

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

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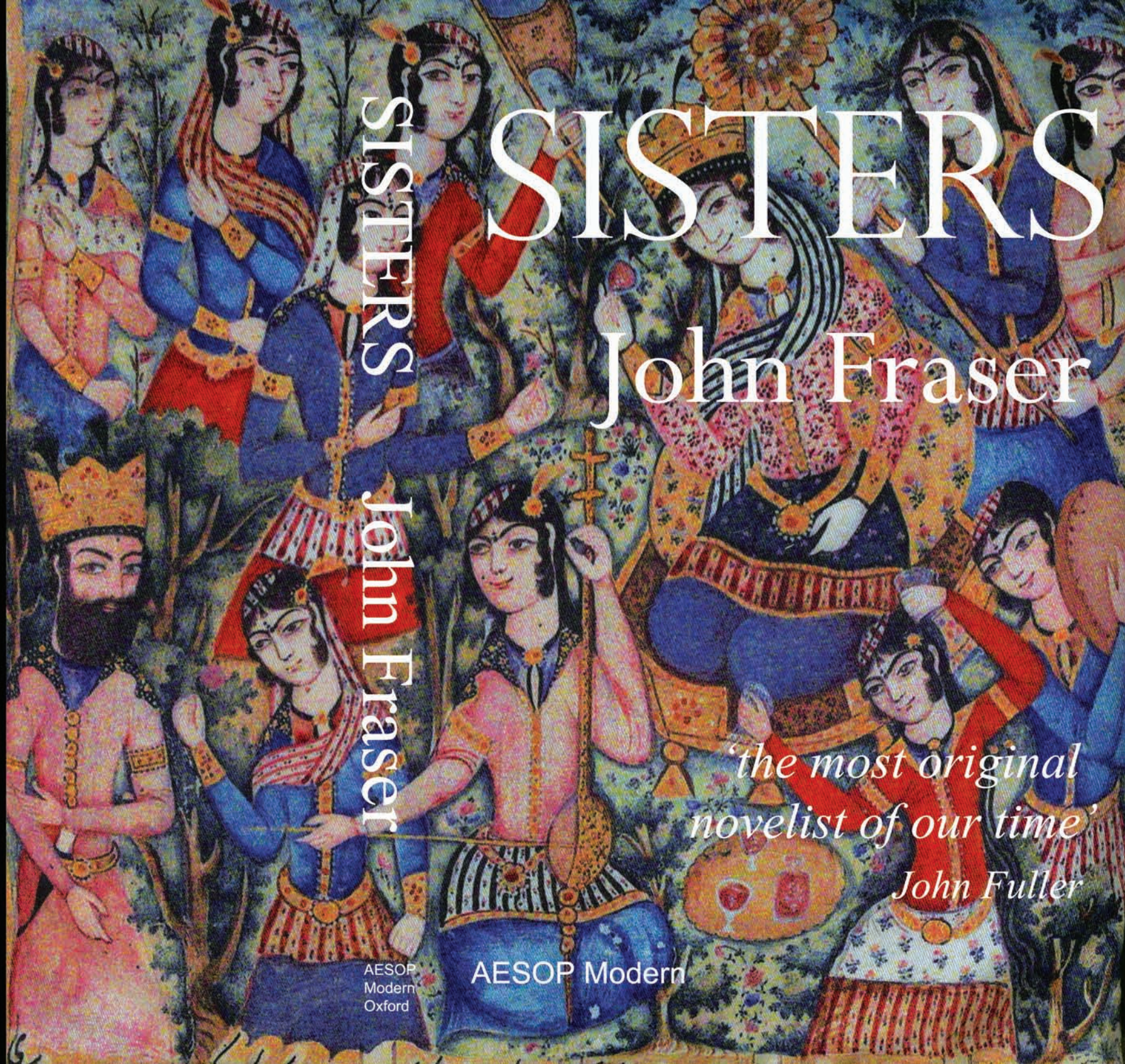
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**Sisters is a contemporary reworking of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Its author, John Fraser, has been hailed as 'the most original novelist of our time' by the distinguished poet and Whitbread Award winner, John Fuller. It can be read as a kind of vega.**

Masha, a young woman with a rich Middle Eastern culture, is forced by war to leave her country, her sisters, and even change her name. Abandoning her training as a surgeon, she becomes involved in superconductors and intrigued by the philosophical aspects of her work – energy, time and distance – she seeks new 'sisters' and tries to assert herself in the unfamiliar cultures and human projects she encounters.

Masha is taken up by Irene, who is occupied in a big house with a laboratory equipped for research in space travel. In an echo of the Chekhovian theme which runs through the plot, the train which promises escape in the *Cherry Orchard* finds an ironic resonance in the expedient of space travel and re-location.



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'It's you who's looking for eternity,' says Doctor Gritt. 'For me – it's just preserving energy that's not squandered. Not stasis, not perpetual immobility. Without an index, Masha, you're no use. What an impulse! If you'd cut off your great toes, you'd fall over endlessly – but I'd have found a chair for you. Without a point, a pointer, there's left for you – only the mind's life. How the world seems. No thing stands out, it's all worth equally. Happenstance – I'm sure you've seen the cats – that's how they live. There is no focus, resolution, no here, no there. If it had been your thumb – no hitching rides – that's dangerous anyway. Nothing to distinguish you from thumbless jaguars – except you don't run fast, and you've no tail. But – the finger. Remember, how it points, it wrote, "Weighed in the balance . . . wanting." We all want, but, Masha, at a glance, you're wanting! If I make a parcel – I can't ask you to block the string. No pen to hold, no brush, even to pick your nose. . .'

'I know,' says Masha. 'It's half a tragedy.'

from *Sisters*

*'the most original  
novelist of our time'*  
John Fuller

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