

# FROM CHINA TO PERU

## *A Memoir of Travel*

Russell Fraser

With a title borrowed from Samuel Johnson, insatiable globe-trotter Russell Fraser fondly recalls his travels in China, Peru, Italy, France, Russia, Scotland, the Persian Gulf, and the Antarctic in this series of meditations on the distinguishing elements of culture and history found in far-flung locales. Fraser establishes himself as a knowledgeable guide who combines an intimate familiarity with local history, a keen eye for culture, a companionable wit, and a penchant for speculation about the grip of the past on the present. Fraser's fascination with people leads him to banter and at times to argue with locals in his quest to discern the peculiarities of a given place, be it a communist training school near Milan or the best bar in St. Petersburg. His grand appreciation for discoveries that can be made only through travel is apparent in every poetically phrased description and artfully reconstructed dialogue.

Fraser begins each essay with an autobiographical passage before turning to the place and moment at hand. This technique establishes camaraderie with our learned, informative, and entertaining guide as we walk deserts and frozen plains, Old World neighborhoods and Far Eastern danger zones, the lobbies of plush new hotels and the aisles of centuries-old cathedrals. In his ruminations, Fraser circles strategically between personal and global pasts—traveling in time as well as space—to put our modernity in perspective and to ponder facets of human experience found amid the regions he describes so vividly. The heart of Fraser's memoir is a two-chapter sequence devoted to meandering through his ancestral homeland of Scotland, a narrative that ably couples family history and travelogue. In the concluding essay, the author's adventure in Antarctica parallels a trip taken decades earlier by his great-grandfather Alexander V. Fraser, the first commander of the U.S. Coast Guard, and again he deftly juxtaposes the personal with the global and the past with the present.

Fraser's tales are peppered with the anecdotes, asides, and well-chosen quotations of a traveler steeped in knowledge of the world's history and its literature. From China to Peru is a welcoming invitation to travel the globe, if only through the insightful memoirs of one well-versed in such passages.

August 2009, 232 pages

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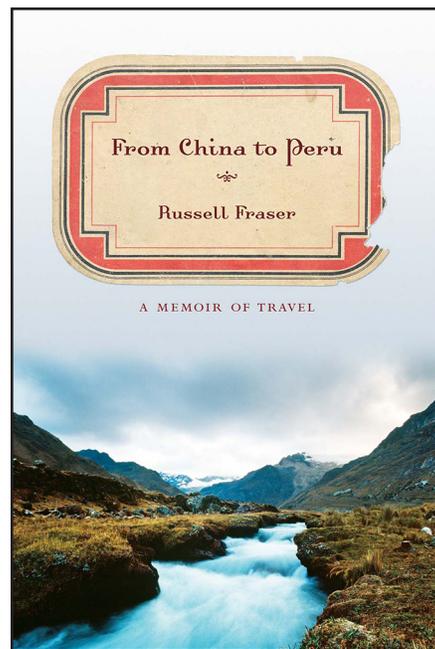
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An accomplished literary critic and historian, **Russell Fraser** is the Austin Warren Professor of English Language and Literature Emeritus at the University of Michigan. He is author or editor of nearly two dozen books, including *Shakespeare: A Life in Art* and *Moderns Worth Keeping*. Fraser lives in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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