

## Into the Wild: Divergence-Convergence Dynamics in Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' and O'Donohue's 'For the Traveller'

Nabaraj Dhungel<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*This paper attempts to explore and analyze how Frost and O'Donohue show the dynamics of divergent journey and convergent journey of a traveler through their poems 'The Road Not Taken' and 'For the Traveller' respectively. This study displays the poets' focus on significant contribution of the travel and experiences from it to create a difference in the lives of human beings. The speakers in both poems make a divergent journey to the unexplored and strange vast world outside which leads them to realization of inner transformation. It is the beauty of the startling journey outward to the wild which enlightens and enriches the humans leading to inner journey to the self and thereby balancing the external and the internal. Both Frost and O'Donohue endeavour to glorify the value of travel in human life as it broadens our mind, liberates our heart and pacifies our souls creating a total balance in life. It is the journey that brings the opposites together changing the scary into the merry. This research projects that the journey to the wild, startling, infinite, unexplored and untraveled seems to be problematic in the beginning but it turns out to be fruitful and significant ultimately as it leads to formation, transformation and reformation of the self. To justify the argument, the ideas of Carl Thompson and Susan Bassnett have been used. This writing plays a significant role in advancement of human life as it efforts to encourage people to make travel to the unknown by unraveling the mysterious strength of journey whether it is divergent or convergent.*

**Keywords:** Divergence, convergence, dynamics, wild, difference, balance.

### Introduction

This research aims to investigate and evaluate how American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) and Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue (1956-2008) depict the dynamics of a divergent and convergent journey in their poems "The Road Not Taken" and "For the Traveller" respectively. This study demonstrates the poets' emphasis on the important role that travel and the experiences gained from it play in improving people's lives. The speakers of both poems travel in different directions to the strange and unexplored

1. Assistant Professor of English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal, Bishwa Bhasa Campus,  
Email: [nabarajdhungel2020@gmail.com](mailto:nabarajdhungel2020@gmail.com)

vast world outside, where they eventually realize they have changed inside. Humans are enlightened and enriched by the breathtaking journey into the wild, which also leads to an introspective journey to the self and a balancing of the internal and external worlds. Both Frost and O'Donohue strive to extol the virtues of travel in human life, arguing that it creates a complete equilibrium by enlarging our minds, freeing our hearts, and soothing our souls. The journey is what transforms the frightening into the joyful, and internal to external. According to this research, the journey to the wild, startling, infinite, unexplored, and untraveled may appear difficult at first, but it ultimately proves to be beneficial and significant since it results in the formation, reformation, and transformation of the self.

Travel writing has emerged as a significant field of study, reflecting some of the most pressing issues of our day as many locations around the world deal with globalization, migration, and postcoloniality. Travel writing, which can take many different forms, including field journals, investigative reports, guidebooks, memoirs, humorous sketches, and lyrical reveries, is currently a vital topic of discussion in many different fields within the social sciences and humanities.

In the travel writing, some writers present their thoughts, insights and experiences gained through the journey, describe the landscapes, cities and the natural beauties visited, depict the cultural realities, traditions and customs found in the particular regions, narrate the challenges, discoveries, and encounters during the journey, and some fight for the formation of new identity by enlightening the self through the journey to diverse locations. By documenting locations and customs that may evolve over time, encouraging readers to visit new places, and sharing a variety of viewpoints, travel writing helps close cultural divides and opens up new perspectives on the world.

Even though travel writing as a genre and subject of study got space in literature, literary studies and the academia in the twenty first century, it emerged from the time of Herodotus in Greece. From the past to the present, the authors record their travel experiences, explorations, fictional voyages, travelogues, adventures and self-discoveries. We can see some travel writers from the past to the present. Herodotus' *Histories* (5th century BC) is one of the earliest travel accounts which documents Herodotus' explorations of the ancient world. Homer's *Odyssey* (7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) tells the tale of Odysseus's fatiguing and beleaguered return from the battle. Marco Polo's *The Travels of Marco Polo* (13th century) is a detailed account of Polo's journey through Asia. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is a satirical travel narrative that critiques society through fictional voyages. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) is a mixture of travelogue and personal experiences. Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) is a humorous and critical glance at European culture from the perspective of an American traveler. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) is a significant writing of the Beat Generation, recording a road trip across America. Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012) is a modern memoir about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail as a form of self-discovery.

