

Literary Tourism and Waterscapes in the Short Stories by Siti Zainon Ismail

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Abstract

Siti Zainon Ismail is a literary scholar, writer, and Malaysian cultural figure who has embarked on various journeys – both physical and imaginative. The intersection of literature with these journeys is particularly fascinating within the realm of “travel literature”, a subfield of literary tourism studies. This paper examines her connection to waterscapes, whether it is the external settings she has visited or the local regions she has depicted in her works, which subsequently result in a collision of ideas amongst her characters. This article references several short stories by Siti Zainon Ismail published through Galeri Melora, namely *Kampung Paya Kami* (1998), *Nyanyian Orang Laut* (2000), and *Piazza Di Spagna* (2005). Several other short stories later take readers on her journeys through the Riau Islands in Indonesia and Rome, Europe. Siti Zainon Ismail extensively discusses human nature, the surrounding environmental conflicts, heritage, and love stories through the backdrop of these waterscapes. This study employs the framework of literary tourism and the literary path within the context of psycho geography – how the author is engaged in the folds and lines of the map of the narrative’s watery locales, marked by literary signposts. Siti Zainon Ismail invites her audience to trace the contours of this “new map” to encounter fictional characters, settings, roads, structures, or even meet the author herself. Through Siti Zainon Ismail’s short stories, the readers are portrayed as pilgrims in the realm of literary tourism, and they also contribute a unique impact associated with waterscapes.

Keywords

Literary tourism · Malay literature · Psycho geography
· Siti Zainon Ismail · Short stories

Resumo

Siti Zainon Ismail é uma estudiosa literária, escritora e figura cultural malaia que embarcou em várias jornadas – tanto físicas quanto imaginativas. A intersecção da literatura com estas viagens é particularmente fascinante no domínio da “literatura de viagens”, um subcampo dos estudos do turismo literário. Este artigo examina a sua ligação às paisagens aquáticas, sejam os cenários externos que visitou ou as regiões locais que retratou nas suas obras, que posteriormente resultam numa colisão de ideias entre as suas personagens. Este artigo faz referência a vários contos de Siti Zainon Ismail publicados pela Galeri Melora, nomeadamente *Kampung Paya Kami* (1998), *Nyanyian Orang Laut* (2000) e *Piazza Di Spagna* (2005). Vários outros contos posteriormente levam os leitores em suas viagens pelas Ilhas Riau, na Indonésia, e Roma, na Europa. Siti Zainon Ismail discute extensivamente a natureza humana, os conflitos ambientais circundantes, a herança e as histórias de amor através do pano de fundo destas paisagens aquáticas. Este estudo utiliza o enquadramento do turismo literário e do percurso literário no contexto da psicogeografia – como o autor se envolve nas dobras e linhas do mapa dos locais aquáticos da narrativa, marcados por sinalização literária. Siti Zainon Ismail convida o seu público a traçar os contornos deste “novo mapa” para encontrar personagens fictícios, cenários, estradas, estruturas, ou mesmo conhecer a própria autora. Através dos contos de Siti Zainon Ismail, os leitores são retratados como peregrinos no âmbito do turismo literário, e também contribuem com um impacto único associado às paisagens aquáticas.

Palavras-chave

Turismo literário · Literatura malaia · Psicogeografia
· Siti Zainon Ismail · Contos

1. Introduction

Siti Zainon Ismail, the 14th Malaysian Laureate, is a literary scholar, writer, and prominent Malay cultural figure. She has a rich heritage with roots in various cultures, including Malay-Minang-Batubara and Javanese-Banjar, which greatly influence her philosophy of “journey” in her creative work. Her educational journey has taken her from Kuala Lumpur to Kota Bahru, Malaysia and even to Java’s ASRI (Institute of the Arts) Indonesia before returning to her homeland for scholarly pursuits. Her diverse experiences range from writing poetry and exhibiting paintings to participating in international conferences, covering a wide geographical and cultural spectrum. This study explores the connection between literature and her various journeys, particularly focusing on “travel literature”, a subfield of literary tourism studies that often revolves around themes related to waterscapes.

