

BOOK REVIEW

**TRAVEL POETRY BY NOR FARIDAH ABDUL MANAF, SILVERFISH BOOKS,
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*¹Mohd Fadhli Shah Khaidzir & ²Mafarhanatul Akmal Ahmad Kamal

¹ Pusat Pengajian Citra Universiti, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

² Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: cali.khaidzir@ukm.edu.my

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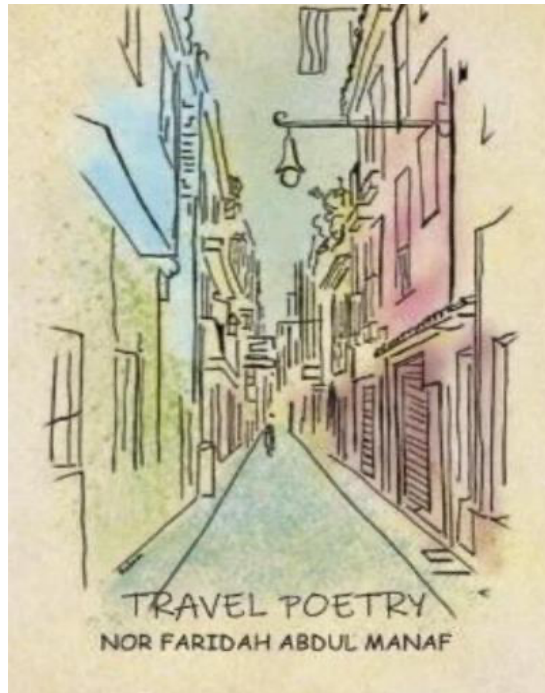
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ABSTRACT

Travel Poetry (2019) by Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf is a compilation of poems on places, people, and memories. These narrative writings are anecdotes that delves into the aesthetic appreciation of embarking on journeys and exploring places while establishing a profound connection to an individual's cultural heritage and roots. Faridah embellishes her travel experiences by providing a comprehensive portrayal of the places and individuals encountered along her journeys, leveraging the perspective of a Malay Muslim woman who has received a Western education. This book allows readers to experience travelling all over the world by reading her poems from one page to another while understanding Faridah's perspective and worldview as an individual. Through her works, Faridah effectively communicates the notion that even though individuals travel to explore different parts of the world, they ultimately find a sense of pride and connection to their own country and cultural heritage, which in the end helps to shape their personal identity. In short, *Travel Poetry* is not just a book of poems about travelling to different destinations around the world but also about how an individual's mind and action are moved by their destinations.

Keywords: Travel, place, people, heritage, journey.

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Imagine there's no poetry

No poets too

No inspiration

No imagination

No religion

No war

No happiness

No joy

No life.

(Imagine, 2019)

REVIEW

Travel Poetry is Nor Faridah's second published book on poetry, which consists of collections of poems written about places, people, and memories. This collection of poetry came after 13 years of success with her first collection of poems, *The Art of Naming* (2006). Nor Faridah used to be a professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the International

Islamic University Malaysia before retiring in early 2023. The poet was born in 1963 and received most of her academic degrees overseas, including in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Australia. As a creative writer who has published collections of poems, short stories, essays, and articles, she has been recognised with a number of accolades for the significant contributions she has made to the world of literature. Thus far, she has authored numerous literary works. The author's literary works, including her poetry and short stories, have been published in many countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Iran, and the United States of America. She has published two poetry books: *The Art of Naming: A Muslim Woman's Journey* (2006) and *Travel Poetry* (2019).

Keeping with the similar travel-themed poetry in her first book, readers are invited along into the travel experiences of Faridah as she explores places, interacts with people, and recalls memories, which form the basis for the inspiration of her poems. Like a journey, many of her poems are based on questions, hopes, and life issues that have made her journey meaningful in terms of the aesthetic sceneries and historical settings, as well as her journey towards understanding herself as a Muslim female Malay traveller to which she deeply identifies herself.

The book is divided into two sections of poetry: place and people, and memories, the elements that were captured by Faridah from her observation throughout her journey. Despite the segregation of sections in the book, the poems in both parts appear to have a strong sense of connection between the place and the people, with memories being the bridge that connects the two. Having said that, reading the book at its surface, readers will only be introduced to Faridah as a vivid traveller who writes poetry. However, upon further reading her thorough narratives and gaining a grasp of the thematic values contained within her poetry, it becomes clear that Faridah is not the ordinary average traveller that people normally have encountered.