Travel liberates mind, heart and soul of the traveler. Regarding the objective of travel, Prakash Thapa asserts: “That people in most instances come to enjoy the wilderness of the mountains, and free themselves, bringing liberation into their soul: the liberation of the self” (19). People enjoy the wild pleasure of environment which makes people feel liberated in hear, mind and soul- a miraculous performance of nature. Similarly, Osho states that “it is something like that of the fourth dimension: travelling into the unknown, thus unfolding the multiple paths of inner dimensions, and this is something very creative dimension of life in particular” (254). Travel to the unknown unfolds the roads to inner world. The physical journey leads to spiritual liberation and regeneration. For Blanton, “it has since been catering to the desire of broadening audiences for geographic and cultural knowledge of unfamiliar places and peoples, for economic, socio-political, or strategic information, as well as for entertainment through captivating stories” (7–29). The journey to the unfamiliar world provides knowledge and experiences. “Western journey narratives of the Modern Era particularly promise to function as a ‘conduit of knowledge and experience’” (Hayward, 362, qtd. in Ette, 28–29). Travel provides not only pleasure and entertainment but also knowledge and experience in human life. Travels “focus on travelers’ personal feelings and imagination, and blending of inner and outer journeys” (Blanton, 11–20, qtd. in Hayward 366–67). Travel is such a medium and a tool which brings the opposites together-the inner and the outer.

The divergent and convergent journeys are interrelated. The internal becomes the external and vice versa through travel. The Australian Blogger Beth Bridges in her opinion article “As you change your inner world, you change your outer world” acclaims: “As you change your inner world, you change your outer world because the external world is a reflection of our inner state. As your inner world re-organises, the outer world will also slowly reorganize” (para 1). Knowledge of the external world doesn’t rest on any proof of the external world. Instead, knowledge of the external world is achieved in sensory experience. It is through the entrance of an idea into our mind through the senses that we have knowledge of the external world. Locke writes, “‘Tis therefore the actual receiving of ideas from without that gives us notice of the existence of other things and makes us know that something doth exist at that time without us which causes that idea in us...” (E Book IV, chapter 11, section 2, 218). Travel makes us understand and feel the existence of other beings leading to realization of own existence in this universe. Mary Baine Campbell in “Travel writing and its theory” projects: “As a kind of writing, ‘travel writing’ provokes certain kinds of essentially literary questions and formulations” (263). Both travel and travel writing help us raise questions, find out the problems and also the solutions together.

Travel forms reforms and transforms the self and the self transformed after the travel experiences changes the structure of the phenomena. Matthew Priselac in “The Relation of the Self and External Reality” writes: “Self does not create a new phenomenal world, but the self transforms the structure of phenomenal reality to another structure. The self is the subject, and the external reality is the object. The self acts on objects; i.e.

the subject is related to its objects in the knowing relationship” (41). Travel to different locations and spaces provides us the knowledge of culture, geography and the relationship of the humans to nature. The Australian Traveller, Evan Sutter in his article “Exploring the Inner and Outer Worlds: A Journey to Constructing a Fulfilling” acclaims: “In our quest to construct a life worth living, we often look outward. We seek the beauty of mountains, oceans, and bustling cities, finding joy and meaning in the richness of our surroundings. Indeed, travel plays a significant role in enriching our lives, and exposing us to new cultures, perspectives, and experiences” (para 1). Travel is such a thing which enriches, through fun, our self and life as a whole.

Travel outward fulfils our quest to make our life worthy; it widens our thoughts and viewpoints taking us to different cultural realities. Journey out contributes eventually to the development of the inside of the traveler. It plays a vital role in formation of human self. Sutter further writes: “Reflecting on my own journey from coastal towns to vibrant cities, I’ve encountered diverse communities that have shaped my worldview. Each place brings a unique blend of people and ideas, challenging me to see life through different lenses. Yet, amidst the external exploration, I’ve come to realize that true growth often occurs within” (para 3). The further out we go, the nearer in we reach. Travel takes us into the vast internal world through the exploration of the outer world. Moreover, Sutter acclaims: “For it is in this exploration of the inner and outer worlds that we truly find meaning and fulfilment. While external travel may offer excitement and novelty, it is the journey within that holds the key to true fulfilment. By nurturing our inner worlds, we cultivate resilience, creativity, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and others” (para 7). Travel to the outer world nurtures our inner world. “So travel, at heart, is just a quick way to keeping our minds mobile and awake. As Santayana, the heir to Emerson and Thoreau with whom I began, wrote, ‘There is wisdom in turning as often as possible from the familiar to the unfamiliar; it keeps the mind nimble; it kills prejudice, and it fosters humor’” (Iyer, 6). Travel makes a human different. Therefore, travel is essential in promotion and advancement of human life.