Siti Zainon Ismail was born on 18 December 1949 in Gombak, Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Her early education at Setapak Primary School, Kuala Lumpur and Langgar Primary School, Kota Bharu, Kelantan (1956, 1957-1961) and then to Aminudin Baki Secondary School (SAB), Kuala Lumpur (1962-1968). Her arts interest started when she began to learn *batik* drawing (a technique of waxing and dyeing) when she was in Kota Bharu. While at SAB she was trained by the art teacher, Idris Haji Salam. Due to her interest in painting, she pursued her studies in fine arts at the Indonesian Art Institute (ASRI), majoring in Painting (1970-1973). She was regularly wins the Kartini Sketch Award (1970-1973). She also joined *Sanggar Dewata* and participated in exhibitions around Java. In February 1974 Siti Zainon Ismail returned to her homeland to work as an art trainer at the Ministry of Youth Culture and Sports (1974-1976). She worked as a Tutor at the National University of Malaysia (UKM, 1976) and graduated with a Master of Arts (UKM, 1980) and Ph. D from University of Malaya in 1992. She used to teach Cultural Heritage and literature at the Malay Language, Literature and Culture Centre, UKM. She has also been at Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA, UKM) as a Research Fellow (1995-1996); UKM Cultural Director (1996-1999) and also a Professor at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS, 2014-2016).

She is an active Malaysian female poet and painter. She often represents her country in poetry readings, painting exhibitions and cultural arts seminars throughout the country and also at the international level such as in the Philippines (1976); Bhopal, India (1985); West Berlin (1985, 2000); Seoul, South Korea (1986); Indonesia (Aceh, Bali, Jakarta, Jambi, Lombok, Makassar, Padang, Riau, Palembang, Yogyakarta 1983-1998); Thailand (1986, 1989, 1990). France (1986), Berlin (1986). London (1986, 1990, 1992); Australia (1993), Singapore (1990, 1995); Hamburg (2000) and Russia (2003). Her poems and short stories have been translated into various languages such as Bulgarian, Hindi, English, Korean, Urdu, Japanese, French, Thai and Russian. We could later how this settings, from local to global contributes such impact to her creative work, especially when we talk about literature, travel, tourism.

Researchers Rita Baleiro & Silvia Quinteiro (2018) reference earlier works by Richard Butler (1986) and D.C.D. Pocock (1992) in understanding the concept of “travel literature”. They suggest that the relationship between “literature” and “tourism” goes beyond mere “travel” and extends into various disciplines. This approach allows for diverse interpretations and meanings in literature.

Introducing “literary tourism” into the interdisciplinary field of comparative literature, as proposed by Jonathan Hart (2011), creates innovative spaces that were not initially foreseeable. In this context, literary tourism uses methods and approaches that provide interpretations bridging the gap between a work and its readers. It may also involve practical methods for text interpretation, including elements like space, literary settings, author biographies, cultural-historical contexts, local characters, and geography (both physical and human).

It is noteworthy how a literary journey, character development, and creativity can lead to the creation of a literary atlas that presents the artistic and character-driven depiction of a region or country. This becomes a discourse that is “real” and not limited to fictional or creative exploration in works.

Rita Baleiro and Silvia Quinteiro (2018) also suggest several considerations in their research on literary tourism, including:

- i. The concept of literature (narration, characters, and settings).

- ii. The concept of tourism (destinations, experiences, and tourists).
- iii. The intersection of literature and tourism (literary tourists and literary settings).
- iv. The outcomes of literature and the author (geographical settings, literary works, and author biographies).

This article refers to several short stories by Siti Zainon Ismail which were self-published under Galeri Melora, Siti’s independent publication company – namely, *Kampung Paya Kami* (1998), *Nyanyian Orang Laut* (2000) and *Piazza Di Spagna* (2005). In her retrospect, if these works were self-published, she would have the “authority” or “power” in choosing the short stories she wished to publish. Beyond that, it would not be necessary for her to go through elimination processes by editors, but instead, her works would be conveyed to her readers as they are. Each of the short stories mentioned are travelogues, documenting her journey to the Riau Islands and even flew further to Southern Europe, Italy – two of the most popularly sought countries by world travellers. Several common tourism statistics, for le, show Italy’s ranking among the top five countries visited in 2022 (Statista, 2023; World Atlas, 2023; World Population Review, 2023).

