

The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia Study Guide

The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia by Paul Theroux

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Plot Summary

The author plans a four month trip from London, through Europe and into Turkey, to Iran, Pakistan and India. He travels extensively in India and then flies to Rangoon, Burma. There he sees the Gokteik Viaduct and flies to Rangoon, Thailand, and takes rails all the way to Singapore. He makes a stopover in Vietnam and travels on some parts of the Trans-Vietnam railway. He travels extensively in Japan and after a sea voyage, takes the long Trans-Siberian Railroad back to Europe and London. He begins his journey in early September in London and travels to Paris, interrupted only by the English Channel ferry. After lecturing in Istanbul, the author heads to Lake Van on the more comfortable Turkish Railways. The author spends a couple days in Teheran before taking the train to the Iranian holy city of Meshed. There is no alcohol on this train, and most women are in veils; then the author spends a week in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, there is the incredible Khyber Pass railroad that climbs through the mountains and arrives at Peshawar. From there the author goes to Lahore, a city of women in veils. After a couple of cab rides the author reaches Amritsar, India. The author takes a train to Delhi and then a train to Simla takes him to the foothills of the Himalayas. In Bombay and Jaipur the author meets large groups of Indians engaged in traveling to various religious festivals. Then the author goes to Madras, traveling 1,400 miles south. The Tamils of Madras often speak English, but further south the people are near naked. After making it to Rameswaram, the author takes the ferry to Ceylon. He describes Ceylon as a desperate country. The author speaks at a literary conference with sumptuous meals in a food-short country. The author returns to India via Calcutta.

The author flies to Rangoon with the goal of crossing the Gokteik Viaduct in Northern Burma. Next the author flies to Bangkok, which continues as a sex tourism center, even after the American soldiers leave Vietnam. The author travels by rail to Nong Khai and takes a ferry to Vientiane, Laos. The author returns south on the 1,400 mile line through Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, all the way to Singapore. The author next flies to Saigon, and has the goal of traveling on the bits and pieces left of the Trans-Vietnam railroad. American bases have turned into squalid refugee camps in December 1973. The author then flies to Japan and is somewhat dismayed by the swift, clean Japanese trains, which he likens more to airplanes. He contrasts the organized, polite behavior of most Japanese to their outbursts of drunkenness and popular shows combining pornography and murderous violence. The author travels from Sapporo, in the cold north, to Kyoto, the southern city known for its temples and community bars.

The author takes a ship from Yokohama to the Russian port of Nakhoda, to the Trans-Siberian railroad. On the first leg of the trip, to Khabarovsk, the author enjoys a very comfortable wooden sleeper car. Khabarovsk is shockingly cold, at 35 degrees below zero. On the next leg of the trip, the Rossiya, the author is surrounded by Russian speakers, drinks heavily and learns some Russian. The author ends his Russian trip by getting drunk constantly with the bribed head of the dining car, Vassily. The author proceeds through Europe and back to London.



Chapter 1 and 2, pp. 1-43

Chapter 1 and 2, pp. 1-43 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 1- The first passenger the author remembers is named Duffill, an old man traveling from England to Istanbul, Turkey. The author, Paul, wonders why Duffill is going to Istanbul. He watches schoolboys waiting for trains and a gypsy camp as the train goes non-stop through England. As the train nears the edge of England, the Italian and Nigerian passengers seem to become excited. Duffill is standing with his parcels. His clothes are over-sized; he is small and the author believes he is from a rural area, not London.

After the ferry, the passengers are at the station in Calais, France. The author is heading to Paris to board the Orient Express. The passengers discuss the author, Graham Greene, who wrote *THE HONORARY CONSUL*. The author buys an expensive meal on the train and argues for the right to also grab a copy of a newspaper. He sees a building window and a party and imagines that it is a reunion of friends. At the Gare de Lyon in Paris, the author's car links to the rest of the Direct-Orient Express.

Chap. 2- The author chats with a man named Molesworth about Indian trains being great, and both drink wine. The author thinks Duffill must be fleeing the police to go to Turkey for no apparent reason. The author looks for the dining car but cannot find it and learns it does not exist. Duffill is eating food he brought; in an Alps train tunnel the lights go out, upsetting him and the author. Duffill delays going back on the train at a stop near Milan because Molesworth has packages and waits for Molesworth to pass. The doors close in Duffill's face and he misses the train. The author and Molesworth discuss whether Duffill can catch up with the train, but Duffill is never seen by them again. At Trieste, Molesworth's tickets are noted to have been mistakenly all torn out by the last conductor. He has to buy a new ticket but arranges to be able to get his money back. The author describes more people including an Armenian woman whose son disrupts all of her conversations. Monique, a Belgian girl flirts with a doctor, who gets excited as he talks about cancer.

As the train moves out, the author looks out on a farm scene. The author is told by a policeman not to take pictures. Molesworth urges the author to sit back, drink and relax. The author and Molesworth find a stall at the Sofia Station selling sausages and buns, but the pushcart man refuses to accept Italian money and they cannot buy the food. They hurry to get back on the train, since they do not want to be left behind like Duffill. Other people on the train give the two men crackers and cheese. They reach Sirkeci Station of the European side of the Bosphorus and the author leaves the train. The author takes a ferry to Haydarpasa on the Asian side of Turkey, across the Bosphorus. The author gives a lecture and afterward meets a writer named Yashar Kemal, who says he is a Marxist, but he is critical of the Soviet Union. Yashar invites the author to his house. The author thinks how the styles in Turkey are stuck in the late 1930's. The men end up conversing in bits and pieces of English. Yashar's character has many

contradictions. Molesworth later comments to the author that the Turks were neutral during World War II and that may explain some of their character or lack of it.



Chapter 3 and 4, p. 44-65

Chapter 3 and 4, p. 44-65 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 3- An antique dealer tries to force the author to buy an old silk scroll. The author leaves and tries some pastries that he read about in a guidebook. He takes the ferry to Haydarpasa Station and buys food for the train but later discovers there is a dining car. Turkish Railways are run much better than the Direct Orient Express. The author talks in German to some Turks in his car. After some questions, he loses patience and retreats to his compartment. The first-class section is full of Turks. The rest of the train is a mix of Turks and hippies from the West that are heading to India and Nepal. The hippie girls are believed to be runaways. One American hippie man says that he escaped from his wife and kids. Outside, it is hot, flat and dusty. There are isolated huts and patches of irrigated fields.

The author is comfortable and consults his tourist guide, Nagel. He sees a town Kasper that goes back to the Roman Empire. Outside of a lovely mosque, there is little to see while riding past the town. A Turkish man stops in the author's compartment for a minute to escape his family and smoke a cigarette. At lunch, the author is joined by a sub-chief of the hippies. The young man is hot and oppressed. The author spends too much time in his hot car sleeping. At 10 pm they reach Lake Van. The new conductor is Iranian and the car goes over Lake Van on a ferry. After much protest, the author is put in a second class car with three grumbling Australians.

Chap. 4- The author finds the recurrent, huge photos of the Iranian Royal Family to be obnoxious. He realizes he has to bribe the conductor to get a comfortable compartment with only one other occupant. The author's cabin-mate is named Sadik, who is making money selling Turkish novelties in Europe. He also guides parties of Muslim pilgrims to the Holy City of Mecca. Now, he is heading to Australia to arrange to send skilled emigrants from Turkey to Australia. In Teheran there are strong religious restrictions that separate men from women. At this time there are a huge amount of foreigners in Teheran, especially American oilmen. The author takes the train northeast to the city of Meshed.



Chapter 5 and 6, pp. 66-80

Chapter 5 and 6, pp. 66-80 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 5- Most women are dressed in body length veils. There is no beer or alcohol for sale. The author is joined in the dining car by someone intent on looking at a woman in modern dress. This Englishman is an engineer who works in an isolated town and rarely sees women. The man studies Farsi in his spare time and is thinking of becoming a Muslim. The author hears the story of this man's desperate attempts to meet a woman but thinks that his attempts will be unsuccessful. Meshed appears with its mosques and is at the end of the line. His next stop is Afghanistan. There are no trains in Afghanistan and the author is with the two hippie boys in a kind of no-man's land hotel on the frontier. Afghanistan just had a military coup and is turning violent. A man shoots through the roof of the bus that the author is on to Herat. The author is stuck in Afghanistan for a week on his way to the Khyber Pass.

