

Literary Studies

Students' Responses to Plot Device of Going/Trapped to Another World Seen in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Frank L Baum: Reading Interest and Popular Culture Knowledge

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A B S T R A C T

This study discusses the plot device of 'going/trapped to another world' as seen in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by Frank L. Baum about reading interest and popular culture knowledge by the students' responses from the English Department Universitas Andalas. It aims to find the correlation between their knowledge and interest in the plot device of 'going/trapped into another world' and the popularity of the Isekai genre among them. The result shows that the majority of the respondents were familiar with and interested in the genre, and the genre's ability to facilitate imaginative escapism, served as coping mechanism from real life challenges, it helps their opinion that the plot device remains popular and relevant in the future with strong confidence in its enduring appeal as relatable experiences become the primary reason for its popularity to stay in the pop culture world.

I. INTRODUCTION

The plot device of going or being trapped in another world is a concept that various authors have widely used in starting their narratives. The pattern of saying that the main character goes or is trapped in another world triggers conflict and the beginning of a narrative that usually revolves around a particular adventure or mission problem that must be completed. The story of going to another world is generally centered on the main character's efforts to return home to his original world.

In the repertoire of English-language literary works, the plot device to go or be trapped in another world is not something the literary author does not commonly use. Alice's Adventure in Wonderland (Carroll, 2008), published in 1865, tells the story of the journey of seven-year-old Alice into a rabbit hole and takes her to another world (or Wonderland). The novel highlights the plot device of going to another world and

signifies correlation to later discussion of *isekai* genre (Reka, 2022). Then in 1900, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1993), was released focusing on Dorothy's journey to return to Kansas after being carried away by the wind that brought her to the Land of Oz. These two works, which are stories intended for children, become one of the references in storytelling based on going or being trapped in another world in English literature.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is a children's novel released in 1900 by L. Frank Baum. This novel tells of Dorothy's efforts to return to her home in Kansas after the wind carried her to the Land of Oz using a plot device to go or be trapped in another world. In her quest to return, Dorothy meets other characters as friends and accompanies the journey and foes. In addition, Dorothy must face various obstacles with all the miracles that always occur in the Land of Oz. Lastly, Dorothy could return to her hometown but had to part with those who had accompanied her to help her return.

The children's story *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is one of the influential literary works to be studied in English literature. In the article entitled *Why Is the Wizard of Oz so Wonderful?* (Onion, 2021), it reveals that it is not the specific interpretation in the meaning of the work that makes this story interesting, but instead that this literary work is a benchmark for various American fantasies. *Oz*, as an entertaining literary work, has given American readers strength, friendship, and humanity even though it was intentional or unintentional by its author (Burger, 2009).

Plot devices trapped in another world have recently become a trend in various comics (*manga*) and animation releases originating from Japan (*anime*). The concept of going to another world is often referred to as *isekai* (異世界, translated as another world) (Pagan, 2019). Paul Price, in his article "A Survey of the Story Elements of *Isekai* Manga (2021)" revealed that there are four types of *isekai*, which are the main character entering through a portal, the main character entering without a portal, fantasy characters from another world entering the real world, and stories in the world. There is no clear boundary between the natural world and the other world, however some might see *Isekai* as utopian yearning of hopefulness, progress, and peace (Murakami, 2021). The trend of the *isekai* genre resulted in various pros and cons, so various story contests began prohibiting using the *isekai* plot device (Whalen, 2016). Meanwhile, a museum exhibition dedicated to *isekai* is opened to signify influence and popularity of the genre (Morrissy, 2021).

The plot device trapped in another world becomes relevant to be discussed and analyzed in literary studies related to students' knowledge and interest in reading. The plot device triggers whether a reader will continue reading or choose to stop due to whether or not the reader is interested in the concept of the main character starting a journey to another world to return to his original world. Students' exposure to this plot device is also a concern that needs to be studied, considering the recent popularity of the *isekai* genre in popular culture. Their knowledge of the *isekai* genre should accompany their understanding of plot devices trapped in another world. The relationship between plot device of 'going to/trapped in another world' and *Isekai* genre is not something different, as the concept are relatable and prominent in their respective fields (Appelgate, 2022) (Mark, 2020).

The interest in storytelling with plot devices of going/trapped in another world needs further exploration for students taking Prose courses. This search questions the interest in reading stories based on being trapped in another world and students' understanding of the development of a popular culture that takes the plot device as the main attraction. The reader's response to this plot device is needed because, as one of the popular genres, being trapped in another world is a concept that provokes critical thinking in storytelling. Can this plot device increase interest in other stories after reading the literary work, provoke their curiosity about other works, and explain why this genre has been popular lately even though it has been around for a long time.