Typical in her works, a distinctive yet thought-provoking location usually sets the backdrop for Siti’s stories – which then sparks active exchanges of dialogues and conversations, potentially becoming a catalyst for readers to:

- i. visit and deeply appreciate the localities presented,
- ii. protect and conserve the localities mentioned as heritage sites, and
- iii. conduct literature analysis as a productive post-activity after the visit.

Finally, from these unique settings and distinctive localities, literary spaces are created which allow for the convergence of the author’s thoughts through characters with what is contained in the reader’s reflections. This could possibly be what Jonathan Hart referred to as innovative spaces and the intersection between disciplines that can be linked with the variety of literary tourism.

2. Discussion

2.1 *Kampung Paya Kami (1998) – A Short Story Collection*

This collection consists of three short stories:

- “Kampung Paya Kami” (Our Kampung Paya)
- “Jurai Palma” (Palm Trees Ravelling)
- “Daun Maple Akhir” (The Last Maple Leaf)

Through the short story “Kampung Paya Kami”, it leaves readers with a huge sense of nostalgia. With its fictive setting, “Kampung Paya” (literally translated as Swampy Village) becomes an idiosyncratic reference, not only expressed through her short stories, but beyond that, Kampung Paya, too, lives vividly in her poetry works such as *Kasih Bonda: Kampung Paya Kami* (DBP, 2008). This poetry collection has been translated into English with its English title – *Bonda’s Love: Our Kampung Paya* and also in Russian (ITBM, 2010).

Siti Zainon Ismail begins “Kampung Paya Kami” with an argument and a conflicting tone on the shift in the physical state of Kampung Paya through time:

Bayangkan sahaja kalau nenek masih hidup. Percayakah dia melihat kampung halamannya tidak kampung lagi. Melihat sungai telah kehilangan fungsi. Mana pohon sukun dengan batangnya yang melebihi dua pemeluk lelaki perkasa. Mana pohon ciku dengan akarnya saling melingkar dan melata ke kepala tangga.

[Just imagine if Grandma was still alive. Do you think she’d believe her hometown is no longer a village like she used to know? Seeing that the river has lost its functions. Where are the *sukun* (breadfruit) trees with trunks that exceed the embrace of two strong men? Where are the *ciku* (sapodilla) trees with their roots interwoven, snaking towards the head of the stairs?] (Siti Zainon Ismail, 1998: 1)

“Kampung Paya” has changed its name to “Kampung Banda Dalam,” which borders Kampung Padang Balang (Kasih Bonda, 2008: x); it is located at the border between the Selangor state and Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. In most of Siti Zainon Ismail’s biographical writings, “Bandar Dalam” is spelled as “Banda Dalam.” As expressed in the book *Rumah Waris Uwan: Membaca Peta Kuala Lumpur*

(2013), Siti Zainon Ismail deliberately explains the name and actual spelling of “Kampung Banda Dalam”, instead of “Bandar Dalam” in the “Writer’s Note” of the book,

In this book, I corrected the spelling from “Bandar” to “Banda.” “Banda” in old Malay and Minang-Negeri Sembilan (Bonda) means a waterway. Hence, “Banda Dalam” means a deep-water channel, especially during the occurrence of a major flood caused by the overflow of the Gombak River into our village, making it resemble a swamp. This is the life that has been documented in “Kasih Bonda Kampung Paya Kami” (DBP, 2008). Some place names like “Banda Hilir” in Melaka and “Banda Acheh” have retained their original spelling [sic].

The correction of the place name spelling also brings to our attention the changes and encroachments that have occurred in the villages surrounding the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Names like Kampung Baru, Kampung Keramat, Kampung Pandan, and even Kampung Banda Dalam face obstacles due to development and land encroachment, including road construction and development pressures.

“Kampung Paya” was given its name, according to Siti Zainon, after the occurrence of a flood in their village which was so severe that the entire area of the village became sloppy, resembling a swamp (2008, 2013). “Paya” (swamp) is an area of marshy land (inundated with water) that is covered with various types of vegetation, including wetlands. It is also an area of marshy land used for planting rice or paddy fields (PRPM, 2023).

Latiff Mohidin, a Malay poet contemporaneous with Siti Zainon Ismail, was also known for using *rawa* (fens) or *paya* (swamps) as a setting in his poetry collection *Rawa-rawa* (1992) – which literally means “fens”. In the following excerpt, observe how the poem, with the same title, is described by the writer:

Rawa-rawa paya yang pekat kelam
Mataku ini tidak akan kulelapkan

[The dark, dense marshes of the swamp
I will not let my eyes fall asleep]

These two lines were repeated thrice out of the 20 lines in Latiff's short poem.

