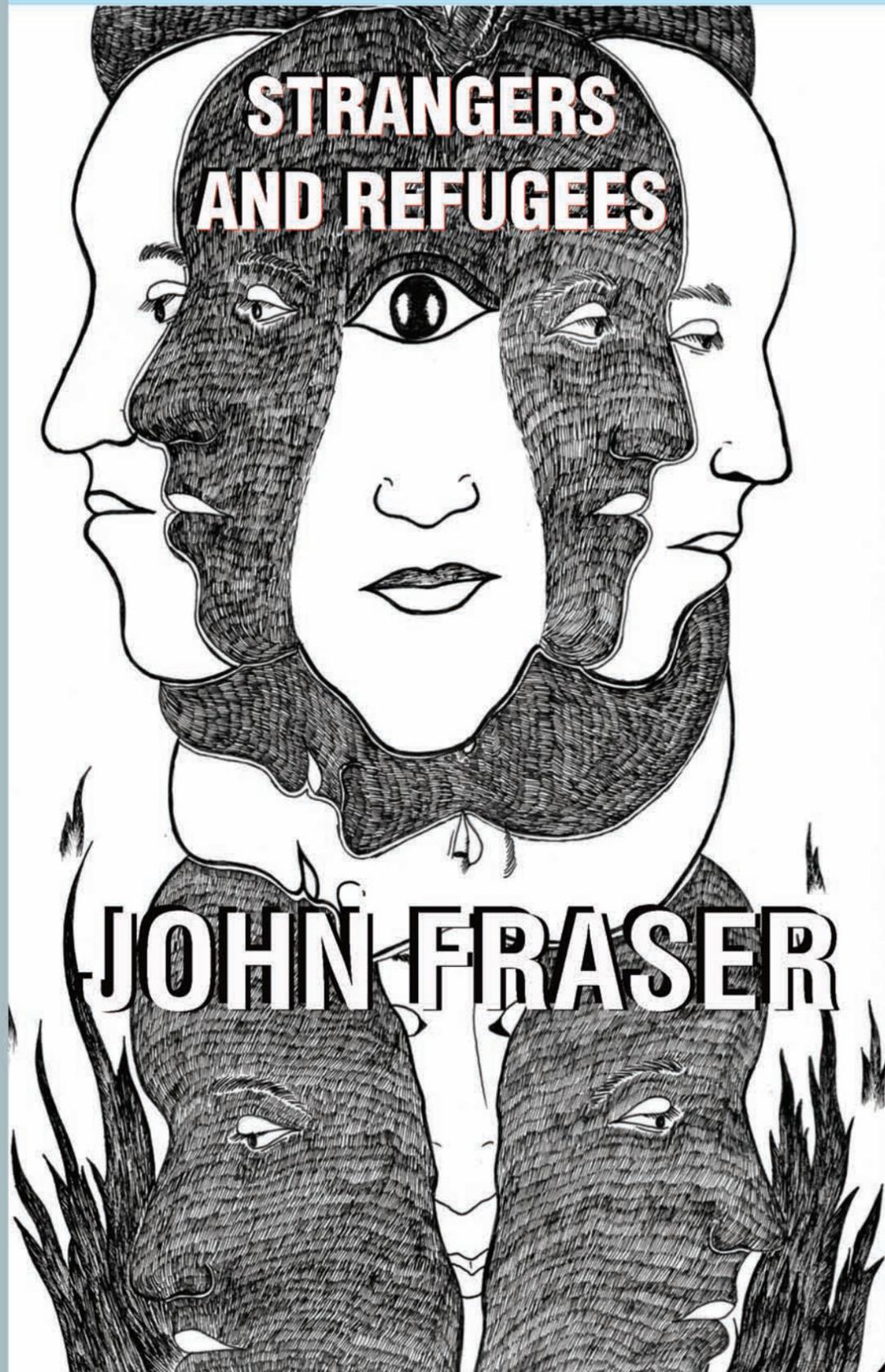
It's a commonplace, to say we're strangers to ourselves – not only when we are alone, but especially when we are in company. Khalil comes from a ruined land, chooses the obvious role in his new places – acting. On film, where someone else will edit him. He longs to find the treasure we all want – and isn't his, or ours. He flits through 'Travels with Strangers' too – but people of all spots and stripes are rolling down, shaken from their safe spots – and finish in the Caucasus! A place that once was Eden – and they try to plant and harvest there again. It doesn't necessarily work. It's strange, because they're of all human types. Maybe the world wasn't made for people, or maybe it's too far gone for them to find a space to think and talk. And how they talk! Seek love and sex and something – nothing - in between. There must be, of course, conclusion. Khalil's a fine dancer - exhibition standard. That's a gift!

Front cover: 'The Fire'
by Murtaza Ali Jafari
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STRANGERS AND REFUGEES JOHN FRASER

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I have a script, already charged with metaphor, and I must make another jump, turn it to pictures that you never dreamed of, will never use again. It's hard, so hard, Khalil, it makes me weep ... although, it's what our business is. There's worse – once you take ship in metaphor, there's waves of real things – up and under you. You believe you owe a reverence to the dead, they bore you up, the order's theirs, you wear their face, your prick and tits are handed down, and you will hand them on – the sun is good, the moon a little less.... If they weren't there – how would you see to hunt, or plant....? I turn them into portents, poetry – suppose they stay that way? Suppose the realism I court transforms the world, turns seasons inside out, and ghostly things come down from rocks out there in space where nothing is, though it is filled with hard stuff quite invisible... And as you know, Khalil – it doesn't end like that. Into the death pit, on the memorial ... the names are sketched when we are born, the space reserved – a niche for slaves, a bed for nobles – a death is a serious thing, it stands and will not move aside and let you through, not for a day, until you pay it with another death. Not yours, if possible, not a metaphor – first a sacrifice, then you work it out... you send a postcard. A mobilisation, the scything of the young – conscription, by politics or friendly nature with its germs and tidal waves.... An office to report to, an emergency, a judgement: death is insatiable, Khalil. However many bodies you can offer up, it's always harder to evade – “move on, move out, just let me past” you cry in vain.... Unforgiving, unmoveable. Quite insatiable.'

from *Strangers and Refugees*

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