



Discovering the Unknown: The Functions of Push and Pull in Theroux's Pacific Adventures

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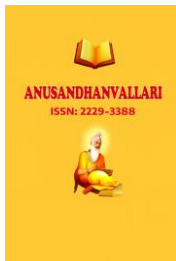
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Abstract: Travel serves as a doorway to other worlds and a tool for self-discovery, allowing travellers to transcend preconceptions and gain a more profound comprehension of individuals and locations. This paper explores how firsthand interactions with foreign cultures, environments, and social realities alter perception. Travellers frequently form opinions about a place before visiting it based on media, anecdotes, and other people's experiences. Personal interaction with the location, however, calls into question these presumptions and substitutes more genuine and complex insights for shallow impressions. Through this process, travel reveals not just the nature of a few places but also the attitudes, biases, and potential for personal development of the traveller. *The Happy Isles of Oceania*, Paul Theroux's sixth major travel book, examines how Theroux utilizes his voyage across the Pacific to challenge preconceived notions and uncover the nuanced realities of the locations he visits. Theroux's travelogue focuses on the continuous interplay of opposing forces that shape and influence his adventurous spirit.

Keywords: Self-discovery, Cultural perception, Push and Pull factors, thirst for adventure

Travel often serves as a portal to the unknown, as well as a catalyst for self-discovery, offering profound insights to those who embark on such journeys. By exploring unfamiliar locations, travellers can learn a firsthand idea of places they had only known through preconceived notions. Before a traveller arrives, they may have assumptions about a place based on tales, the media, or the experiences of others. However, when they actually immerse themselves in the place -its culture, landscapes, and realities, their point of view changes drastically. This personal interaction promotes a more genuine and nuanced understanding by substituting superficial impressions with real insights. Dzüvichü (2023) This trip exposes not only the nature of the unknown locations but also underlying truths about the traveller's attitudes, prejudices, and potential for development.

Foreign destinations offer unique experiences because they provide experiences that are not everyday experiences, such as magnificent scenery, delicious dishes, delightful cultural events, unusual leisure activities, diverse languages, and so on. Scholars agree that seeking novelty is a key motivator in travel. Dann's Push and Pull Theory serves as the foundation for the most modern motivation theories. However, several researchers have contributed their knowledge to the field. This theory is widely respected among scholars and is frequently utilized to support studies on travel motivation. Pongen (2024) Dann developed this theory in 1977, which explicitly targets travel motivation and includes push and pull forces. People travel because they are being pushed by internal forces, such as a desire to escape daily routines and pulled by external forces, such as destination attractions. Push factors come from the internal of an individual and make him travel, such as the need to relax, explore, meet new people, and improve relationships. LY (2024). Pull factors, on the other hand, are external to the individual and provide an explanation for the real destination choice. Seaton, a scholar, explained that "pull forces can include the avoidance of work and cultural/social pressures at home, while pull factors include seeking leisure/play, freedom and escape, novelty, relationships, relaxation, escape, culture, and education" (Boo & Jones 2009e).



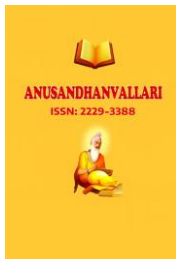
Paul Theroux, the celebrated travel writer, finds himself drawn by both the push and pull forces that have inspired poets and adventurers for centuries—the wish to leave behind what is known and the impulse to explore what is beyond. This internal force drives him to embark on a voyage throughout the isles of Oceania in search of experiences as well as places that illuminate the richness of human existence in far-flung regions of the globe. Theroux was influenced by the following poem lines of Ulysses by Lord Tennyson, to travel to the isles of Oceania.

Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles ... (Theroux ii)

The essence of Theroux's travel philosophy is encapsulated in these lines. He, like Ulysses, is unwilling to stay in the comfort or routine. He is inspired by the desire to "seek a newer world" (Theroux ii) – to go towards the unknown despite dangers, discomfort, or uncertainty. The poem addresses a restless spirit that craves adventure over safety and curiosity over contentment. Theroux recognizes himself in Ulysses; both are experienced men who, instead of retiring, decide to travel beyond the sunset in pursuit of meaning, truth, and beauty. The phrase "Happy Isles" refers not only to the actual islands of the Pacific but also to the pursuit of paradise, wisdom, or tranquillity.

Driven by Tennyson's timeless call, Theroux's adventure journey to Oceania is both a physical voyage and a poetic one. It is a voyage influenced not only by maps and location but also by literature and the fundamental human urge to travel. Every remarkable journey has a stark, high-stakes reality that is revealed by Theroux's statement, "a journey can be either your death or your transformation" (Theroux 3). Theroux never takes his expedition casually. It's a conflict with the unknown and often with oneself. He is motivated by something greater than a simple desire to see the globe when he sets out across the Pacific. That demanding inner energy pushes him to locations where comfort vanishes and the self is put to the test. After all, water is both life-giving and destructive. Much like the ocean, the journey may offer two outcomes: it may drown you, or it will cleanse and transform you.

Theroux is motivated by the push inside of him –a strong, restless energy that forces him to abandon familiarity, comfort and even the people he loves –as he travels across the Pacific. The road, particularly the lengthy and lonely one that Theroux chose, removes all distractions and reveals the traveller to his feelings as well as the outside world. Theroux, on seeing a family of four – "Dad, Mum, and the two boys, eating happily in the glare light and joking with each other, and at the sight of this happy family I burst into tears" (Theroux 10), he doesn't simply observe them. He breaks. Even the bravest wanderer bears sadness. His defences are broken by the picture of the happy family, which reminds him of his own family, the comfort of a connection. Theroux is undergoing a transformation that involves exploring the world and facing the loneliness of being alone. He sees travel as exposure rather than escape. Even though he is surrounded by the huge Pacific, he is moved to tears by the silent anguish of remembrance. As the journey pushes you outward, it also turns you inward, which is where the actual struggles –and transformations –start. This is the paradox of the journey.



According to Dann, push factors can be divided into two categories of travel motivations: anomie and ego-enhancement. Anomie is the desire to transcend the feeling of isolation generated by daily life. This motivation represents the desire to escape the difficulties of daily life. Ego enhancement, on the other hand, stems from the desire for recognition and explains the quest for status that travel bestows. Theroux's travel is driven by anomie – a desire to escape emotional disconnection and find meaning beyond the constraints of everyday life. His journey is about how he is attempting to see himself, not how other people perceive him.

The spirit of adventure and the risks that frequently accompany travel, particularly in remote and harsh environments, are encapsulated in the following lines of Theroux:

I was in a large quarry-like place littered with boulders the size of bungalows in Wellington in a gusting wind. I decided not to linger. The commonest emergency in these parts is not a fall or a broken limb but rather an attack of hypothermia. I descended quickly, moving from rock to rock, to whip up my blood and warm myself, and I arrived back at the hut exhausted after what was to have been a rest day. (Theroux 24)

More than a mere physical description, Theroux's description of being stranded in a barren, wind-whipped landscape speckled with enormous rocks is a moment that exposes the psychological and emotional dynamics of adventure. Theroux's choice to travel through such a terrible environment, even on what was supposed to be a rest day, indicates that there are powerful push factors at work inside of him. He is engaged with an environment that is neither welcoming nor forgiving, because of his innate need for adventure, and perhaps the challenge of testing his limits. On the other hand, the environment itself might have provided pull factors, such as the bleak, dramatic scenery, the sense of vastness and separation from the modern world. These natural features might attract tourists like Theroux, who are looking for raw experiences.