Chap. 6- The train at the Khyber Pass, Pakistan goes through a series of tunnels in the mountains to the town of Peshawar. It is full of tribal people and there are petty disputes over begging. The author speaks to Mr. Haq, who is a Pakistani lawyer who asks for advice on whether it is safe to go to Afghanistan to rescue a jailed nephew. Mr. Haq is afraid of what could happen to the boy but also what could happen to him if he goes to Kabul. Outside the train, there is dramatic mountain scenery. Finally, the train reaches the level, green town of Peshawar. The author likes the well-separated mansions and colonial architecture of Peshawar. He can buy beer and sees paintings of Buddha in the local museum. Starving beggars are around, and the author is offered illegal drugs. It is difficult to get his train ticket to Lahore.



Chapter 7 and 8, pp. 81-99

Chapter 7 and 8, pp. 81-99 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 7- The train to Lahore is very spacious and comfortable. The author meets a young Indian man who is fleeing London, due to its persistent racism. The young man does not have a first class ticket and is kicked out by the conductor. The city of Lahore brings to the author's mind the descriptions of the Anglo-Indian author, Rudyard Kipling. In Lahore, women are isolated and veiled, while men find erotic images on movie posters. It is Ramadan, the month of daytime fasting, and it is difficult to get food during the daytime. The author seeks out the nearby Punjab Club but gets lost and is rescued by a passing cab. The Club is deserted, and the author leaves with another cab rescuing him and bringing him back to the hotel. There various pimps solicit him, and he finally makes it to the hotel bar, the only one in town, and which has expensive beer.

Chap. 8- A short car ride takes the author to Amritsar, across the border in India. Amritsar is a holy city to the Sikhs, who have legends promoting military bravery. The author imagines the class structure of railroad seating to be similar to the Indian caste system. A Sikh train conductor gets the author on a train to Atari, a short distance away. The author rides in the steam locomotive but it is hot and dusty, and he has trouble seeing through his sunglasses. The train compartment to Delhi is pleasant and has a cold shower. The author shares his compartment with a German drug addict named Herman. The author reflects on Herman and the phenomenon of sick, doomed people who go to India to decay among the poor and forgotten people of India. The author sees the remarkable sight at the Old Delhi station of an entire Indian village assembled within a train station. The author plans to make lectures in various Indian cities in order to finance his trip. He also plans to take a train to Ceylon, though there is some doubt about whether this is possible. He overhears conversations of Americans, perhaps at the American Embassy, on their digestive troubles due to poor food and water in India.



Chapter 9 and 10, pp. 100- 123

Chapter 9 and 10, pp. 100- 123 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 9- The ticket line takes a long time, and finally American embassy officials end up getting the author a ticket as a visiting V.I.P. Elsewhere on the train, many Bengalis are traveling to a festival for the goddess of destruction, Kali. In the morning, the elderly Indian in the author's compartment shows the author that American Vice President Agnew has resigned on petty financial charges, on the same page that a Mr. Dikshit is featured. At the town of Kalka, the flat landscape suddenly changes into the beginning of mountains. The author changes to a narrow gauge train that goes up the hills to Simla. The author is served breakfast at Kalka Station and travels with a Simla civil servant, Mr. Bhardwaj. A large baboon leaves the track as the train approaches and the civil servant tells a story about a holy man, a sadhu, who could talk to monkeys. Mr. Bhardwaj comments on how he has not taken a bribe, and tells how he fired many clerks for taking bribes and other misdeeds.

The town of Simla has Victorian architecture and is the former summer capital of colonial British India. Mr. Bhardwaj is the Accountant General of the Punjab and invites the author to his office that is located in a castle. At the Simla Mall, Indian vacationers enjoy the scenery. The town of Simla is very Victorian and the British Empire style and includes a fancy Anglican cathedral. The author has tea with Mr. Bhardwaj, which turns out to be an elaborate vegetarian meal. He visits an ashram where the guru, Mr. Gupta, tries to recruit him. Mr. Gupta refers to miracles of reincarnation done by a holy man and to the Yogi, Paramahansa Yogananda, who went to America. The author visits Mr. Bhardwaj again and says farewell.

Chap. 10- The author next train companion is an irritable Indian, Mr. Radia, who does not like the author to drink alcohol. Outside of Delhi, the view is stunning as the countryside is flat and seemingly uninhabited. When the train stops at Mathura at night, there is a large encampment of a village at the station. The people there are from Kerala and going to a religious festival. Mathura is the town where Lord Krishna is said to be born, with scenes paralleling the story of the baby Jesus. The author talks to Mr. Radia, who used to work for an English Company, Shell, until he quit out of disgust. Now he works on a Japanese-Indian project, where he resents efforts of male Japanese managers to date Indian female workers. The train rides through the province of Gujarat, a rich agricultural area on the West coast of India. They pass a shantytown of people by the tracks and also a petrochemical plant. As the train approaches the metropolis of Bombay, the train makes several unscheduled short stops. It is people pulling the emergency cord to make the train stop near their homes. The author arrives at Bombay Central where there are large crowds, but most of the people are involved in working or traveling. The author hopes to see vultures eating corpses at the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence but is disappointed. The author gives a lecture and meets an Indian author who supports himself as a community organizer. There is a paper shortage in India, which is making things difficult in publishing.



Chapter 11 and 12, pp. 124-145

Chapter 11 and 12, pp. 124-145 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11- The author goes sightseeing in the princely city of Jaipur. Foolishly, he does not take his guidebook and gets little information from his tour guide. A temple has graffiti by a black pool of water with instructions on things not to do. The author gives a lecture in Jaipur and visits a museum, including an old astronomical observatory. The author arranges to get a ticket to Delhi. He can board a sleeper car that after midnight is hitched to the train going there. The author discusses his experiences in Jaipur with an Indian professor, who is not surprised by the ignorance of the guide. He says that most Indians know nothing of their history and religion. The author arrives in Delhi and prepares to take a train to Madras and the island of Ceylon.

Chapter 12- A train is boarded mostly by Tamils heading home to Madras. The men put on their traditional South Indian clothing and talk in Tamil and in English to the author. The author reads, enjoys the scenery of the forests and gets out for a stop in Nagpur, where he buys oranges, and beggars accost him. The train continues and it begins to rain. The train engine stops working and there are a series of delays, with a stop for several hours in the town of Sirpur.

The countryside is green and people are seen defecating by the train tracks. The Indian engineer in the author's compartment talks about his life. There is a legend told of both a yogi who lives on only air, and the partnership of a monkey and a blind tiger. In Madras, the author settles down and later takes a taxi to a beach on the Bay of Bengal. The taxi driver offers him an English girl prostitute, who turns out to not exist, though there are several child prostitutes that the author refuses. The author is driven through Madras to an isolated spot and thinks of escaping, but there is no danger; there is only a misunderstanding and the author's fantasy of an English prostitute stuck in Madras.



Chapter 13, 14 and 15, pp. 146- 164

Chapter 13, 14 and 15, pp. 146- 164 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 13- Further south, wild black children jump on the train to get water and jump off. The author is fed but is hot. Outside the window, he sees almost-naked people among irrigated fields. Next day a Buddhist monk stops by for water and is an American. The monsoon has not arrived here yet, and there is a water shortage. The train follows a track almost along the beach which is exciting. The end of the line is the town of Rameswaram, home of a large Indian temple and the so-called Tomb of Cain and Abel. The author next takes a three-hour ferry trip to Talaimannan on the Northern point of the island of Ceylon.

Chap. 14- It is raining at Talaimannan Station. The sleeper car is wooden, and the rice fields look like they are in bad shape. The Singhalese population is said to be lazy and there are reports of food shortages. The author meets an English language teacher, who claims he is being investigated for giving subversive messages in his lessons. The train stops at Kurungala and the author reads of increased veneration for St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. Children chew on raw cassava sticks and stray dogs fight over discarded peels. The train comes into the capital, Colombo, and people desperately try to pimp or sell things to the author.