"Rawa" means a marsh or a swamp. It is also described as an area inundated with water, overgrown with various plants (PRPM, 2023). In relevance with the theme of waterscapes, Latiff Mohidin, too, had published his monumental poem titled *Sungai Mekong* [Mekong River] (1966). It is impressive how the persona of the longest river in Southeast Asia, the 7th longest in Asia and the 12th longest in the world, became an inspiration and a creative reference to a poet. The Mekong River has a length of approximately 4,350 km. About three-fourths of the drainage area of the Mekong lies within the four countries the river traverses on its lower course – Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Britannica, 2023). These settings – from the Mekong River to even mentioning Niagara Falls, become a point of interest and beckons the reader to explore them.

It is also captivating how in her works, Siti Zainon Ismail made use of the setting of "banda" in old Malay and Minang-Negeri Sembilan, referring to waterways. Partly it reflects her Minang background as well. "Banda Dalam" refers to a deep-water channel which was caused by a great flood which overflowed from Gombak River to her village, resulting in the village turning into a swampy area. For certain reasons, Siti Zainon Ismail delivers her criticism about development in her country. Most of the floods or flash floods occur frequently in Kuala Lumpur is because of the monsoon and heavy rainfall. On top of that is because of the stream and land use; hefty siltation of rivers, deforestation and rapid urbanization (Nur Fazillah Muhamed Noordin, 2007)

Concerns have been raised by various parties regarding the "paya" (swamp) landscape, particularly in relation to environmental conservation. For instance, when the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) and the Malaysian Green Foundation (YHM) planted approximately 300 mangrove trees in the Mangrove Recreational Park, Kampung Sijangkang, Teluk Panglima Garang, Selangor, Malaysia as part of the Mangrove Reforestation Program. This initiative also involved nearly 70 participants from the MTC and the community of the recreational park on March 27, 2022. It aimed to support Malaysia's Greening Program through the Plant 100 Million Trees Campaign. Previously, more than 235 trees of

various species were planted in Cempaka Lake Park, Bangi, Selangor (Yayasan Hijau Malaysia, 2022).

Meanwhile, according to Firuza Begham Mustafa (2008), Malaysia, as a tropical country with diverse types of forests, boasts mangrove forests as one of its key ecological features. Mangrove forests are composed of unique tree species found in shallow coastal areas and muddy river estuaries. What sets the mangrove forest landscape apart is its historical significance in plant communities that have been a crucial part of human life (Lugo & Snedaker, 1974). For instance, research by Walsh (1977) focused on the resilient roots of rhizophora trees that withstand the coastal environment.

In essence, the swamp setting incorporated in Siti Zainon Ismail's short stories widened the perspective and understanding of "perairan" (waterscapes) into the realms of tourism and literature. Indeed, "paya" (swamps) can also be a source of attraction. In Malaysia, wetland-based recreational parks such as Paya Indah Wetland in Dengkil, Selangor (2023), and Pantai Paya in Pulau Tioman (2023), have been developed as examples of this.

Beyond reading stories situated in villages serving as Malay heritage sites, these villages should be conserved and protected (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2013, 124-12), potentially marketed as tourist attractions. Kuala Lumpur's tourism should not only be marketed for its cosmopolitan attractions, but also a blend of tradition and hometown charm, as found in literary works by Siti Zainon Ismail herself. In 2022, Kuala Lumpur hosted a significant number of domestic tourists, approximately 16.9 million (Dagang.news.com, 2023). These tourists can explore nearby villages to experience the local culture and heritage.

In "Kampung Paya Kami", the character "Aku" ("I", first-person pronoun) laments on their loss and longing for the memories made in the village, while comparing to the current surroundings they are in. For example:

lebih-lebih lagi kerinduan itu terjadi kala aku menyusur lorong-lorong kota jauh di perantauan di negara asing. Melihat jejaran pohon-pohon *mulbury* yang sedang dilanda angin musim luruh dengan batangnya yang hitam pekat, angin yang mendesah sesekali dilibasi renyai-renyai hujan, aku semakin diusik untuk menembusi masa lalu yang tak satu pun surut dari ruang harianku.