Theroux's trip across Australia is influenced by push factors or internal motivations. Despite the warnings he heard from the people, his curiosity, spirit of adventure, and desire to experience the wild world drove him toward the outback. He becomes more determined when others explain the dangers to him in "a jeering, mocking, we-know-better way" (Theroux 51). The more one is told not to go, the more one is compelled to find out for oneself. This is the classic trait of the adventurer. On the other side, pull factors are present in the dramatic and exotic picture of the Australian landscape. A traveller like Theroux is drawn into the experience by the outback's wildness, the coast's mystery, and the level of danger. The untamed, natural beauty of Australia has a certain allure that provides the kind of genuineness and passion that many travellers are looking for. The locals are obsessed with natural hazards, including the creatures, plants and weather. However, Theroux points out that the true threat is not the wild, but the human: "There is a great fear of natural things in Australia. But no one mentions the drunks, who are everywhere and a great deal more dangerous" (Theroux 51). This twist reveals a deeper truth about travel. Theroux remarks about Australians that their fear is culturally constructed. They fear and complain about the natural world because it is so visible and easy to identify. However, they disregard or ignore social problems such as alcoholism and violence. For the traveller, this means navigating not only the terrain but also the blind spots of local narratives.

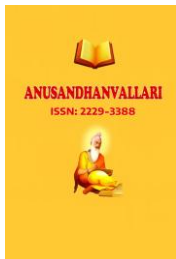
Theroux's intense sense of adventure flourishes in the face of cautions, warnings, taboos and mystery, is reflected in the following lines:

A man named Micah said, "But do not paddle to Tuma Island."

"Why not?"

"It is where the dead people go."

I found it on my map, a slender island, about five miles long to the northwest, and questioning them further I learned that it was a haunted place where no living person went because it was where the dangerous spirits of the



dead resided. In Malinowski's description it was the Trobrianders' heaven, a place of eternal youth and perpetual copulation – an erotic paradise, if you were a *khosa*, a spirit... I put Tuma high on my list of destinations of places to paddle. (Theroux 155)

This instance serves as an example of the internal and external factors that influence travel motivations when viewed through the lens of push and pull theory. Theroux is internally motivated by a desire to explore the forbidden, the mythic, and the unseen. The more others urge him against going, the more motivated he is. His push to go to Tuma is driven by his need to challenge boundaries, to find hidden truths, and to experience places others fear or avoid. On the other hand, Pull is the Tums island itself, depicted by a local man and Malinowski's description as "an erotic paradise" (Theroux 155) exerts a powerful pull.

The fact that Tuma is believed to be haunted and inhabited by frightening ghosts of the dead only adds to its attractiveness. For many, this would be a clear reason to avoid it. But for Theroux, danger is not something to flee from – it is often a signpost pointing to where the most profound or enlightening experiences might lie. His desire to connect with locations shrouded in fear and taboo illustrates his perspective that travel is not about sightseeing, but about confronting the stories people tell about their world – and sometimes defying them. Theroux transformed a local warning into a personal welcome. His choice to go to Tuma despite its haunted reputation reflects the spirit of the traveller who is pushed by the inner restlessness and pulled by the lure of the unknown.

Theroux's travelogue reveals a constant interplay between push and pull forces that mould his spirit of adventure. Internally, he is motivated by a strong curiosity, a willingness to face fear, and a refusal to accept societal taboos or second-hand warnings. Theroux constantly followed his inner urge to explore the forbidden, whether by choosing to travel to a ghost island that people avoided or by defying fears of deadly wildlife. At the same time, he is pulled by the magnetic allure of the unknown – the mythic quality of landscapes, and the natural beauty of the outback. These outside factors appeal to the traveller not because they are secure or comfortable, but because they offer depth and truth that goes beyond the ordinary.

Theroux's voyage is defined by these push and pull factors taken together, not just as physical travel, but as a quest to engage the world on his terms. His travel serves as a reminder that most of the fulfilling journeys are frequently motivated not by what we seek to escape, but by what we feel compelled to understand – even at personal risk.

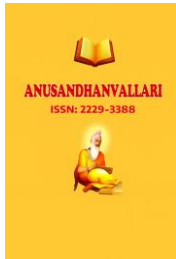
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