Travel writing encourages readers to explore new places, documents places and traditions that may change over time, helps bridge gaps between different societies by sharing diverse perspectives and offers new ways of seeing the world by stepping outside one’s comfort zone. Human traits are present in all travels: the need to move, the need to satisfy one’s curiosity, the drive to discover new things, the want to make friends, the desire to enjoy nature, the occasional dared evil tendencies, the willingness to confront obstacles and repercussions, and so forth.

### **Divergence-Convergence Dynamics**

The journey to the vast external world is considered to be divergent journey. It is a path that breaks away from the conventional or expected course, leading to unique experiences, self-discovery, or alternate realities. But it also includes the protagonist’s

break away from the traditional societal rigid system, challenging traditional structure, exploring the unexplored, self-discovery and transformation, seeking enlightenment beyond the mainstream and exploring different outcomes based on past choices. The texts are *Divergent* (2011) by Veronica Roth, *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell, *Dark Matter* by (2016) Blake Crouch, *Siddhartha* (1922) by Hermann Hesse, *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006) by Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick, etc.

A convergent journey is a path where different experiences, choices, or perspectives ultimately lead to a unified destination, understanding, or resolution. This type of journey appears in literature, personal development, science, and philosophy. It includes hero's journey with resolution, single conclusion from various perspectives, narrative with multiple paths leading to single destination, self realization and growth, different religious and spiritual paths for fundamental truths and different innovations and societies developing towards a common globalized future. The texts are *Oedipus Rex* (5<sup>th</sup> C. BC) by Sophocles, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) by Agatha Christie, *The Odyssey* (8<sup>th</sup> C. BC) by Homer, etc.

The journey into the wild ultimately makes one mild. It means the more we travel to the external world, the better, freer and wider our mind and understanding become. By exploring and experiencing the outer world, we can transform our inner world and thereby forming a new identity with inner realization and reorganization. It means the external journey takes the internal out in the open space. Here, the external becomes internal and vice versa through travel.

## Methodology

This study is a library-based literary qualitative research and therefore, Textual Analysis method has been used here. Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and John O'Donohue's "For The Traveller" are the basic texts for analysis. The poets, through the poems, attempt to project the transformative value of travel focusing on divergent and convergent journeys.

## Theoretical Framework

Travel writing explores the unexplored concretizing the abstract and recording the fact prevalent in the universe. It helps us excavate our own potential concealed within us in lack of opportunity to be brought forth into the public. British writer Carl Thomson defines travel as a genre in this manner:

To travel is to make a journey, a movement through space. Possibly this journey is epic in scale, taking the traveller to the other side of the world or across a continent or up a mountain; possibly it is more modest in scope, and takes place within the limits of the travellers own country or region, or even just their immediate locality. (6)

The journey takes the traveler to other side of the world. Even the limited journey contributes in reaching the unlimited and infinite other side hidden from the sight. "All travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity and identity, difference and similarity" (9). Travel brings the opposites together like the inner and the outer, different and similar, physical and the spiritual, and so on.

While talking about travel and gender, Susan Bassnett, the British scholar of comparative literature, in her essay "Travel Writing and Gender", claims that travel writing leads to self-exploration. She writes: For Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark, travelling and writing about their travels seems to have arisen from a dual process of self-exploration" (263). Travelling is exploration and writing about travel is re-exploration. Bassnett further utters: "The works of Gertrude Bell or Freya Stark, in contrast, reflect personal, social, and political changes, so that the journeys they recount are both inner and outer journeys, towards greater self-awareness as well as greater knowledge gained through experience" (238). Travel helps in redefining the travelers as well as the human world including the natural world. Bassnett asserts: "Travel for some women, it seems, may have offered a means of redefining themselves, assuming a different persona and becoming someone who did not exist at home" (234). The females can uplift and empower themselves writing about their travel and thereby establishing their identity and agency. Travel writing "mirrors the struggle of modernist women trying to find a way of realising themselves in a changing world" (239). This sort of writing helps the females realize themselves which leads to their liberation from the clutch of patriarchy. Bassnett concludes in her essay that: "The search for self-expression and the reformulation of identity are common elements in the work of many of the travelers" (239). When the travellers write about their travel, they focus on self-expression, self-exploration and identity formation.