Chap. 15- The seminar on American literature, where the author speaks, is well-attended due to the lavish meals offered between presentations. The books the author gets there end up stained with gravy. Nearby, men listen to a BBC broadcast and make horseracing bets. The author insinuates that laziness has allowed the food shortage to develop, and that the Tamils have been persecuted on Ceylon. On the train from Galle back to Colombo, people are constantly trying to beg something. A Chinese man does cosmetic dentistry and is doing well. Another man is smuggling jewelry into Ceylon and sneers at the "Grow More Food Campaigns" of Ceylon. People have little to eat on the train and little to read because of the paper shortage.



Chapter 16 and 17, pp. 165-187

Chapter 16 and 17, pp. 165-187 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 16- The author is back in India and going to Calcutta. The author meets a man of about 30 and they look at an Indian girl passing by. The young man admits he is running away from his Indian girlfriend. The girl is about 22, named Primila and the daughter of a business customer. Primila and her friend arrange for the young man to drive them to the movies and the young man ends up taking Primila to a bar in his hotel. Soon, she is up in his room to see a painting of his, and then has sex with her. Six months ago he had been told by a psalm reader that he would meet an Indian girl who would dance for him. He falls in love with Primila and then decides to revisit the psalmist who does not recognize him, so the young man runs away from the girl.

The train approaches Calcutta and vendors sell food and goods. At Howrah station, throngs of Biharis try to outdo the recent Kali festival. The author's guide is a Bengali named Mr. Chatterjee. Howrah Station is a huge building built by the British, and whole villages live inside the station. Rickshaws are essential transportation in the narrow alleyways of Calcutta. The author gives lectures and is overwhelmed by Calcutta. He quotes a long passage by Dickens about Old London. The author leaves Calcutta and India thinking of a man who he sees hopping on one leg, the other being missing.

Chap. 17- The author flies to Rangoon, Burma, with the aim to take the train north and over the Gokteik Viaduct, built under British rule. The author gets a ticket to Mandalay for the next early morning for a 9-hour ride. The author walks through Rangoon and is accosted by beggars, then makes his train. Rangoon Station is cleaner than the last time the author had been there in 1970. There are fences for security after a bombing. Soon, the author is on the train, which is moving, and he admires the people and the rice fields. A whistle blows and people open their lunch boxes. The author pokes fun at the Buddhist Burmese who refuse to kill pesky animals. They encounter delays of a socialist bureaucracy; the Buddhist has the ability to endure the delays. The train breaks down and then there is live music and a little girl does a graceful dance. The author tells the stationmaster that he intends to go to Maymo and over the Gokteik Viaduct but is told that to go to the Gokteik is forbidden.



Chapter 18 and 19, pp. 188-206

Chapter 18 and 19, pp. 188-206 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 18- The author is on the train to Maymo and there are many stops. At a stop, a Burmese man buys some burnt small birds and rice for the author to eat, but the author ends up eating only the rice. This Burmese man is named Mr. Bernard, and is an 80-year-old Catholic. The man did manual labor on the railroad and then was a cook for the British Army for a long time. He liked this job until it was disrupted by the Japanese occupation. The man is still in charge of large governmental dinners that take place from time to time in Mandalay. Mr. Bernard urges the author to stay the night at his hotel, named the Candacraig, which is an old British mansion. The author talks to a radio operator named Tony, who is sympathetic to the author's wish to get to the Gokteik Viaduct. Around the station there are no automobiles and the author hires a horse-drawn stagecoach. Maymo is an old British colonial outpost that used to serve as Burma's summer capital. After a three-mile ride, the author checks into Candacraig. He's the only guest at the mansion. Mr. Bernard lights a warm fire for him and serves him a meal.

Chap. 19- The author meets Tony and buys his ticket to Naung-Peng, the station after the Gokteik Viaduct bridge. There are Burmese soldiers on the train, and Tony puts in a good word to them for the author. The train goes off in the rain and stops at a country station. There, soldiers tell the author to sit down and they take down his personal information. The author suspects that the train is stopped because of him and is afraid of being arrested. Instead, he is approached by Security Officer U Sit Aye and the two men get on another train. The train passes waterfalls and goes up high, then passes the Gokteik Viaduct over a deep gorge. The Viaduct is invisible in the mist, but then the sun comes through and he sees it. The train descends, going through a series of tunnels. At Naung-Peng Station there is a hut that has fires for warmth and serves a Burmese stew with rice on large leaves. The author returns on the next train back to Maymo, and the train is provided with food at stations. The author is allowed to go on his travel but is told not to go back on the train to Gokteik.



Chapter 20 and 21, pp. 207-223

Chapter 20 and 21, pp. 207-223 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 20- The author flies to Bangkok, Thailand and then takes a train north to Nong Khai, then crosses the river to Vientiane, Laos. The bars and brothels in Vientiane are known for their sexual offerings. The women who serve beer in bars are often naked and will have sex with foreign men on the spot. The author returns to Nong Khai Station and takes the train going south all the way to Singapore. The author loves the wooden sleeper cars, with their wide berths and Thai style shower jars in the bathroom, which he relates to the Thai national character. The author meets an American salesman, who tells of being at the White Rose bar in Vientiane and being solicited by a woman who is dressed. The man goes upstairs with her, and the girl turns out to be a guy.

Chap. 21- Bangkok continues as a sex tourism center. At night, the train leaves Bangkok station and soon is in the quiet countryside. The author meets an odd Thai man in the corridor named Mr. Pensacola, who is secretive but talks vaguely about making money and meeting American officials. The man has two guns. The author talks to his compartment-mate, Mr. Thanoo, who also speaks and reads English and is well-educated. The train makes it to Hua Hin station in the monsoon season. A Taiwanese team of girl acrobats performs and amuses the passengers while the train is stopped. The author talks to Mr. Lau, who is a Chinese man who is a citizen of Malaysia. Mr. Lau complains that as a Chinese, he suffers discrimination. The train is hot, and the author goes into a trance. He wakes up at Butterworth Station in Malaysia and must leave the train.



Chapter 22 and 23, pp. 224-240

Chapter 22 and 23, pp. 224-240 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 22- The author enjoys riding on the wooden balcony between train cars. He avoids the Malay soldiers who are drunk and singing, showing their dominance over the wealthier Chinese minority. At the Ipoh Station, the author imagines there are dark secrets concealed at the Victorian hotel of adulteries and affairs. The train moves on and the author talks to two Bangladeshis who have just taken part in a family planning conference in Singapore. The author contends with them that they are somewhat hypocritical in that they both have many children. That night the train makes it to Kuala Lumpur Station, which is a large and ornate station built in the shape of a mosque.

Chap. 23- The author talks to a police inspector named Cedric, some English planters, and Chinese and Indians who are drunk in the train lounge. Cedric is deployed to keep Tamil rubber-laborers in order, and men can be sentenced to being whipped. Cedric leaves, and the planters talk about an old friend named Hensch, who is believed dead or gone to Australia. The bartender, named Peeraswamy, tells the author about a Singapore Tamil religious festival. Peeraswamy was singing and going into a religious rapture and then was stuck with metal pins. He then reports that he collapsed in the Tamil temple.

The train passes the border of Singapore, where Singaporean authorities are quite strict and make sure that the author has adequate money. The author lived there when he was able to leave teaching and get his work published. He resents Singapore's censorship, anti-labor laws and strict state control. People are fined for allowing mosquitoes to breed, which actually makes some sense, because these the mosquitoes could spread disease. On the fringe, there is a bohemian and student community that laughs at the Singaporean laws. The author cannot believe he stayed in Singapore for three years.