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview and results of students' reading interest in a plot device or genre which is very widely used but has recently become a trend and is becoming popular again in student life exposed to the development of popular culture. It is hoped that students will further explore the narratives about being trapped in another world apart from literary works and other famous cultural works.

The popularity of the *isekai* genre and the plot device trapped in another world certainly impact the readers, viewers, or consumers of the text, both in terms of literacy interest and from a psychological perspective. We need to know not only as a cultural interest but also the ability to study the impact of genres and plot devices related to self-perception and social society, which tends to run away from reality (escapism) or vice versa, and we inevitably have to face that reality, how bitter it is.

This study uses a reader response approach because the research focuses on readers' reactions and responses (in this context, students of the English Literature Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas, who take the Prose course). In *Critical Theory Today*, (Tyson, 2015), reader response theorists believe that the reader's role in interpreting works cannot be separated, and the reader will not always be passive in interpreting the work because the reader participates in interpreting the work as the reading process. This sentiment is similar to the Deconstruction approach, which considers the author dead, and meaning is in the hands of the readers.

II. METHOD

The research method used in the research

on the plot device going to another world is a combination of quantitative methods and qualitative methods to accommodate the scope of research based on reader response and textual analysis of the genre and plot sets for going to another world. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study, considering that the research focuses on reading interest, genre knowledge, development of popular culture, and complex English mastery from the perspective of readers who are critical of studying a literary work.

Data collection was carried out with a focus group discussion on students of the English Studies Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas, who took the Prose course in the even semester of 2021-2022. The students of the Prose course come from classes B and D, whom the proponent of this research teaches. In addition to the FGD, data was also collected through filling out questionnaires that must be filled in by these students related to issues of plot devices, genre knowledge, knowledge of popular culture, and, most notably, whether or not there was an increase in reading interest related to the narrative formulation trapped in the other world. Communication is carried out directly (face-to-face through offline class implementation) and online because the pandemic still does not allow full implementation in the field. However, it does not reduce the validity of the data because the proposer is a lecturer in courses related to this research topic. The focus group discussion method and data collection through questionnaires are relevant to this study.

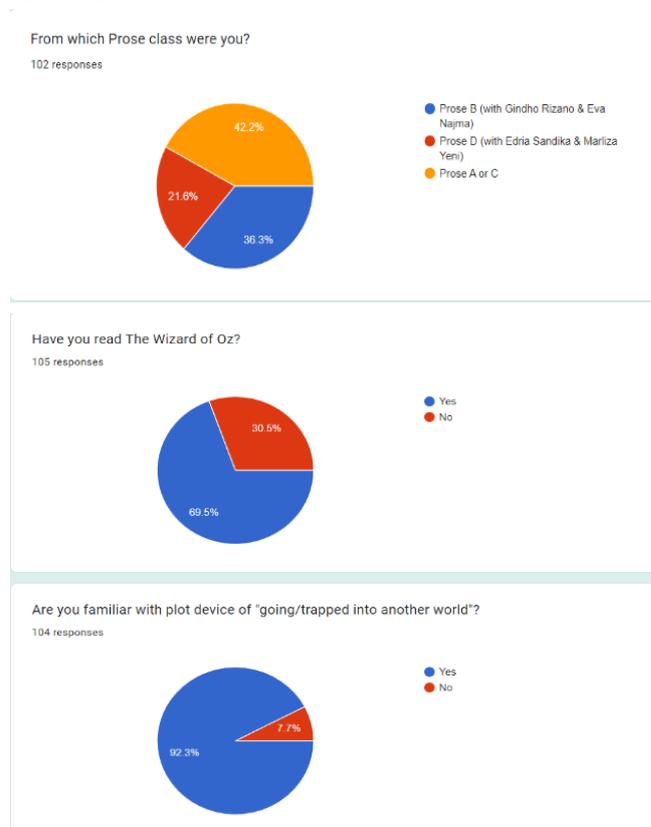
This research is participatory and requires active participation from both the proposer/researcher and the students. Research on literary works, genres, and the development of popular culture requires understanding the context, practice, and cultural experience under study. The development of popular culture does research that focuses on classical literature, pop culture, participants, and reading interest as a whole crucial.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

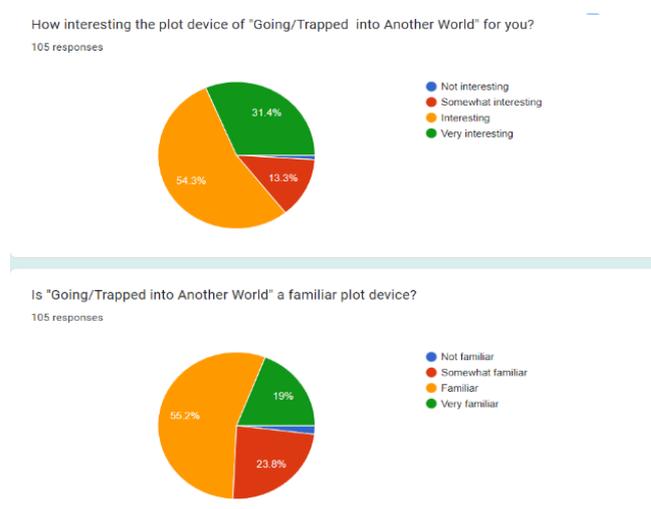
Results

Based on the data collected from the questionnaire, a comprehensive survey was conducted among 105 respondents who are students from various Prose classes during the even semester of 2021-2022. The results revealed a diverse range

of perspectives regarding the prevalence and popularity of the plot device 'going/trapped into another world'.