[moreover, this yearning intensifies when I wander through the streets of a foreign city far from home. Observing the rows of mulberry trees being swayed by the autumn wind with their dark, robust trunks, and the occasional sigh of drizzling rain, I am further compelled to delve into a past that never retreats from my daily existence.] (Siti Zainon Ismail, 1998:3-4)

In line with the Kampung Banda Dalam's 150th anniversary in 2020, Siti Zainon collaborated with villagers in documenting the Letter of Declaration *Kampung-kampung Tradisi Melayu* as a Malay Heritage Village, officially established in 1916 as a land specially allocated for the Malays. In *Dalam Kasih Bonda: Kampung Paya Kami*, Kampung Paya Kami paints the "Malay world," notably through three aspects: the architecture of houses, customs, and the local community's economy (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2017).

2.2 Nyanyian Orang Laut (2000) – A Short Story Anthology

This short story anthology was written alongside A. Rahmad. The title of this anthology, *Nyanyian Orang Laut* (karya Latar Kepulauan Riau) foreshadows the setting of its short stories, situated in the Riau Islands. Two short stories written by A. Rahmad were *Puteri Daik Lingga* (The Princess of Daik Lingga) and *Mencari Pulau* (Searching for the Island). Meanwhile, three short stories by Siti Zainon Ismail were:

- "Dari Pulau ke Pulau" (From Island to Island)
- "Nyanyian Orang Laut" (Song of the Sea Nomads)
- "Percik Buih Pulau" (Splashes of the Island's Foams)

Within these three short stories, a poem titled *Kepada Perempuan Laut* (To the Seawomen) was included.

In "Dari Pulau ke Pulau" the protagonist, "Dia" ("She"), encounters a man of the fourth generation, described as 'an artist, the creator of *Gurindam Dua Belas* (page 40).' This quickly centers the author and the reader's attention on the composition of Raja Ali Haji, the masterpiece *Gurindam Dua Belas* (Twelve *Gurindam*; "Gurindam" referring to a genre

of traditional Malay poetry) written in 1847. The significance of this work as *Syi'r al-Irsyadi* lies in its didactic nature and its guidance toward the Eternal Realm. It is enriched with knowledge and character values (Kartini Anwar, 2008). For example, a passage from its first stanza,

Barang siapa tiada memegang agama,
sekali-kali tiada boleh dibilangkan nama.
Barang siapa mengenal yang empat,
maka ia itulah orang yang ma'rifat.
Barang siapa mengenal Allah,
suruh dan tegahnya tiada ia menyalah.
Barang siapa mengenal diri,
maka telah mengenal akan Tuhan yang bahri.
Barang siapa mengenal dunia,
tahulah ia barang yang teperdaya.
Barang siapa mengenal akhirat,
tahulah ia dunia mudarat.

[Whosoever to his faith holds not,
Is a man whose name will be forgotten
Whosoever understands these four,
Truly stands among the knowers.
Whosoever has knowledge of The One,
Command, forbid: he will not turn.
Whosoever has knowledge of self,
Has knowledge of Allah, azza wa jal.
Whosoever has knowledge of the life of this earth,
Knows it is a deception of no true worth.
Whosoever has knowledge of the Afterlife,
Knows this world is profitless strife.] (Raja Ali Haji, 2003)

By following these excerpts from the *Gurindam*, readers are drawn into the emotion of visiting the realm of Raja Ali Haji, namely Pulau Penyengat or Penyengat Island. Being in front of his grave can further intensify their excitement. There is a layered reading experience to follow, such as reading about the biography of this figure, exploring more about *Gurindam Dua Belas*, or delving into other renowned works like *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk* (1847), *Tuhfat al Nafis* (1865), *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis* (1890) (Abdul Malik, 2014). This illustrates how visiting a location can broaden and deepen one's literary exploration, making it more critical and delving into spiritual realms as well.

Siti Zainon Ismail directly presents Pulau Penyengat in this short story as a “tourist attraction” (page 44, 47), but with a friction when a “rombongan Tionghua” (Chinese entourage) arrives at the “kebun bunga” (floral garden) on the island. The author imagines that there is a concern with the arrival of outsiders on Pulau Penyengat. It is a small island located approximately six kilometers from Tanjung Pinang, the administrative center of the Riau Islands Province, Indonesia. It is close to several other islands, including Batam, Rempang, and Galang. It also serves as one of the tourist destinations in the Riau Islands (Satellite Image of the Distribution of the Cultural Heritage of Pulau Penyengat, 2023).