Chapter 24 and 25, pp. 241-267

Chapter 24 and 25, pp. 241-267 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 24- The author goes to Vietnam to ride parts of the old French-built Trans-Vietnam Railroad. It is December 1973, and the Saigon government is keeping parts of the railroad running. The author stays with an American host and his wife, code-named Cobra I and II, who live in a villa set among trees and gardens. While the ceasefire is not holding and the war goes on, a commission is trying to attract tourism to South Vietnam. Posters are displayed with pretty girls by beaches. Mr. Chau, the Director tries to get the author to not take the train, since it is a wreck, but the author goes and finds the Saigon Station. There are lovers and drug addicts that occupy the abandoned train cars. The author is directed by the station master to an old wooden carriage from French times that is comfortable. The author sees this as an example of the South Vietnamese need to give V.I.P.s like himself a good impression. The station master imagines that if the Vietcong are kicked out of the border town of Loc Ninh, he can one day connect his line to trains traveling all the way to Turkey. People live almost on the track, and the author sees from his window into people's huts. In Bien Hoa, there are fabricated houses, but they have no sewers except for an open ditch. The author gives a lecture at the University of Saigon. He goes with Cobra I to see some night club entertainment. In the Mekong Delta, the author sees a former American base that has been largely looted and destroyed.

Chap. 25- The author flies to the northern city of Hue, the former imperial capital, to ride the 75-mile line to Danang. There is obvious war damage to houses in Hue, and it is cold and damp in December. The author lectures at the University of Hue, where across the river is Vietcong-occupied territory that is shelled by ARVN patrol boats. At Hue Station, the author is again in the nice car of the director. The author thinks of the abandoned children living in the remains of American bunkers. American road traffic is gone and for 4 months the South Vietnamese have run the Hue to Danang line, though it is vulnerable to attack. In Danang the weather becomes clear and warm, and from the train the author and Cobra I and II view the beautiful mountains, beaches and sea, and sites of battles. The author walks through the train cars and sees ARVN soldiers and the wounded. Old ladies offer him half-American children. The author feels odd that the U.S. has so quickly exited South Vietnam. The Vietcong control large sections of the countryside.

There are huge areas near Danang that housed American GIs that are now packed with refugees and stink from sewage. The author hears stories of American hospitals abandoned and looted by South Vietnamese officials. Cobra I, along with the author decides to stop by a seaside beach house. It is occupied by three American drunk men, surrounded by Vietnamese women, the local security and CIA heads. The CIA man warns about Vietcong activity after sundown. The author stays at Marble Mountain, and meets Col Tuan, who is also a writer. Many works in South Vietnam, are censored and writers instead tend to translate American and English classics. The author flies south

again and attempts to take another train, but a major oil depot is blown up by the Vietcong and there is fuel rationing. The author goes back to Saigon and flies to Japan.



Chapter 26 and 27, pp. 268-288

Chapter 26 and 27, pp. 268-288 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 26- It is December and in Japan it is cold after three months of traveling in the tropics. The author prepares to go to Hokkaido, the Northern Japanese Island and then Siberia and must buy winter clothes. Prices are expensive and the author spends his first Japan lecture fee on winter clothing. In the dark streets of Tokyo, people are drunk and celebrating their December bonuses. Before the author takes the train north, he has time for an evening of entertainment. He goes to a music hall that begins with a topless line of Japanese dancing women. Then there is a more sadistic turn in the presentation called "Oil-Kill." Two nude women fight to the death on a film and two more in person on the stage. Next there is a film of a man and a woman that ends in a murder and a similar stage show of two women. A woman then commits suicide while a man reads a poem. The author is amazed that Japanese couples leave the theater so calm and dignified.

The train takes the author to Aomori by early morning, where he takes a ferry to Hokkaido. Vacationers go north to ski, along with the Eskimo-like natives of Hokkaido. A warning chime sounds before stops, which are all for less than one minute.

The author misses the slower but more entertaining ride of the Indian trains. He feels like he is on an airplane on the fast bullet trains. He reads the translation of the horror stories of Edogawa Rampo. The tales of madness and perversion disturb the author until he stops reading. He is sitting next to a Japanese girl who is reading a comic book. When she goes to the toilet, the author sees pictures of violence and also fart jokes. The train arrives at Aomori and within 15 minutes the passenger are all on the ferry and it is going to Hokkaido. There is a blizzard and the 4-hour trip is rough. When the author arrives, he knows he only has 15 minutes to be on the train to Sapporo.

Chap. 27- The author gets into a conversation with Chester, a teacher of English from L.A. working in Japan. Chester cannot believe the author is writing about his trip, saying that everyone travels. The author tries to describe what might make his book interesting, but Chester leaves. The train follows the coast and then heads inland to Sapporo. There's lots of snow but few skiers out, since it is not the official ski season yet. The consulate driver, Mr. Watanabe drives the author around, but Sapporo is too new a town to have much historical interest.

The author decides that he want to go to Jozankei, a hot spring resort. He and the driver go there, but it is too expensive. He walks around in the snow acting strange and then goes to a restaurant to warm up. Then the driver takes the author to see a statue of Dr. Clarke, who is an American agricultural professor who helped set up an Agriculture College in Sapporo in the late 19th century. His motto to his students was "Boys be ambitious." The author gives a lecture in Sapporo which is slightly upsetting to the audience. He asks a young woman if she would like to have a drink with him, but it is

not the right time. This brings to mind the story of an American mother who has an intimate dinner with a Japanese mother and Japanese kindergarten teacher. After dinner, the Japanese mother brings out a scroll with a pornographic scene. A monk rapes a geisha, and then the geisha ends up demanding more sex from the tired monk. The moral of the story is that the author is showing that all activities of the Japanese culture require a certain sense of place and decorum.



Chapter 28, and 29, pp. 289-303

Chapter 28, and 29, pp. 289-303 Summary and Analysis

Chap. 28- At Tokyo Central station, a crowd of Japanese businessmen send off an important man. The author talks to a Japanese Literature Professor who teaches a 2-year course on Henry James' book "the Golden Bowl." They are riding the Super Express to Kyoto, in the middle of an endless suburban area. Professor Toyama teaches in Kyoto. The men discuss Japanese strip shows and the author complains they are too bloody.

The Professor is quite interested in the author's journey through the railroads of Asia. The Professor tells of sailing from London to Japan and being deprived of women. Even in Penang, the Professor and his friends, then students, had an argument and could not get a prostitute. The author has at least seen a few prostitutes in his travels as well. The author rather likes Kyoto, the mild weather and the relaxed bars. The author gives his talk in Kyoto and describes with Professors, subjects such as Japanese humor and Western eroticism. The men discuss the suicide of Yukio Mishima and his various books on subjects like reincarnation. The author meets an old teacher of his from Amherst, Massachusetts. They enjoy the temple and crowds on the top of Mount Hiei.

Chap. 29- The author takes a very brief train ride to Osaka from Tokyo. He checks into his hotel but cancels his plan to go to a puppet show. In part, he is afraid of the polluted Osaka area, with people walking around wearing gas masks. The author gets drunk and then is called to give a lecture at the Cultural Center. The author asks the writers there about the recurrent stories where elderly Japanese become sexual voyeurs. Later, the author goes into a bar and is abused in a sort of friendly way by drunken Japanese men. One even kisses him, and then the author leaves. On the way back to Tokyo there is a train delay that is caused by a computer malfunction. The author goes to an office to ask questions about what happened to the train, but is interrupted by an announcement for the beginning of an office exercise session.



Chapter 30, part 1, 2 and 3

Chapter 30, part 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

Chap, 30, Part 1- The author takes the ship, M.V. Khabarosk to Nakhoda in Siberia and has a cabin with two Australians and a young Swede. The author meets Nikola, a Yugoslav who speaks English and Russian and translates the bartender's Russian for the author. Nikola is pro-communist and has no sympathy for Djilas, a persecuted Yugoslav author. The Sea of Japan is rough and many of the passengers become seasick. The author recovers over night and hears war stories from a Russian seaman; by evening the ship reaches the port of Nakhoda.

