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TITLE: Ghost Train to the Eastern Star
AUTHOR: Paul Theroux

INTRODUCTION:

Paul Theroux's *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* intrigued me and made me choose this book because of its promise of adventure, travel and cultural exploration. I have always been fascinated by travel literature and want to travel all around the world and explore different cultures the world has to offer. Having read the first book, "The Great Railway Bazaar", I immediately chose this book, eager to see Theroux's journey around the world again, with thoughts which go beyond just surface level sightseeing. I loved the way Theroux penned down his thoughts as a traveller and how he sees beyond what any random traveller would and thus, I picked this book up with no hesitation. Initially, I expected a compelling journey through Asia, filled with rich descriptions and deep reflections on the changing world. I was expecting to read how society has changed over a period of time, either for better or for worse and how Theroux's revisiting of his old route years later would be.

SUMMARY:

In *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*, the main character, Paul Theroux retraces the journey he first took decades ago in *The Great Railway Bazaar*, wanting to know how the world had changed over the years. He also was curious to see how his thoughts and observations as a tourist would change over the years. In the book, he wrote about his adventures traveling through Europe, the Middle East, and Asia by train. His route goes from London to Tokyo and back, covering places such as Turkey, Turkmenistan, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Throughout his travels, Theroux encounters a range of people—from locals and fellow travelers to famous writers like Orhan Pamuk, Arthur C Clark and Haruki Murakami. He reflects on the immense changes in these regions along with the people, shaped by globalization, war, political shifts and modernity and how all these factors transformed the landscapes and cultures he once knew. The book's central themes include the contrast between past and present, the nature of travel, and the impact of political and social transformations. The author talks about Change and Nostalgia, and shows how places evolve- or sometimes stay the same. In every place he visits, he observes the impact of globalization and notices how many of the places he visits have modernized rapidly, for better or worse. He sees Western influence everywhere but also notes the resilience of local cultures. Theroux also highlights the power of travel, and how true travel is not just about sightseeing and tourism, but also about observation and meeting new people, whether in a café in Tbilisi or a train in India, as this is what makes a journey truly memorable.

ANALYSIS AND OPINION:

The book was a well written travel memoir which beautifully captured all the places Theroux visited. One of the book's strengths is Theroux's eye for detail and his observation skills. His

writing brings landscapes and people to life, capturing both the beauty and complexity of travel. His ability to capture the essence of a location—its smells, sounds, and atmosphere - makes the reader feel as if they are actually in the place at that moment. Theroux's self-awareness and willingness to contrast his younger and older self adds an introspective layer. He doesn't just describe places—he considers how time, memory, and experience shape our understanding of different places and how we naturally start to view things differently over a period of time as our priorities and thoughts change. Another thing I enjoy about the book is how he captures all the engaging encounters he has with all different kinds of people, so he can actually get to know the place better since people are what makes every place different. The book has interactions with locals, intellectuals, and fellow travelers. These moments add depth and perspective, making the journey feel personal and real. A particularly striking moment is when *he states, "Travel is at its best when it's challenging."* This perfectly shows his philosophy of travel.

However, the book is not without its flaws. At times, Theroux's tone, which is usually witty and cynical, can come across as grumpy, judging or dismissive, especially when comparing modern travelers to his own experiences. This occasional negativity might put off some readers. Additionally, certain sections are packed with fascinating details, while others are very slow, making it a bit uneven and the reader can feel bored in the middle.

If I had to pick one standout character (besides Theroux himself), Orhan Pamuk makes a particularly memorable impression. Orhan Pamuk is a Nobel Prize-winning author who Theroux meets in Turkey. Pamuk brings a rich perspective to their conversation. He and Theroux discuss nostalgia, Turkish identity, and the tension between modernity and tradition in Istanbul. *Pamuk said that Istanbul was a city caught between nostalgia and modernity, explaining that many Turks longed for the past while struggling to embrace the future.*

Despite some of its drawbacks, the book successfully conveys a profound message: The World Changes, but So Do We. Travel is not just about seeing new places but about understanding how the world and its people evolve over time and how we, as travelers, change too. Another important lesson is that while economic progress brings development, it also erases certain traditions and cultures.

PERSONAL CONNECTION:

Reading this book was like taking a long, reflective journey myself. The book inspired me to *set out* on my own journey with a more open and observant mindset. It *opened my eyes* to how much the world has changed in just a few decades. It also changed my perspective on travel and made me realise travel isn't just about visiting the most famous monuments, but also about meeting new people and learning about their lives and cultures. Theroux's reflections on globalization and nostalgia gave me *food for thought* about how modernization affects cultures in both positive and negative ways. This book also reinforced the idea that *"the grass is always greener on the other side."* Many of the people Theroux meets dream of moving elsewhere, while he himself longs for the romance of past travels. Theroux's detailed descriptions helped me *take in* the beauty, complexity, and contradictions of the places he visited. Overall, *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* made me appreciate the depth of travel beyond its surface pleasures. The book made me realize that true exploration requires patience and an open mind—two qualities I hope to cultivate more in my own journeys.

CONCLUSION:

I would certainly recommend *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star* because it is more than just a travel memoir - it's a deep, thought-provoking exploration of how places and people change over time. Theroux's sharp observations, engaging storytelling, and honest reflections make it an interesting read for anyone who loves travel, culture, and history. I would mainly recommend this book to those who enjoy travel literature and reflective storytelling. It is particularly suited for readers who appreciate cultural insights and philosophical thoughts rather than just an action-packed travel book only showcasing the sightseeing aspect of travel. While Theroux's perspective might not resonate with everyone, his observations and experiences offer a unique lens through which we can view the modern world.