

BLUE LIGHT

and

STARTING OVER

*Also by John Fraser
and published by AESOP Modern:*

Black Masks
The Magnificent Wurlitzer
Medusa
The Observatory
The Other Shore
The Red Tank
Runners

BLUE LIGHT:
AFTER THE END
&
STARTING OVER

John Fraser



AESOP Modern
Oxford

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PREFACE

Blue Light and *Starting Over* conclude the pilgrimage, or conspectus, John Fraser began with the publication of *The Red Tank* (2010). It is not necessary to read through the sequence, nor indeed to sample any part of it, in order to place the present tales. *Blue Light* is about the world closing down, and *Starting Over* plays with the ambiguity contained in the title – starting anew (if you want), or starting finished – a rejection of the exercise.

In *The Red Tank*, the author cast a cool eye on sex and science (‘Chinese Whispers’), intelligence and Intelligence (‘Funny Little Fellows’), and crime and state-building (‘The Bright Stars’), with side-glances at the artistic modes used to elaborate these – and other – themes. *Runners* (2010) considered politics, its limitations and inspiration, and *Medusa* (2010) examined humanitarianism and disaster, fortitude and the military.

This summary may suggest that a pedagogical or ideological project is embedded in the series. In fact, to use the analogy with pilgrims’ tales, or symphonic movements, the context is structured to provide a coherent stylistic unity. The tales, the movements, are

different, but it is the whole that bears the weight of significance.

*

We all know what the end of the world is like – it's not dissimilar to our own end. In our heads, both these ends – the world, the person – are already present. *Blue Light* shows what it's like, the running down, the onset of *rigor mortis* – and the new life sprouting, notwithstanding. That is how it is, exactly so. The way it all happens.

Here, we're in Italy, where there's a high priest who's infallible; organised crime that's organised better than anything else; politicians who seem eternal, like the capital. Living in the capital, the Eternal City, you need Capital, and this is how it's generated and handed round.

Art too is eternal, so they say. Italy is full of it, some of it in fair condition. The process of producing it, or not quite finishing (and getting Capital for it too) – that's an even longer eternity.

The Eternal, the Immortal: as you'd expect, the gods and goddesses, demigods and nymphs, sylphs and mythic mortals, they're still around, and going strong. In every bar and cane brake, divinity is imminent.

At the start, the Professor's point is that 'isness', the present, the real, seems the tangible product of two unreal

states – the past (wobbly memory, vacillating history), and ‘blue land’, the future. Blue land is hypothetically an ‘end’, our self-destruct – but of course, it’s not ‘real’, it’s as open to interpretation and construction as is the past. In this concoction, as the scene is Rome, the old gods and goddesses are present – immortal not as characters, but because the emotions they invoke and represent – love, jealousy, repugnance – are, for humans, immortal.

*

Living for ever may not be too bad – but do you really want it? When the world has ended, how attractive is rebirth, or resurrection? *Starting Over* may mean you have to piece a whole new world together – just using the ruins of the past. A drink, a smoke – that at least you need, but much is scarce or lacking, and what there is may not be good for you. And yet, it all comes sprouting up again! Is this hope? This unstoppable fecundity, an eternal recurrence we, this time, are conscious of, directing it, or so it seems – should we encourage it? Is this a false start? Perhaps the world that fell – or was pushed – wasn’t worth reproducing. *Starting Over*’s cold ‘I’ moves among the highest authorities of the new dispensation, and is sceptical about it all.

An end requires the candle flame, at least, of something lingering on, or coming back. The flickering consciousness returns from its – maybe useless – operation and anaesthesia, carrying with it every memory, every place, relationship, song and dance. There's joy in this return?

Rosa Trebant
December 2010

BLUE LIGHT

AFTER THE END

*De l'éternel azur la sereine ironie
Accable, belle indolemment come les fleurs,
Le poète impuissant qui maudit son génie
A travers un désert stérile de Douleurs.
L'azur, Stéphane Mallarmé*

*Je parlerai du revenant, de la flamme et des cendres.
Jacques Derrida,
De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question.*

Rome

The Lecture

‘I won’t ask why there’s something rather than nothing, since we’re all hoping to find some lunch,’ says poor old Professor Harmless – some German name – fishing for laughs. ‘So I’ll just ask, “Why is everything as it is and not something else?”’

‘Silly old fool,’ I think, ‘everything is quite different,’ as I’m eyeing, pulling on, that girl over there.

‘You’re mafia, aren’t you?’ she asks.

‘Some silly people say I am, so what? There’s a stigma. Some silly people say I’m not, they’re still silly.’

‘It’s my dad,’ she says. ‘He’s got some smelly cash,’ and I say,

‘It’s mostly smelly. Banks have a scent they spray, otherwise you’d not go past, nor in – sniff the new notes, there’s no drugs, no sweat, just clean and tidy.’

There is a pause, then I say, ‘Of course I’m not mafia, just invest.’

Well, I wouldn’t say if I was, or would I? Intervention, the investment stuff – it doesn’t change a thing, like the prof says, just brings forth some more isness. Change, like he says, is an illusion, going on like birth or like decay, spring and whatever follows – even if nothing

does – all's still firmly in the isness slot. It gives you something to hold on to – isness, the everything.

I say, 'There's commission.'

'Much?'

'For you, thirty per cent,' and she says,

'That's OK, it's just like taxes.' She thinks it's commission on the interest, not the capital: who cares, capital is soft as butter, spread it thick or thin, and in the end it's all chucked into Capital that keeps the world a-going round, deciding who is up and who is not or has been once.

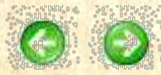
'Where did your father get the cash?' I ask.

'Importing women and children. In rags. And beating them. And stealing what they earn.'

'OK!' I say, what I don't know won't hurt her, and I'll give her documents – that capital's like butter, and when it melts, it's gone, but – there's old Capital, it licks its lips, and down it's sunk!

'I'll give you documents,' I say. They're useful, keep your feet warm on the park bench. Or even – maybe you'll earn, we'll take a slice each year off what you give us, and there! It's all yours, – though it's all ours too. Don't ask too much.

How fortunate for her – not mafia, I just invest.



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