Part 2- The author pays extra for a compartment in "soft class." After a wait in the sub-zero cold, the passengers get on board the train, the Vostok. The author is amazed that his compartment is large and comfortable, with rugs, mirrors and goose down pillows, to start his journey to Moscow. Dinner is not very good but is washed down by vodka. The author again talks to the American couple, who are celebrating the husband's finishing of medical school. The author makes some abrasive remarks about expensive doctors and the man becomes insulted. The author realizes that he is drunk. When the author wakes the sun has barely risen. Outside the author sees farmers heavily bundled. The train makes some quick stops and heads for the city of Khabarovsk, on the Soviet-Chinese border.

Khabarovsk is the site of a bridge that completed the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Many passengers get off here to fly to Moscow. The author gets out and searches the stores for tobacco. He eventually finds some in the 35-degrees-below-zero weather. The author and Jeff, one of the Australians, stop in a restaurant and sit with two college girls. One girl is studying pre-Soviet literature. Even the Intourist lady guide wishes she was working for Intourist in sunny Italy. In the evening, the author visits the hotel restaurant but must leave when soldiers there start to fight.

Part 3- The author rides on the Rossiya, a brand new train. Even in soft-class, the author is somewhat uncomfortable, with the coal-fired heater that always must be stoked. A young man named Vladimir joins the author in the author's sleeping compartment. Vladimir starts to teach the author to speak Russian, using pictures and phonetic writing. Outside it is cold and dark in December, while the author plays chess with Vladimir and drinks wine. The train passes Lake Baikal, and Vladimir leaves at Irkutsk. After he leaves, the author sees that Vladimir took his cigars. Outside is the true Siberian tundra and thick taiga forests. The author spends the next day drunk on vodka, like most of the Russians. At Novosibirsk, the author does not get off because he wants to be in London by New Year's Day, and it is already December 23rd. The author plans to wash up, write a short story and not drink alcohol until the evening. At this point, the author is disturbed by a silent new passenger who takes the opposite sleeping berth. The author becomes enraged by the man's quiet presence and abandons his attempts



at reading and writing. The man follows the train's progress on a map, and it seems to the author that the man is following him.

The author spends a lot of time in the dining car. Vassily, the manager lets the author in after the dining room closes, because the author bribes him and they share bottles of wine. A waiter named Victor jokingly calls a man mopping the floor, Gitler, after Adolf Hitler. At one point, the so-called Gitler starts ranting about Angela Davis as someone who is persecuted. On Christmas eve, the dining car is closed by Vassily, who lets the author in after being bribed. The two drunk men sing obscene ditties in various languages. On Christmas the train crosses a bridge over the Volga River. A radio plays a BBC program of children singing Christmas music. Vassily lets the author into the dining car when they are close to Moscow. He makes the author an omelet but then ends up beating a woman who wants some bread. The author leaves, preparing to arrive in Moscow. The author virtually ignores the remainder of his trip across Europe. The author thinks what his book would have been like if instead of a travel book he had written a work of fiction about his adventures.



Characters

The Author, Paul Theroux

The author is married, in his early 30s and a father. He leaves his family in London for a 4-month trip by train through Europe and Asia and back on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The author uses these long train trips to talk to people and become familiar with cultures as well as places. He is a congenial character who easily gets into conversations with people. At the same time, the author realizes that in a travel book, his observations of the scenery and places are just as important as his discussions with people.

The author keenly describes the scenery from the English countryside to the endless plains of Turkey and the foothills of the Himalayas in India. He seldom seems afraid of the situations he gets put into and is willing to take a chance going to the Gokteik Viaduct, a forbidden area in Burma. The author drinks a lot to be sociable but under stress he can end up drinking constantly as during his trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. He has an interest in the women he meets, including in the bars that cater to diverse sexual tastes in Bangkok and Vientiane, but as a married man, is careful not to admit to any illicit activity. Towards the end of the trip, in Japan and especially Russia, the author seems to become exhausted and less able to deal with his situation. This is partially a bad reaction to the Japanese fast trains, and his difficulties in communicating in the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian.

Mr. Sadik

Sadik is a Turkish Entrepreneur who shares the author's sleeper compartment on the train from Istanbul to Teheran, Iran. He is traveling to Australia, in a new business scheme to bring skilled Turkish workers to Australia. It seems a bit dubious for him to be a successful entrepreneur and taking the slow cheap route instead of flying.

Sadik is involved in a string of import-export businesses. He has been importing Turkish handicrafts into France and has figured at a scheme in which his customers end up paying the import duty. For a while he was bringing Turkish tourists into various cities of Eastern and Western Europe but he tired of this business Later he tells of bringing Turkish Muslims to the holy city of Mecca. His English is good enough for him to describe to the author some of his sexual adventures and misadventures. Sadik claims to have picked up a blond women at a bar and after having drunken sex with her, discovering the next day that she was really a man. These stories are told to the author and take up much of the description of the author's trip through Turkey.

The English Engineer on the Train to Meshed

The English bachelor, who is an engineer, meets the author in the dining car on the train to Meshed. The engineer complains that he was supposed to meet a female secretary



in Iran, but she never arrives. The man likes to meet and look at women but refuses to go to brothels. The engineer now works in an isolated towns in the mountains of northeast Iran. He comes into Teheran, the capital only once every four or five months, so his chances of meeting a Western or liberated Iranian woman are nearly zero. The engineer tells the author of pursuing women on his leave in England, but has no luck. He meets a nice secretary but is frightened away by a call from the girl's ex-boyfriend. Now, he is thinking of becoming a Muslim in order to marry a Persian Muslim girl. The author does not think the man will be successful. The engineer may succeed in becoming a Muslim and integrating himself with his host society, but his chances of getting married are virtually nonexistent.

The Tamil Driver in Madras

The Tamil cabdriver in Madras tempts the author with the reputed availability of an English prostitute. The author agrees to go, intrigued that an English girl would be a prostitute in Madras. The cabdriver drives the author to beaches south of Madras and then to a whorehouse, but the only girls there are Indian minors.

Mr. Duffill

Mr. Duffill is an older man who is on the Direct Orient Express train to Istanbul. Somewhere near Milan, Italy, Duffill fails to get back onto the train on time at a stop, and the train leaves without him. Thereafter, the author refers to being left off of a train as "being Duffilled."

Mr. Molesworth

Molesworth is an Englishman in his 50s that is a drinking friend of the author on the Direct Orient Express train from London to Istanbul, Turkey. He is in his 50s and a former Indian Army man.

The Chinese Dentist on the Train in Ceylon

The author meets a Chinese dentist on the train to Colombo, Ceylon, who actually does not speak Chinese. The dentist is born in Ceylon, married to a Singhalese woman and has a child with her. He actually does not repair teeth, but makes cosmetic false teeth for people whose teeth fall out. The man has an excellent business, but unfortunately the cosmetic teeth cannot be used for eating.

The Young Man on the Howrah Mail Train

The young man on the Howrah mail train is about 30 years old, from England with long hair. He unexpectedly gets in a relationship with an Indian girlfriend from Bangalore, but



is now fleeing her. The salesman claims he is fleeing the girl because the palm reader who predicted the romance, on the man's the second trip to the palm reader does not recognize the salesman and gives irrelevant advice.

Mr. Bernard

Mr. Bernard is a Catholic Burmese man of about 80 years old. He has been in food service for many years and now runs a 20-room mansion that is a former hotel for British officers. The author meets Mr. Bernard on the train to Maymyo.

Tony, the Eurasian

Tony is an man of mixed Burmese and European descent, who is a native English speaker. Tony is the Morse code operator at the ticket office in Maymyo, Burma. He is happy to speak English with the author and helps arrange for the author to get on the train to Lashio and go over the Gokteik Viaduct.

U Sit Aye, the Burmese Security Officer

U Sit Aye is a Burmese security officer who goes to sit with the author after the train to Lashio is stopped. Aye has the author and himself go on another train, which goes over the Gokteik Viaduct. Aye is very polite with the author, and contrary to the author's fears, does not arrest him when they return to Maymyo.