Faridah records the disconnection of relationships between herself and the places through her depiction of understanding the places. Having travelled to these places and experienced the moment firsthand, Faridah expresses her authentic and spontaneous judgements on these places, giving readers her personal insight as a traveller. In the poem *Cold Reception*, she described Detroit as a place that does not represent the literal representation of the landscape. The lines “*This is not a friendly city/ You have a nice make-up/ but inside, I see steel*” (pp. 10) indicate that despite the beautiful aesthetic setting, the place did not resemble any form of emotion or personal attachment that the poet could make sense of. Her frustration with the overall experience can be seen in the poet's repetition of the name of the place “Detroit” three times in a line. Similarly, in the poem *Zurich*, Faridah addresses the lost bond

that she has with the place and the people there in the lines “*Nothing is cheap here/ not even a smile*” (pp. 77).

The theme of loss is also seen in some of the poems in this collection. Faridah has creatively and personally told the story of loss and longing through the memories of the place. In the poem *The Sky and I*, which was set in Faidherbe-Chalingy, Paris, she traces back the memories that she had with her late mother. This poem is among the writings of Faridah, in which she presents the use of nature and how it plays a significant role in remembrance of her loved ones. She described the details of the scenery so intricately that it allows her readers to be part of her narratives, walking down memory in the lines, “*the gentle breeze dances/around my feet/a few nights ago/they were full of mud/I had buried my feet/in sands*” (pp. 20). The poem reflects a strong bond that was established between the poet and her late mother, which has now been transferred to the natural surroundings that her late mother ‘lives’. Another poem that echoes the theme of loss can also be found in *Kolkata Dream*, which is a tribute to her late sister, Mek. The poem paid tribute to two places, one of which forms the landscape of her memories of her late sister. The poem mentioned Kolkata and Kota Damansara as the concreated geographical settings and a third landscape, which is the dream that she had. These three places are meaningful to Faridah as they are interconnected places filled meanings, memories and emotions. This can be interpreted as a symbol of reality and fantasy, of which the departure of a loved one will never return.

Another theme that can be found in Faridah’s travel poem is the importance of maintaining and reconstructing a place to restore its identity and history. Her message in the poems reflects the perspective of a traveller who understands the importance of a place’s identity in creating meaningful insights into people’s journeys. The poems *Sarajevo Hills, I left my heart in Samarkand, I left my heart in Tashkent, Kolkata*, and *The Sphinx* are examples of poems in which Faridah injected the value of maintaining and restoring the history and identity of a place. While some of the places mentioned in Faridah’s poems are unfamiliar or less travelled by some readers, she has successfully created a path for her readers to be inspired and mesmerised by the detailing of her narratives without having the need to be physically present at the places. At the same time, the messages of some of these poems are noticeably clear, which are to restore the history and civilization of the place against terrorism, urbanism, and other means that could erase the identity of the place. Lines found in the poems *Kolkata*, “*I actually see your beauty/ not in your new crawling buildings, malls and condos*” (pp. 29), and *I left my heart in Samarkand*, “*What you cannot buy, you cannot own*” (pp. 27), serve as a plea

and reminder from Faridah to the people of the places of the importance of valuing the worth of what the place brings in terms of its people, culture, tradition, and natural resources.

Faridah, through her travel narratives, reflects a responsible traveller who not only enjoys her experiences but went to great lengths to document and interpret her journey through these places in her poems. In doing so, her poems are evidence of detailed narratives of her exploration across the world, which can be used as references to places, creating a sense of attachment between the readers and the places mentioned in her poems. Reading Faridah's works allows her readers to understand the capability of a place to give specific experiences and memories to an individual. While Faridah's poems are both educational and entertaining, there are a few aspects that can be appreciated about her work. Her poems in this book display her effort to include her personal avowal to preserve and promote the places through her own memories and re-telling authentic travel experiences, which are the results of spontaneous occurrences against the modernisation of the world. This is supported by Mohd Fadhli Shah et al. (2021), in which Faridah's travel poems are seen as more than just representations of what the human senses can experience. Her words transcend human touch and have the ability to affect the mind and behaviour of the readers.

Overall, *Travel Poetry* is another personal journal that is simple in writing but is of great exposure to Faridah's personal journey and her aesthetic observation of places. Reading the notes from the poet section of his book, Faridah has indeed achieved her intention, which is to share her journey with her readers, and she hopes that her readers too will get to share their own journey with everyone. Reading the collection in *Travel Poetry*, Faridah has been able to showcase that her poems do not travel from one place to another but also travel across minds, memories, and cultures, with the capability of thinking beyond borders without any limitation. Her poems written during her travels are yet another best representation of Nor Faridah, besides her previous book, *The Art of Naming: A Muslim Woman's Journey* (2016), not only as a traveller but also as a means of projecting the positive principles gleaned from her observations of her surroundings to the readers through poetry.

REFERENCE

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