### **Textual Analysis**

The poets Frost and Donohue present the travel as a source of knowledge, experience, freedom, blessings, transformation and identity formation. They claim that the wilder the journey, the milder the human condition. The journey can be both convergent and divergent which make the internal external and vice versa. They make us realize that the more we travel to the outer world, the more we reach the inner world. Therefore, exploration of the outer world leads to the realization of the inner world and thereby forming, transforming and reforming the travellers' selves and identities. The external world is vast and unfamiliar; the more unfamiliar and vaster world than the vast outer one exists within us. By exploring the unfamiliar out, we can explore the more unfamiliar inside. It is what the travel does.

"The Road Not Taken" is a notable poem about pursuing decisions in our lives. Our decisions shape us. In the poem, the road represents our life, and the way that we don't pick is "the road not taken". The writer portrays his background and says that some time in the past, he had two decisions to make. He had picked one and pushed forward with it.

Presently, to settle on another decision, he can't do as such. The message the writer needs to pass on is that our decisions altogether influence our future. In the event that we settle on some unacceptable decision, we can't return and address it. We will have no choice other than thinking twice about it. In this way, we ought to be shrewd while deciding or decisions in our day to day existence.

"For the Traveller" by John O'Donohue is a wonderful gift that urges people to see travel as a sacrosanct excursion, where one can pay attention to the internal voice and find new parts of themselves by embracing the quietness and transparency that accompanies being in another spot; basically, it welcomes voyagers to be available and open to the secret magnificence and experiences that might arise during their excursion, permitting their "compass of the spirit" to direct them towards more profound self-disclosure.

"The Road Not Taken" was written by Frost at the beginning of World War I, shortly before he left England for the United States. It is a poem about the inability to comprehend the significance of one's life decisions. It can either be read in the context of Frost's personal life, where he relocates his family abroad, or in the context of world history, where a global war abruptly and unexpectedly breaks out and upends people's lives. Consider the instance of Frost's friend Edward Thomas, following whom Frost allegedly fashioned the speaker in the poem.

Frost highlights on the divergent journey to the yellow wood from the crossroad in which he chooses the one less travelled that ultimately creates a difference within himself transforming it into a convergent journey. The speaker confesses that he could not travel both roads and choose the one for his journey. This diverged road and the speaker's journey to the lees travelled is a metaphor of life journey and the crossroads, ups and downs and the confusions during our life. While living our life, we face so many obstacles, contradictions, dilemmas and challenges that ultimately bring opportunities after the correct decisions of exploring the unexplored and daring to complete the journey. Frost utters:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth; (1-5)

To make the internal world different and better, the speaker makes a divergent journey to the yellow wood. It is obvious that the divergent journey to the jungles, mountains, hills and other natural landscapes really help to form, transform and reform our inner self.

The divergent journey is not only to the external world; it can be the journey from the present to the past as well as to the future. Some travels can be eternal too. When we dare to take risk of travelling to the unknown, unfamiliar and the unexplored and decide accordingly at the time of dilemma, it makes not only our life but also the whole world different. In this sense, the divergent journey transforms both the external and the internal worlds causing the external internal and vice versa. The poet acclaims:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference. (16-20)

The speaker claims that his decision of taking the journey to the diverged road less travelled eventually becomes correct. Moreover, the decision makes the journey more meaningful and eternal. Also, it provides an opportunity to the traveler to tell about it proudly to people of all ages. It shows that the travel in life makes persons totally different forming, transforming and reforming their selves and identities. In this sense, travel is full of interests; people make travels to form their new identities. Therefore, every travel is political in nature.

Before exploring the less travelled road, the persona of the poem was a simple man, after completion of the journey, he starts thinking about the road he didn't travel and he becomes the poet, and when he combines the both, he becomes a completely new man. In this sense, travel transforms the human reforming him/her into a new being. Moreover, it is great to create the difference; more than this, to make us feel the difference is greater. It is possible through travel.

The divergent journey is multiple, startling and troublesome as it is full of obstacles every moment after leaving home. When we move to the unfamiliar from the familiar, each step is difficult as the external world is strange to us causing fear and lonesome to us. O'Donohue asserts that the external world never co-operates us rather it attempts to frighten and also to keep us in illusion. He projects:

Every time you leave home,  
Another road takes you  
Into a world you were never in.  
  
New strangers on other paths await.  
New places that have never seen you  
Will startle a little at your entry.

Old places that know you well  
Will pretend nothing  
Changed since your last visit. (1-9)

The outer unfamiliar world both frightens the traveler and gets frightened with the traveler. The strangers and the strange thing always await the traveler in the external world. Whatsoever, the traveler must dare to face the challenges and to make a complete journey that leads to self-transformation.