Tiger, the American Salesman

Tiger is an American salesman that the author meets on the train from Nong Khai, Thailand. Tiger is a salesman who has been in Thailand for 5 years, and has a military crew-cut. Tiger tells his story of going to the White Rose Bar in Vientiane, Laos, and paying a woman to have sex with him. The woman turns out to be a male transvestite, but still Tiger is somehow attracted to him/her and thinking of going back to the White Rose Bar.

Mr. Pensacola

Mr. Pensacola is a mysterious Thai man whom the author meets on the train to Butterworth, Malaysia. He is about 40 years old and tells a story of killing drug dealers and being rescued by American forces. He shows the author his guns and is some type of intelligence agent.



Mr. Lau

Mr. Lau is a Chinese man that the author meets on the Butterworth Train. Mr. Lau complains of being treated as a second-class citizen because he is in the Chinese minority in Malaysia. He is a civil servant and also involved in the sale of fluorescent light bulbs and neon signs.

Mr. Cedric

Mr. Cedric is a Malaysian police inspector who ethnically is a Tamil Indian and a Christian. He describes himself as a roughneck who takes part in controlling Malaysian rubber worker unrest in Kluang. Cedric and some of the drunk men in the dining car debate the necessity for corporal punishment, using the cane or "rotan" on jailed criminals.

Cobra I and Cobra II

Cobra I and his wife Cobra II are the American hosts of the author in South Vietnam. They have a large house in Saigon surrounded by trees and flowers. Cobra I accompanies the author to most of the spots of his South Vietnam train trip, including to Danang. There, Cobra I has the author visit a beach house that is now the home of some drunk U.S. Intelligence Agents.

Mr Vo Doan Chau, Director of the Commission on Vietnam Touris

Voi Doan Chau is the Director of the Commission on Vietnam Tourism. His office is launching an elaborate campaign to lure tourists to South Vietnam from the United States and Japan. Mr. Chau and Mr. Ngoc insist that they are sending the author and other tourists only to non-combat areas. Mr. Chau warns the author before he leaves not to take the Saigon to Bien Hoa train because it is "the worst train in the world."

Mr. Watanabe

Mr. Watanabe is the U.S. Consulate driver in Sapporo and takes the author on a tour of the city. They try to drive through the street, but the tour is canceled by the heavy snowfall hitting the town. They manage to visit a health spa, but the author finds it too expensive. Mr. Watanabe also shows the author the statue of Dr. Willam S. Clark, a founder of Sapporo Agricultural College.



Professor Toyama

The author meets Professor Toyama on the train to Kyoto. Prof. Toyama is giving an in-depth course on the Henry James novel "The Golden Bowl." The author discusses the famous strip shows of Japan and what authors, for example Saul Bellow, have gone to them. Toyama also tells of traveling as a youth by ship from London to Japan. He complains that even at a stop at Penang, he and his student friends got into an argument at a brothel and could not get a girl.

Nikola, the Yugoslav

Nikola is a former Yugoslav ship captain that the author meets on the ship M.V. Khabarovsk that goes to Nakhoda in Siberia. Nikola is divorced and likes to flirt with women. He has no sympathy with the Yugoslav dissident Djilas.

Vladimir

Vladimir is a young bearded man on the Trans-Siberian Railroad who draws sketches of telephone polls and of London, though he has never been out of the Soviet Union. He gets on the train and gets a berth in the author's compartment in Siberia. Vladimir speaks no English but using pictures he teaches the author some Russian phrases. The two men play tic-tac-toe and chess; when Vladimir leaves in Irkutsk he also steals the author's cigars.

Vassily, the Manager of the Dining Car

Vassily, is about 55 years old and the manager of the dining car in the final leg of the Trans-Siberian Railroad trip. The author wins Vassily's friendship with repeated bribes to get wine and vodka and sharing them with Vassily. Vassily shows his brutal side when he beats up a woman passenger who asks to get some bread in the hours before the train arrives in Moscow. The author had bribed Vassily to get a meal, but this woman simply demanded some food.



Objects/Places

Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul, Turkey is the classic city of East meeting West, half in Europe and half in Asia where the author lectures there. He admires the two main railway stations there, particularly the bazaar nearby Sirkeci Station on the European side of the city.

Lake Van, Van Golu

Lake Van is a large lake in Eastern Turkey. The train cars are loaded on a ferry that crosses the lake to the line to Iran. Though this is still in Turkey, on the Eastern side of the lake, an Iranian conductor takes over.

Teheran, Iran

Teheran, Iran, the Iranian capital at this time is an oil boom town with thousands of Western oil men and contractors there. Modernity conflicts with Muslim religious tradition. Businessmen and Westerners flock to strip clubs to see women without veils.

Meshed, Iran

Meshed, Iran is the terminal city of the train line traveling north-east from Teheran towards the Afghanistan border. It is an Iranian holy city and most of the women on the train are in veils, while the men pray often.

The Khyber Pass, the Khyber Pass Railroad

The Khyber pass is the route from the border of Afghanistan to Peshawar Pakistan. There is a train that goes through the mountains, using an intricate network of bridges and tunnels. Tribesmen take this train to the market in Peshawar.

Lahore, Pakistan and Amritsar, India

Lahore, Pakistan is the city that Rudyard Kipling writes about, with its bazaar and fort. It is just across the border from Amritsar, India, a Sikh holy city.



Simla, India

Simla, India is the old British colonial summer capital. It is high in the foothills of the Himalayas and cool. There is a Gothic Church there, Gorton Castle and other large British colonial buildings and gardens.

The Grand Trunk Line

The Grand Trunk Line in India goes from Delhi, all the way south to Madras, which is a trip of about 1,400 miles. The author describes the train as a "Tamil train," with most passengers being the darker Tamil people of South India.

Galle, Ceylon, the Seminar on American Literature

Galle, Ceylon is the site of a hotel where a seminar on American Literature takes place, and is addressed by the author. The three-day affair is sponsored by the American Embassy. Its most outstanding feature are the big meals served in a chronically food-short nation.

Calcutta, India

Calcutta is the large city on the coast in North-east India. The city is full of religious festivals and socialist demonstrations. The author is overwhelmed by the throngs of poor people and quotes passages of Charles Dickens on the poor in 19th Century London.

The Shrine to St. Jude, Colombo, Ceylon

The Shrine to St. Jude is in Colombo, Ceylon. St. Jude is the patron saint of lost causes, and it is implied that the author and many people feel that living in Ceylon has become a lost cause. Though St. Jude is a Catholic saint, the shrine is popular with people of all faiths in Ceylon.

The Gokteik Viaduct, Burma

The Gokteik Viaduct is a large series of bridges over a deep gorge in Northern Burma. It was built in the 1920s under British rule, as part of a possible connecting line to Southern China. It is now in an area forbidden to tourists. The author seeks to go there despite difficulties.



Candacraig, Maymyo, Burma

Candacraig is a 20-room British colonial mansion that is now a hotel run by Mr. Bernard in Maymyo, Burma. Maymyo is the last stop that tourists are allowed to go to in Northern Burma. Maymyo has no autos that the author sees, and transportation is limited to horse-drawn carriages.

The White Rose Bar, Vientiane, Laos

The White Rose bar is in Vientiane, Laos, across the river from Nong Khai, Thailand. In the White Rose, most of the waitresses are totally naked and sexual services abound. Tiger, a salesman that the author meets, claims that he solicited a woman there in a blouse and slacks, who turns out to be a transvestite.

Singapore, the City-State of Singapore

Singapore is a sovereign nation and city-state at the southern tip of the Malaysian peninsula. It is the last stop on a 1,400 mile train run from Northern Thailand. The author characterizes Singapore as a police-state with a controlled media. This is also a place where the author lived with his wife for three years, taught and had his first child.

Saigon, to Bien Hoa, South Vietnam

Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, is the location of Van Hanh University, where the author lectures. He also visits a nightclub here and the South Vietnamese tourist bureau. He takes a train from Saigon to Bien Hoa. Parts of Bien Hoa were an American base that has been abandoned and turned into a refugee camp.

The Beach House in Danang, South Vietnam

The beach house in Danang, South Vietnam is the former home of an American General. Now it is occupied by two American Intelligence officials, some of their friends and a bunch of Vietnamese girls. All the men are drunk.