Pulau Penyengat, with its attractive sites often visited by pilgrims, includes the Sultan Riau Grand Mosque (with its legend that the mosque’s architecture was put together with egg whites), royal tombs, the Sultan’s Palace complex, and the defence fortifications at Bukit Kursi. Pulau Penyengat and its palace complex have been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Riau Archipelago, 2023). In the realm of Islamic tourism within the framework of “halal tourism,” as proposed by Tri Yuniningsih, Ari Subowo & Susi Sulandari (2021), Pulau Penyengat leads the percentage of tourist arrivals.

With the location of Raja Ali Haji Maritime University (UMRAH) in Tanjung Pinang, named after the revered scholar and writer Raja Ali Haji, Professor Dr. Abdul Malik at UMRAH has conducted extensive research and writing about Raja Ali Haji (Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, 2023). All of these contribute to the continued preservation of Raja Ali Haji as an institution in the field of travel literature, branching out into various other fields such as history and education.

In the short story collection *Nyanyian Orang Laut*, lively dialogues often connect foreign settings with Riau. The footsteps of literature captivate the reader, as the characters’ movements meander. The character “Aku” (“I”, a first-person pronoun), as a *flâneuse*, moves through the narrative like a *dérive*, traversing across the ocean or rare stories. For example, the couple Ariffée Khan-Margie in “Nyanyian Orang Laut” are portrayed as researchers delving into the scholarly works of L.Y. Andaya and John Nieuhoff about the Riau Archipelago. Siti Zainon, in her “nostalgic-comparative” style, captivates pilgrims by inter-

secting thoughts, behaviors, and conclusions with the places she visits. Thus, as readers, we transcend many map boundaries, journeying to places like Bulang, Tumasik [sic], Palembang, Borobudur, and Jakarta.

Within the realm of psychogeography, a closer examination reveals how Siti Zainon Ismail actively engages with the contours and lines of the geographical space within her narrative territory, marked by various literary signposts. In their analysis of Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf’s poetry, Shah Khaidzir, Hashim & Md Yusof (2021) highlight the concept of “awakening.” The author’s response to the clash between the past and the present, and how it transforms into contemplation as a *flâneur*. Siti Zainon Ismail actively undertakes this process in her short stories. She aligns with the perspective of Rita Baleiro and Silvia Quinteiro (2018), which is decidedly supportive, that is,

Seemingly distant, literature and tourism are undoubtedly close: they both provide leisure time (Mansfield, 2015: 19), they imply acts of self-discovery and learning, and they offer unforgettable moments. All these have contributed to an increase of literary tourism, which, in turn, has intensified the interest in this interdisciplinary research.

Through reading the *Nyanyian Orang Laut* collection, it is as if we are travelling together with the writer, through dialogues on literature heritage which sparks deep reflections. One of the key aspects explored in Siti Zainon Ismail’s work is what Raja Ali Haji conveys through his Gurindam (traditional Malay poetry) and his major works; remains worthy to be continuously investigated and embraced.

This study draws from previous research, such as how the coastal fishing village of Sedili in Kota Tinggi, Johor, inspired the poetry of Usman Awang, the third National Laureate of Malaysia (1983). Often using the pen name “Tongkat Warrant” in his poetry, this folk poet wrote poems like *Kuala Sedili*, amongst others, which resonate with a humanistic tone (Lim Swee Tin, 1999). On the other hand, Rahman Shaari elevates this figure as a humanist poet, providing an example with Usman Awang’s poem titled *Kemanusiaan* (Humanity) (Salam Benua, 1982: x). Similarly, in the “Pendahuluan” (Introduction) of *Anak Jiran Tionghua: 50 Sajak Perpaduan dan Keamanan* (Chinese Neighbor’s Child: 50 Poems of Unity and

Harmony), Syed Hussin Ali notes that many noble values can be derived from Usman Awang's poems, with the three most important being humanity, justice, and unity (page ix).