Every traveller travels to the unknown and the dark with the motive and hope of creating light within own selves. With the dream of bright morning after a long journey at dark night, the travelers brighten the path of the journey. The poet means to say that we, as a traveler, can illuminate our inner selves and the whole lives when we develop courage to kindle light on the dark way during our journey. He depicts:

You want to take in  
To where your longing  
Has pressed hard enough  
Inward, on some unsaid dark,  
To create a crystal of insight  
You could not have known  
You needed  
To illuminate  
Your way. (21-29)

Every travel of life is self-illuminating if the traveler dares to continue the journey even if it is dark, difficult and disturbing. It is very interesting self-satisfying to reform and transform our selves through the enlightening journey. But for this, should realize and accept that we need to clear the thorns and the dark aspects of the road of our journey. The journey of Frost begins from the personal and moves to the universal one. The speaker's journey in the poem symbolizes everyone's journey.

The journey of life can be sacred and heavenly if we become successful to explore the unexplored hidden potentialities and realities of our own lives. The journey is real and meaningful only if it directs toward the territories of spirits and the selves. It means the exploration and transformation of the inner selves of the travelers determine the success or failure of the journey. The poet projects:

A journey can become a sacred thing:  
Make sure, before you go,  
To take the time  
To bless your going forth,  
To free your heart of ballast

So that the compass of your soul  
 Might direct you toward  
 The territories of spirit  
 Where you will discover  
 More of your hidden life,  
 And the urgencies  
 That deserve to claim you. (37-48)

The journey becomes pure when it creates a situation in which the travellers' tamed heart is freed and the hidden aspects of life are explored. It means that the journey to the external world can be realized and be blessed one when it transforms, reforms and forms the inner world of the travelers.

Travel is a gift for the human beings as it makes life blessed, refreshed, enriched, free and full. Moreover, travel strengthens the inner ground of the humans if they travel safely, travel with the fullest, travel without wasting time and invitations and travel with awakened spirit. Due to the experiences, joys, explorations, refreshments and earnings in the journey, life gets awakened, enlightened and awarded with the blessings. Donohue utters:

May you travel in an awakened way,  
 Gathered wisely into your inner ground;  
 That you may not waste the invitations  
 Which wait along the way to transform you.

May you travel safely, arrive refreshed,  
 And live your time away to its fullest;  
 Return home more enriched, and free  
 To balance the gift of days which call you. (49-56)

Life itself is a gift for human beings which can be made more fruitful and precious through the travel to the external world i.e. specially nature. The Victorian poet A L Tennyson in his poem Ulysses writes: "I cannot rest from travel: I will drink/Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd" (6-7). He means to say that we have to live our life to the fullest. In the same spotlight, the poet Donohue affirms that we need to travel to live our life to the optimum level. He focuses on the power and value of travel in human life. The speaker in this poem speaks the voice of all the people without personalizing it.

## Findings

Both poets Frost and O'Donohue conclude that the divergent journey is ultimately a convergent journey as the expedition to the external world leads to the transformation and reformation of the inner self. However, Frost moves from personal to universal travel

whereas Donohue focuses only on the universal travel of human beings. Moreover, the startling, troublesome, illusive and challenging trip to the outer world eventually becomes life-changing and society-transforming. In addition, the poets put forward the idea that travel is the weapon to form new identity with full, blessed, enriched and free life. The credit of all the difference that comes to our life goes to travel as it broadens our mind, frees our heart, liberates our soul and renews our spirit. Furthermore, travel injects our life, irrigates it during drought and enlightens it through the opportunity to explore the unexplored and bringing solutions to almost all the problems. The poets, through their poems, prove that the wilder the journey, the milder the traveler is after completion of the journey. Therefore, travel is a blessing to the humans. In this sense, every human needs to be a traveler as life itself is a journey.

## Conclusion

To conclude, even though journey can be both divergent and convergent, the external becomes the internal and vice versa ultimately as travel can bring the opposites- familiar and unfamiliar, wild and mild, startling and joyful, problem and solution, physical and the spiritual- together. Furthermore, the travel can be eternal and make life eternal as it joins all times-past, present and future- into one. The poets Frost and Donohue justify through their poems that travel is a blessing to human beings as it makes life invaluable blurring all the hierarchies, freeing it from all the traps and ties, and illuminating life through exploration of the unexplored. However, Frost begins from talking about the individual journey in life and goes to universal issue of travel for making us different whereas Donohue emphasizes not on the personal but on the universal significance of travel. But, the philosophy of 'life as a journey' stands dominantly in the poems of Frost and O' Donohue. Therefore, to make and feel the difference in life, everyone should involve in travelling.

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