Nichigeki Music Hall, Tokyo, Japan

The Nichigeki Music Hall is in Tokyo Japan and a place where the author thought he could get some mild amusement. Instead the show is opened by a topless female chorus line and quickly descends into violent and sado-masochistic pornography.



Japanese Super Express Train

The Japanese Super Express train travels over 300 miles in less than three hours. The author rides the line from Tokyo to Kyoto. He describes the area in between the two cities as an unending suburban area. The author complains that the train stops are too brief, all from 15 seconds to a maximum of one minute.

The Nobori-sen

The Nobori-sen, or in Japanese, the rustics are Eskimo-faced people who are the native inhabitants of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

The Statue of William S. Clark

The statue of William S. Clark is in Sapporo and commemorates the American founder of Sapporo Agricultural College, in 1876. William Clarke was from the Agricultural College in Amherst, Massachusetts. His motto for the Japanese is "be ambitious boys" in terms of good deeds to accomplish for people and the nation.

Nakhoda, Siberia, Soviet Union

Nakhoda is a Pacific port of the Soviet Union, and the author's entry port into Siberia. It is the beginning of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The adjacent port of Vladivostok is off-limits to tourists.

The Bridge at Khabarovsk, Khabarovsk, Siberia, Soviet Union

The bridge at Khabarovsk in Siberia was built in 1916, and marked the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Khabarovsk is seen by the author in December and is frozen in temperatures of around 35 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. The author tours the stores and factories of Khabarovsk but must leave a restaurant, after soldiers get into a drunken bar fight.

The Bridge at Yaroslavl, over the Volga River

The Bridge at Yaroslavl crosses the large Russian river, the Volga. This marks the train reaching the area close to Moscow, and at this point the passengers of the Trans-Siberian Railroad begin to pack to leave the train.



Themes

The Joys of Railroad Travel

From the beginning of the book, the author expresses the great joy he has in riding railroad trains. The strongest impression one gets from reading the book is the author's fascination with meeting people on the train. Paradoxically, the slow and broken down trains as in Southern India and Ceylon, and in South Vietnam, are the most fascinating trains to the author. He enjoys watching the scenery from the train, and already in France, after crossing the Channel, he is imagining the lives of people that he passes. The author gives close attention to the railroad stations at which he stops. Train stations in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia are made interesting by the people there and the food that is offered for sale. Other stations are imposing landmarks by themselves. This includes the large station on the Asian side of the Bosphorus in Istanbul Turkey. The train stations in Bombay and Calcutta are imposing solid British Victorian period buildings, where whole villages live temporarily. The station in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia is built in the form of a huge mosque.

The author gets into an uncertain quest when he seeks to cross the Gokteik Viaduct in Northern Burma. At first the author has doubts that he will be allowed to travel over the Gokteik Viaduct or whether it is still in service. Likewise, the tunnels and topography of the Khyber Pass railroad and the vastness of the Trans-Siberian Railroad show different aspects of the marvel of railroad lines.

People and Stories of the Trip

The author establishes quick friendships with people he meets, starting with Mr. Molesworth and the unfortunate Mr. Duffill, who misses getting back on the train in Italy. One of the things that give these friendships so much intimacy is that the author and the other mostly men he meets know they are not likely to see each other again. The author is very interested in people, which is increased by alcohol that loosens inhibitions. The reader gets to learn details of the life of the Turkish entrepreneur Sadik, including his funny sex adventures. In fact, the bits and pieces of sexual gossip are brought in by often Englishmen in their 30s, who are tempted by the local women. There is the story of the young man who almost marries an Indian girl, until the second reading of a palm reader is uninspiring. Another Englishman vainly plots to get a Persian wife by becoming a Muslim. In India, Pakistan, Laos and Thailand, the author is often harassed by pimps offering sexual opportunities, which he seems to not take.

Other men the author meets are more serious, like Mr. Bernard, the old hotel keeper in Burma and the official in Simla, Mr. Bhardwaj. The author tries to discuss with various Japanese academics the Japanese attraction to sado-masochism. Finally, the author goes through largely unintelligible acquaintances on the Trans-Siberian Railroad with



Vladimir, who teaches the author some Russian and the bribed dining car manager, Vassily.

Learning about Different Cultures

While meeting people, the author learns about the cultures of the nations through which he passes. Some of things he finds out are obvious; others are more subtle. The train travels in Western and Eastern Europe has inferior service and no dining car, as if this means of travel is now considered obsolete. Train travel is excellent in Turkey and Iran, though the author is somewhat shocked as he leaves secular Turkey, and more and more women wear veils. In Pakistan and Iran, many women are veiled and men engage in a weird sort of staring at women on billboards and in strip clubs. In India, the author finds that whole villages are living in large train stations in Delhi and Calcutta. Sometimes the people have moved there permanently; in other cases the villagers are traveling to a temple for a religious festival. In Ceylon, even Indian travelers laugh at the dramatic government campaigns to raise food production.

In Burma, the author is overwhelmed by the twin practices of socialism and Buddhism, though he still finds a friend, Mr. Bernard to help make his stay pleasant. Perhaps not coincidentally, Mr. Bernard is a Catholic. In Malaysia, the author listens to stories of police control of labor unrest in the rubber plantations. In war-torn South Vietnam, the author marvels at the enduring French influence and the quickly evaporating influence of the United States. Japan is a bit of a challenge to the author, with its quick-witted professors and fast trains. He tends to look at the dirty underside of Japanese culture. In Russia, the author sees as typical, the hot borscht soup bowl and wine and vodka, along with the drunken brawl. He goes through the harsh Siberian winter trip with non-English speaking Russians, who sometimes quote the poet Pushkin.



Style

Perspective

Mr. Paul Theroux, the author, has the perspective of a traveler looking to meet new people and see new places. The report of the author's travels is largely told in the first person but is interrupted by many anecdotes that the author reports as told in the first person by another person. The author is an American in his 30s who is married with children, and living in London, UK. He has taken out four months to travel, take down his impressions and write a book. In the course of his travels, the author makes stops in many cities where he delivers lectures to help pay for his travels. He does this in cooperation with the local U.S. Embassy and Consulates. Though some of the author's opinions are intriguing, they are from the perspective of an author who maintains the favor of the establishment. Although the author reports on various sexual offers he receives from pimps and prostitutes, he never admits to sampling these forbidden activities. He may have done something but would not want his wife to know. Toward the end of his trip, the author seems to be exhausted and irritable, drinking heavily in Japan and especially in the Soviet Union. The last is understandable, since the Russians he encounters are drinking, too. In general, the author tries to blend in with his surroundings, for example being a vegetarian when that is popular on the trains in India. He does his best to mix in and be comfortable with the local people wherever he goes.

Tone

The tone of the author is rather cynical. He manages to find fault or make jokes about almost all situations and people. The Japanese railroads are faulted as being too fast, clean and efficient. At this point, the author longs for the slow sleeper car he took in Madras and beyond, India. These same railroads are criticized for being noisy, and uncomfortable. The Direct-Orient Express is mocked for having no dining cars. The Turkish Railways are luxurious and efficient in first-class, but the author dwells on the lower-class sections that are mobbed by Turks and Western hippies. The author's complaints about various people and places in a sense are the driving force of the book that keeps things going, along with the trains that are moving forward.

There is also a tone of exploration and adventure, especially when the author is trying to go someplace that is inaccessible and unusual. There is a certain excitement from the author in making the weekly trip of the Khyber Pass Railroad to Peshawar, Pakistan. The author's planned railroad trip to Ceylon is a bit of a mystery with some uncertainty on whether the railroads of Ceylon are reachable or still in operation. Perhaps the high point of the book is the author's successful effort to cross the Gokteik Viaduct in Northern Burma. It is interesting that the author notes that this train was supposed to be built to go further north and connect to the Chinese Railways. This sense of adventure and danger is further used in the trips on the small train runs in South Vietnam, and the author's trip as the only Westerner on much of the trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad.



