

# Between Shifting Place and Shifting Privilege: A Comparative Study of World, Other, and Self in *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* and *Barbie* (2023)

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**Abstract.** *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* and *Barbie* (2023) are two narratives from two different parts of the world but have similarities and uniqueness in the aspect of the journey of their characters. The first presents the main characters who travel from the world to the realm of the jinn, while the second travels from a world dominated by women to a patriarchal world. As travel writings that utilize movement through space, it is interesting to describe how the two narratives negotiate between the self, the other, and the world being reported. So far, previous research has been limited to the conception of jinn and gender and sexuality analysis, none have studied it by combining travel literature theory and comparative literature methods. Therefore, this study aims to examine the travel narratives in the two works related to Carl Thompson's travel literature theory. The results of the study show that the foreign world, the strange other, is related to self-formation. The self in both works can be influenced and form a romantic self, or unaffected and form a Cartesian self.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, old Malay literature, travel writing, *Tamīm Al-Dāri*, *Barbie*

## 1. Introduction

Traveling, in travel literature, often influences not just physical shifting but also mindset and emotions of its characters. Carl Thomson argues that travel writing maps not only literal journeys but also emotional and psychological ones, metaphorically described as journeys [1], [2]. Thompson's theory outlines three main aspects of travel writing: Reporting the world, representing the other, and revealing the self [1].

In Arabic speaking world and regions influenced by Arab culture, travel writing is not a new genre. Travel literature existed even before Islam, during the Jahiliyyah era, as seen in pre-Islamic poetry describing experiences and feelings during travels. An early Islamic example is *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* recounting the travels of Medina to the Jinn world, encountering various unimaginable creatures.

On the other hand, in contemporary times, travel narratives continue to evolve. For instance, the 2023 film *Barbie*, which broke box office records with \$1.44 billion in earnings, tells the story of Barbie and Ken's journey from Barbie Land to the real world. Over seven previous studies have analyzed *Barbie* (2023), mainly focusing on gender and sexuality, such as works by Meidy [3], Mulyani [4], Alfiyanti [5],

Firmansyah [6], Parulian [7], Syarifudin [8], and Wicaksono [9]. From the literature review it can be concluded that there has been no research comparing the two works from a travel literature perspective. Therefore, this study aims to examine the travel narratives in the two works related to Carl Thompson's travel literature theory.

This study hypothesizes that the two works, although originating from two different cultures, have the same travel literature formula consisting of world reporting, other representation, and self-disclosure.

## 2. Method

The method used by researchers in this research is descriptive analytics with a comparative literature approach. *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* and the film *Barbie* (2023) are compared to find out how the self, others and the world are narrated by the two works. The data collection technique was carried out by collecting library data, reading and noting important things, and processing research material based on the reading of *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* and the film *Barbie* (2023) as material objects. The data was then analyzed using travel literature theory by Carl Thompson with stages: the first is analyzing how the world is reported, the second stage is analyzing how others are represented, and the third stage is how the self is revealed.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Reporting the World

World reporting in travel literature generally contains news about the wider world which functions to disseminate information about people and places that are not widely known. Thompson stated that the real world and the world in travel writing are mediated by the traveler's perception and the traveler's act of writing [1]. In the *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri*, the world that is reported is a description of Tamīm Al-Dāri's journey to mystical and magical places. Tamīm Al-Dāri was taken by the Genie Kafir Ifrit to the fourth layer of earth, then various extraordinary incidents and events occurred, such as encounters with genies and strange creatures.

Tamīm Al-Dāri then entered, he saw a man who was big and long, about as high as the sky, blind in one eye and full of chains all over his body from his neck down to his feet, and it was like that forever." [10]

The reported world is a world full of oddities and supernatural phenomena that give travelers insight into places that go beyond reality in the real world. Apart from that, world reporting is also found when Tamīm traveling to unusual places such as the land of the jinn, the devil's island, an island inhabited only by women, a majestic city with seven layers of doors, a green city, and a beautiful magical land, as in the following quote.

"So he came to a city that was very beautiful in appearance and the gate was made of seven layers of Khurasani iron. ... After that, he entered the cave. He saw that inside the cave there was a very beautiful house with many jewels in it." [10].

Tamīm found a beautiful house with a throne decorated with gold and jewels belonging to the Prophet Sulaiman. This description provides a picture of the outside world that Tamim's character has never visited before in the real world.

Similar to the experience felt by Tamim Ad-Dari, travel writing in the film *Barbie* (2023) also distorts the world. The traveler is living in with the world the traveler has just discovered. Barbie and Ken as travelers who travel from the world of Barbie (Barbie Land) to the real world (Real World) report a world that is different from their place of origin. Barbie Land is a perfect world with women dominating various fields. This world is very inversely proportional to the real world visited by the characters Barbie and Ken, namely a world that is not perfect and women are subordinate to male power.

"Everything is almost like ... reversed here". [11].

Barbie reports that the real world is drastically different from Barbie Land. The place that supports women in Barbie Land becomes very male-dominated in the real world. Ken, who is also experiencing the real world for the first time, admits that everything feels upside down. The comparison of the two worlds in the two works both show a world that is different from his home world. If Tamīm and Barbie see it as worse than their home world, Ken is the opposite.