Mawar Safei's study in 2021 positions the poet Usman Awang as a figure in Malaysian literary tourism, taking into consideration his background and birthplace in Kuala Sedili, Kota Tinggi, Johor. Even though the site of his birthplace no longer exists, the essence of Sedili, represented by the Sedili River, the fishing village, and Sekolah Kebangsaan Sedili Besar, still echoes with memories and the legacy of Usman Awang. Moreover, in his honor, two schools have been established, namely Sekolah Kebangsaan Dato' Usman Awang in Kampung Kota Kechil, Kota Tinggi, and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Dato' Usman Awang (originally Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Perling, Johor Bahru). Additionally, "Jalan Dato Usman Awang" in Tanjung Sedili stands as a literary landmark associated with Usman Awang's works, a heritage that should be preserved. This argument is also reflected in Siti Zainon Ismail's short story set in Pulau Penyengat, Riau.

2.3 *Piazza Di Spagna (2005) – A Short Story Collection*

Three short stories are included in this collection, with each story accompanied by a poem, with intertexts from the respective plot and setting of the stories. The three characters – Nik, Azalea and Veera are in love across all three short stories, namely:

- "Potret Azalea" (Azalea's Potrait)
- "Bulan Madu Piazza Di Spagna" (Honeymoon in Piazza Di Spagna)
- "Konserto Musim Bunga" (A Concert in Spring)

Piazza Di Spagna, the setting, is also the title for this collection. It is a famous tourist hub in the capital of Italy, Rome. This story is situated at the Spanish Steps with two towers rising at the top. Meanwhile, on the square, there is a round fountain, the Fontana della Barcaccia, inspired by Pietro Bernini and his son, Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

The first short story, "Potret Azalea" (1986), initially takes place in Piazza Di Spagna or the "Spanish

Steps" (page 6), where Nik paints his picture and reminisces about Azalea. It then shifts to the Arno River in Florence (page 8), the setting for Nik and Veera's first meeting. Through the notes in "Sekilas Rasa" (Writer's Notes), Siti Zainon gives us an idea of a love story obstructed by family, involving Nik and Azalea. Nik then goes to Italy as a painter and encounters Veera. Siti Zainon also admits in her blog notes that this short story was written before her arrival in Rome, Italy.

The second short story, "Bulan Madu Piazza Di Spagna", was crafted in April 2000. In the "Sekilas Rasa" (Writer's Notes) notes written on July 2, 2004, the author confesses,

Empat belas tahun kemudian, pada tahun 2000, baru saya dapat menjejak bumi impian itu. Saya jelajah Venezia, Firenze sampai ke Roma. Mencari Nik yang sudah terdampar di Napoli. Kubawa kembali Azalea, tiba di musim bunga bercanda di ayunan gondola dan bertemu di tangga Sepanyol – Piazza Di Spagna.

[Fourteen years later, in the year 2000, I finally set foot in that dreamland. I explored Venice, Florence, and all the way to Rome. Searching for Nik, who had found himself in Naples. I brought Azalea back, arrived during springtime, played on a gondola swing, and met at the Spanish Steps – Piazza Di Spagna.] (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2005)

Hence, as a reader, we are brought through Siti Zainon's traces of literature in Venezia (Venice), where Azalea obtained her education; Firenze (Oron River in Florence), where Nik and Veera first met, and Rome as the main setting for *Piazza Di Spagna*.

Siti Zainon Ismail includes a map sketch on the book cover in this collection. The map, "La rete Eurostar Italia", represents the travel route of high-speed trains in Italy. There are brief notes added by the author, mentioning the date and time spent in a specific location. For example, when arriving in Treviso (near Venice), her note reads "from Zurich by train 10 pm-7 am (March 31 – April 1, 2000) with her husband." This reflects the wanderer's attitude of Siti Zainon Ismail, serving as a *flâneuse*, observing, contemplating, and noting her experiences. There might also be a continuation of her reading, something initiated before embarking on her journey. After

returning from the distant journey, there is still more continuous reading, contemplation, interspersed with note-taking, and eventually the creative work takes shape, drawing from the inspiration that lingered throughout her exploration. This is how the steps of creative work are traced. It mirrors the journey of literary and travel exploration which we would experience when the collection *Piazza Di Spagna* is in our hands.