Structure

The entire book is structured around the author's 4-month railroad trip through Europe and Asia. The book is divided into 30 chapters that run from 5 to 40 pages each. The first 3 chapters, pp. 1 to 56, describe the author's journey from London to Eastern Turkey, generally within what one would call the Western World. Chapters 4 to 7, pp. 57-90 recount the leg of the journey through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Chapters 8 to 16, pp. 91-178 are a large section of the book that tells of the author's journeys in India and Ceylon. Chapters 17 to 19, pp. 179-206 describe the author's side-trip to Burma with the goal of crossing the Gokteik Viaduct, in an area forbidden to tourists.

Chapters 20 to 23, pp. 207-240 tell of the long trip from Nong Khai in Northern Thailand, through Malaysia, south to Singapore, one of the author's happiest journeys. Chapters 24 and 25, pp. 241-267 tell of the author's brief and frustrating railroad trips in South Vietnam after the withdrawal of American troops from the area, on the remnants of the Trans-Indochina Railroad. In Chapters 26 to 29, pp. 268 to 303, the author encounters the famous bullet trains of Japan and the first winter weather of his journey. This is a prelude to the last chapter, Chapter 30, which is divided into 3 parts. This is the author's 10-day trip, first by boat to Nakhoda and then on the longest railroad in the world to Moscow and then back to London.



Quotes

"He was in his indignant late fifties, and I could see him cutting a junior officer at the club— either at Aldershot or in the third act of a Rattigan play."

Chapter 2, p. 12

"Duffill grasped the rails beside the door and as he did so the train began to move and he let go. He dropped his arms. Two train guards rushed behind him and held his arms and hustled him along the platform to the moving stairs of Car 99."

Chapter 2, pp. 18-19

"He died in 1938, and that was my insight: modernization stopped in Turkey with the death of Ataturk, at five minutes past nine on November 10th, 1938."

Chapter 2, p. 37

"'I think it's only fair to say,' I said, wondering how I was going to finish the sentence, 'that I'm not , um, queer. Well you know, I don't like boys and —'"

Chapter 4, p. 58

"'You can stay in London if you like. They're all racialisists. It starts when you're about ten years old, and that's all you hear— wog, nigger, blackie.'"

Chapter 7, p. 83

"The Kalka Mail was full of Bengalis, on their way to Simla for a festival, the Kali pufa. Bengalis, whose complexion resembles that of the the black goddess of destruction they worship, and who have the same sharp hook to their noses, have the misfortune to live at the opposite end of the country from the most favored Kali temple."

Chapter 9, pp. 102-103

"Famine relief, resettlement, drought prevention, underprivileged, anything you can name. It is a headache sometimes. But my books don't sell, so I have no choice."

Chapter 10, p. 121

"'About two kilometers down the road'— the man pointed into the blackness— 'there is a bar. You can get beer there.'"

Chapter 12, p. 136

"The next morning I was visited by a Buddhist monk. His head was shaved, he wore saffron robes, and he was barefoot.... He was, of course, so right for the part that I guessed immediately he was an American, and it turned out he was from Baltimore."

Chapter 13, p. 149

"Unfortunately, these plastic dentures are valueless for chewing food with and must be removed at mealtime. Mr. Wong said business was excellent and he was taking in between 1000 and 1400 rupees a month, which is more than a professor gets at



Colombo University."
Chapter 15, p. 162

"We looked at the painting, sitting on the bed— it was the only place to sit— and as she pointed out what was good about it, how the figures were so well done, she reached over and picked it up from my lap.... —I felt a surprising voltage in my groin from the light pressure of her hand. ...She stayed for about two hours."
Chapter 16, 170-171

"Early in this century enthusiasm for railway travel produced a spate of optimistic books about railway travel: the French were building the Transindochinois line to Hanoi, the Russians had brought the Trans-Siberian almost to Vladivostok, the British had laid track to the very end of the Khyber Pass, and it was assumed that Burmese railways would extend in one direction to the Assam-Bengal line and in the other to the railways of China."
Chapter 17, 179-180

"The viaduct, a monster of silver geometry in all the ragged rock and jungle, came into view and then slipped behind an outcrop of rock. It appeared again at intervals, growing larger, less silver, more imposing."
Chapter 19, p. 204

"He says , 'Don't you like girls?' and gives me a really horrible smile in the dark."
Chapter 20, p. 211

"The rotan is a cane — a four-foot rod, about half a finger thick. Cedric said that most jail sentences included strokes of the rotan."
Chapter 23, P. 232

"There were really two selling points, the beaches and the war. But the war was still on, in spite of the fact that nowhere in the forty-four-page booklet entitled 'Visit Viet-Nam' was fighting mentioned, except the oblique statement, 'English [language] is making rapid progress under the pressure of contemporary events.'"
Chapter 24, p. 244

"Some watched the train, with their rifles at their shoulders, in those oversize uniforms— a metaphor of mismatching that never failed to remind me that these men— these boys — had been dressed and armed by much larger Americans."
Chapter 25, pp. 257-258

"I arrived in Tokyo with the clothes that had served me for three months in the tropics, my drip-dry wardrobe."
Chapter 26, p. 268

"The Japanese behaved in concert, giving a seasonal regularity to their pastimes and never jumping the gun. They ski in the skiing season, fly kites in the kite-flying season,



sail boats and take walks in parks at other times custom specifies."
Chapter 27, p. 282

"Like the train, the ship follows Soviet custom: it is riddled with class distinctions so subtle, it takes a trained Marxist to appreciate them."
Chapter 30, Part 1, p. 304

"But I was relieved, and almost delirious with the purest joy a traveler can know: the sight of the plushest, most comfortable room I had seen in thirty trains."
Chapter 30, Part 2, P. 311

"I was now the only Westerner on the train. I felt like the last Mohican. Deprived of friendly conversation, denied rest by my bad dreams, irritated by the mute man in pajamas and his pages of equations, doubled up with cramps from the greasy stews of the dining car— and guiltily remembering my four months' of absence, missing my family— I bribed Vassily for a bottle of vodka (he said they'd run out, but for two rubles he discovered some) and spent an entire day emptying it."
Chapter 30, Part 3, p. 330



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the author's preference for train travel. Why does the author prefer trains to planes and cars as means of transportation?

Discuss the differences and similarities between the neighboring countries Turkey and Iran. Both are Muslim countries with secular regimes at this time (1973). What are the differences in the attitude of the populations of these countries?

Discuss differences and similarities between Pakistan and India. The people of Pakistan and Northern India are very similar racially and culturally; nevertheless, there are marked differences between Pakistanis and Indians. Are there noticeable differences in the author's travels in the two countries?

Discuss the author's trip over the Gokteik Viaduct. The author wants to see the Viaduct because it is a giant construction project left in the proverbial middle of nowhere and done under former British rule. Also discuss the author's comments about train lines built 50 to 100 years ago that could have connected the trains of India and Burma and of Burma and China,

Discuss the 1,400 mile trip from Nong Khai, Thailand, to Singapore. Compare the atmosphere of sexual tourism in Thailand and Laos with the rules and regulations of Malaysia and Singapore.

The author makes a visit to South Vietnam in December 1973, after the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam. Discuss the motives for running parts of the old Trans-Indochina line and the Commission on Vietnam Tourism. Are South Vietnamese officials being realistic? Why do they make such an effort to present conditions as normal?

Discuss the author's visit to Japan and its railroad lines. The author is somewhat disturbed by the speed, cleanliness and modernity of Japanese trains. He goes into a detail discussion of Japanese pornographic traditions and obsessions with violence and sado-masochism. Is this a fair treatment of Japan? Is this a break from the author's treatment of previous areas and rail travel?

Discuss the author's trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The weather is extremely cold, and after a point, nobody speaks English. The author drinks excessively. Is the author's trip on the Trans-Siberian more difficult than other parts of his travels?

Discuss the author's reactions to crowds at the stations in Delhi, Bombay and Madras, India. Is he fair in his remarks on the large number of poor people in India? Is he excessive in his negative comments on whole Indian villages camping out in train stations? Are his comments on overpopulation in India fair and supported by facts?