### **3.2 Representing the Other**

Othring involves distinguishing oneself from others, often with a hierarchical (level of importance) aspect [1], [2]. The "other" in *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* refers to a variety of beings and things that stand for both good and evil energies. Because Tamīm Al-Dāri was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, for instance, a character has a great deal of regard for him and wants to take care of him so that he can obtain intercession.

Islamic jinn are portrayed in the hikayat as obedient and amiable creatures who even defend Allah's cause by serving as truth-bearers in a world full of evil. On the other hand, the story introduces Ifrit jinn, animals with one blind eye and elephant-like trunks, and the character Dajjal, who all stand in for forces of evil and deceit.

The hikayat portrays Islamic jinn as faithful and friendly beings, even fighting for Allah's cause as bearers of truth in a world of darkness. In contrast, the narrative

features Ifrit jinn, creatures with elephant-like trunks and one blind eye, and the figure of Dajjal, all representing forces of evil and deception.

"And he said, 'My work today has been to make people kill others.' ... 'My work today has been to incite adultery.' ... 'My work today has been to separate a husband and wife.'" [10, pp. 22–23].

In this quote, Tamīm Al-Dāri meets a creature whose mouth is like an elephant's trunk and whose eyes are blind in one eye, representing the other as a symbol of evil and sin which is contrary to the religious and moral values held by Tamīm Al-Dāri in the real world. The actions of these others illustrate how far they are from the right path according to Tamīm.

Apart from that, the appearance of strange creatures with animal characteristics such as a pregnant dog whose womb can bark as well as figures such as Sahar, Barhis, a rich woman but lamenting her luck, a man who fills a pot with a hole, the Prophet Khidr and angels provide a spiritual and mystical dimension. The story represents a world full of supernatural entities that play a role in Tamīm Al-Dāri's life journey.

In the film *Barbie* (2023), the concept of "othering" is reflected in Barbie's perception to the real-world characters such as the CEO of Mattel, Mattel employees, Ruth Handler, Sasha, and Sasha's mother. Barbie views the CEO of Mattel as a symbol of capitalist power treating her as a commercial product. She finds the Mattel employees incompetent in creating products relevant to real-world needs and aspirations. Barbie criticizes the existing system at Mattel and believes the company should be held accountable for the chaos it causes.

"I've gotta talk to somebody in charge. Everything is backwards here. Men look at me like I'm an object. Girls hate me. Everyone thinks I'm crazy, and I keep getting arrested" [11].

The quote describes the interaction of the Barbie character with the characters from the company that created her, which shows the process of othering. The Barbie character reacts by criticizing the competence of the characters from the company in creating products that are relevant to women, as well as the capitalist and patriarchal systems that are detrimental to women. The Barbie character also meets the character Ruth as a historical figure who created Barbie, as well as human figures who played with Barbie dolls during her childhood, namely Sasha and her mother, Gloria.

### **3.3 Revealing the Self**

Carl Thompson stated that the Cartesian self is a distanced self that seeks useful knowledge from travel. In contrast, the Romantic self not only observes but

also reacts to its surroundings, more open to changes due to travel [1], [2]. In the *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri*, the journey full of wonder and mystery does not change Tamīm Al-Dāri 's fundamental identity and personality. He still misses his wife and children and remembers the grave of the Prophet. Despite facing supernatural entities and trials, he remains steadfast as a devout servant of Allah and a friend of the Prophet.

"Then he cried because he remembered the grave of the Messenger of Allah, Peace be Upon Him, he became aware of his country, and he longed for his wife and children." [11].

Her identity and beliefs remain consistent, even as she gains new knowledge and insights from her adventures. Consequently, one may classify Tamim Ad-Dari's character as a Cartesian representation of the self. Barbie's excursion into the real world, on the other hand, causes a significant shift in her personality and perspective in the 2023 movie *Barbie*. After the adventure, Barbie, who was formerly self-assured and optimistic, becomes emotional and fragile.

Barbie's excursion into the real world has undermined her confidence and caused emotions of uncertainty, as evidenced by her tears and vulnerable appearance during her chat with Gloria. She starts to doubt ideals of beauty and looks for her individuality outside of the clichés that have clung to her. The Romantic self is embodied by this.



**Figure 1. Conversation between Gloria and Barbie**  
(Source: *Barbie* 2023, Time Code: 01:13:12)

#### 4. Conclusion

In *Barbie* (2023), *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* describes a journey that includes reporting on the world, standing in for the other, and disclosing oneself. In contrast to Barbie and Ken's original universe, the movie *Barbie* (2023) depicts the male-dominated social structure of the real world, whereas *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* describes the odd and mysterious Jinn world. In *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri*, the other is represented by both good and bad supernatural beings, whereas in *Barbie*, the other is represented by human individuals that inhabit a patriarchal world and have different viewpoints on Barbie. Revealing self in *Hikayat Tamīm Al-Dāri* shows the steadfastness of Tamīm's identity and beliefs as a devout servant of God who does not change despite traveling to another world. In contrast, in *Barbie* (2023), Barbie

and Ken's journey triggers significant transformations in their personalities and perspectives as romantic selves.

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