The writer builds the plot with Azalea being an art history student who furthers her study at Akademia Arsitekturium in Venezia (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2005:22). Similarly, Nik is a visual artist who incorporates Rome a lot in his paintings. These two backgrounds of the characters became an opportunity for Siti Zainon Ismail to situate the plot in every part of Italy. From the east of Venice to the borders of South Napoli. Hence, readers are brought to “experience” various artworks by Baroque, deepening their knowledge on the architecture history of Spanish Steps in 1725 by De Santis [sic] (Francesco De Sanctis) dan Spechi [sic] (Alessandro Specchi) (Siti Zainon Ismail, 2005:20).

The readers follow Azalea’s specific tasks to fulfil such as outlining Colosseo, Campidoglio, La Torre de Pisa or Ponte de Rialto. There is an attraction for us to explore all these settings, and there is an adventurous spirit that we want to get closer to. According to statistics (WorldData, 2019), tourist arrivals in Italy include visits to these places. Rome is the top city visited by international tourists, with a total of 10.32 million (Figure 1). The Colosseo, or Colosseum, is a major attraction (Tripsavvy, 2023).

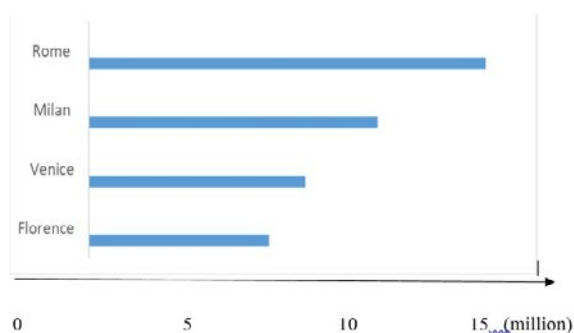


Figure 1. Statistics of Tourist Arrivals to Italy (2019). Source: Dream Big, Travel Far (2023)

This short story collection strengthens past findings with regards to the position of travel literature which opens doors to other various fields. As such, reading three short stories with Italy as their setting would offer a reading experience that transcends architecture and artworks, but also gastronomy, music and waterscapes.

The focus of Silvia Quinteiro (2023) and Mawar Safei (2021)’s studies on travel literature, specifically on waterscapes, generally finds significant meanings to be analysed. flow with emotional impact on the spiritual connection and love story of Nik and Azalea. According to Silvia Quinteiro,

Water contains multiple layers of meaning. It is associated with purification, the washing away of sins, rebirth. Water is an emblem of flow, fluidity, movement, transition, change. Water refreshes, regenerates, vitalises. Water is life itself! As such, there is no wonder it has been a symbol in the literary works of all times, appearing in a variety of shapes: ocean, sea, river, lake, waterfall, rain and many more. Water itself travels through time and space and is shaped by tangible and intangible heritage, changing landscapes and the ways we see the world. (Quinteiro, S., 2023)

Siti Zainon writes in her sketches,

Senja hampir gerimis
Gondola masih menunggu
...
Kami masih mereguk
Kopi akhir
Menyambut nyanyian takdir

[Dusk is almost drizzling
The gondola is still waiting
...
We are still grumbling
Final coffee
welcome the song of destiny]

She is still weaving the image of canal (by “gondola”) with the “drizzling” and as well as the “dusk”. There is a strong pathetic fallacy technique. Waterscapes is not only about physical canal or in previous short stories related to swamplands and ocean, but “water” flows together with the characters’ emotion.

sustainability, much like the majority of buildings in Rome, especially in Venice. In the end, from the pilgrimage experience, literary works are further examined and scrutinized with greater diligence and accountability.

This article specifically examines how Siti Zainon Ismail is involved in the lines and the map of the setting and spatial narrative territory with some markers and literary traces. The setting and theme of waterscapes are developed through the imagery and the title of swamps, seas, and canals. The author portrays the spirit of preserving the heritage of Kampung Paya and the literature of Raja Ali Haji within the framework of psychogeography. Then, during the exploration of different locations by crossing space and time, the author and the reader both experience a deeper inner understanding through the portrayal of characters as pilgrims, as seen in the fate of Nik and Azalea. It's true that Rumi quotes that the condition of a pilgrim of love is to be willing to become dust and ashes. Finally, understanding the essence of travel through reading between the short stories in Siti Zainon Ismail's collection leads us on various paths of contemplation towards the Divine, and not merely focusing on income and profit.

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