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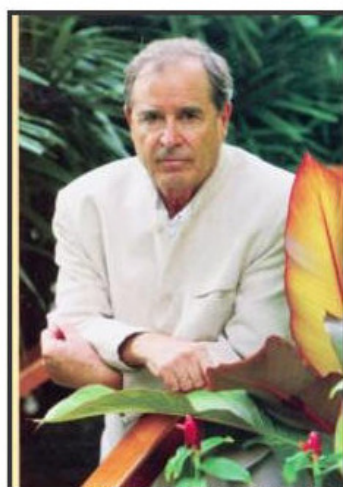
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Books

King of the road: Paul Theroux reads at Seattle Central Library on Oct. 16

The travel writer nonpareil rides the rails again in 'Ghost Train to the Eastern Star'

By [Sheri Quirt](#)
October 14, 2008
NWsource staff



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In his 1965 essay "The Cerebral Snapshot," 24-year-old Paul Theroux examines the quest to capture in words a scene that one has witnessed. "No camera is like no hands," he writes, and an author's task is to use all his skills and resources to recreate pictures for an audience. Theroux has expertly done just that over the subsequent decades, and will appear at [Seattle Central Library](#) on Thursday, Oct. 16 to discuss his latest adventure, "Ghost Train to the Eastern Star."

"Ghost Train" retraces the journey of his first nonfiction book, 1975's "The Great Railway Bazaar," an overland trip from London to Japan and back. Three decades on, the world of "Ghost Train" is smaller, noisier and has a hell of a lot more people in it. The meandering India of old seems more remote than ever as Theroux infiltrates a Bangalore call center filled with young Indians affecting American accents, providing technical support and cold-calling customers ("the Glengarry leads") half a world away.

An accomplished novelist, Theroux has a gift for dialogue, which assists in the unforgettable characterizations of those he meets along the road. His work is the best argument you will find to dispense with your iPod for a few hours on your next trip and leave yourself open to seatmate serendipity.

Theroux's style has inspired untold numbers of wannabes, pretenders and a few legitimate talents ([Brad Newsham](#) is one who makes the grade). He is not a tourist nor a daredevil adventurer, but an astute observer and a vivid reporter. He does not redact or whitewash the judgmental and crotchety moments that are part of serious travel. But he also shares the wonder he finds in the minute detail: a smell, texture or chance narrative seen from a sleeper window. Time and again, Theroux gets the cerebral snapshot.

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