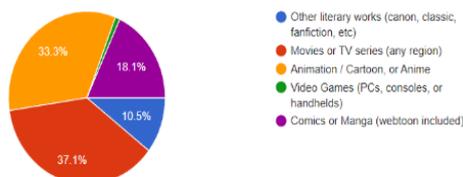
The respondents were distributed across four Prose classes, with 42.2% coming from Prose Class A and C, 36.3% from Prose Class B, and 21.6% from Prose Class D. Within this group, a significant 69.5% were familiar with Frank L. Baum's 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz'. In contrast, 30.5% had yet to read or finish the story. Surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of 92.3% of those familiar with the book were also acquainted with the plot device of 'going/trapped into another world', leaving only a mere 7.7% unfamiliar with it.



In addition to ‘The Wizard of Oz’ and ‘Alice in Wonderland’, respondents identified similar plot devices in various forms of media. Notably, 37.1% found them in movies or TV series, 33.3% in animation or anime, 18.1% in comics or manga, 10.5% in other literary works, and a surprising result of 1% in video games.

Besides ‘The Wizard of Oz’ or ‘Alice in Wonderland’, where do you find similar plot device of ‘going/trapped into another world’?

105 responses



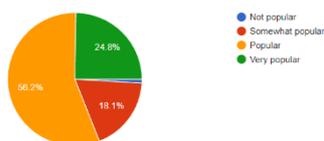
The range of works featuring this plot device was extensive, including titles such as ‘The Chronicles of Narnia’, ‘Jumanji’, ‘Coraline’, ‘Sword Art Online’, ‘Coco’, ‘Soul’, ‘That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime’, ‘Digimon Series’, ‘Inuyasha’, ‘Alice in Borderland’, ‘Doctor Strange’, ‘Stranger Things’, ‘Korean Drama Mr Queen’, and ‘Castle in the Sky’.

Interestingly, 54.3% of the respondents found the plot device ‘going/trapped into another world’ intriguing, with 31.4% expressing an even greater level of interest. Only a tiny fraction, 1%, found it to be uninteresting.

Most respondents, comprising 55.2%, considered the plot device of ‘going/trapped into another world’ familiar, with 19% deeming it very familiar. In contrast, 23.8% found it somewhat familiar, and only 1.9% thought it unfamiliar. Furthermore, 56.2% of respondents believed it to be a popular plot device, with 24.8% asserting it to be very popular. A smaller fraction, 18.1%, considered it somewhat popular, and just 1% found it unpopular.

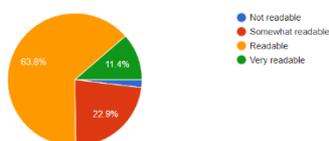
Is ‘Going/Trapped into Another World’ a popular plot device?

105 responses



Is ‘Going/Trapped into Another World’ a readable plot device?

105 responses

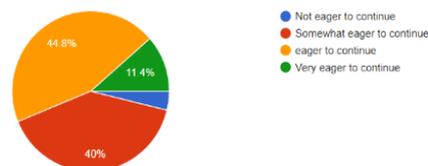


Regarding readability, 63.8% of respondents believed ‘going/trapped into another world’ to be a readable plot device, with 11.4% rating it as very readable. On the other hand, 22.9% considered it somewhat readable, and only 1.9% found it not readable at all.

Looking towards the future, 44.8% of the respondents expressed eagerness to continue reading stories featuring the plot device of ‘going/trapped into another world’, with 11.4% being very eager to do so. Meanwhile, 40% were somewhat eager to continue, and 3.8% were not. Turning towards the broader *Isekai* genre, 20% of respondents expressed a keen interest, 33.3% were generally interested, 32.4% had a moderate interest, and 14.3% were not interested.

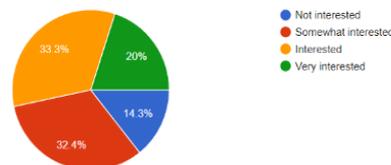
How eager are you to continue reading similar plot device of ‘Going/Trapped into Another World’ after reading The Wizard of Oz’?

105 responses



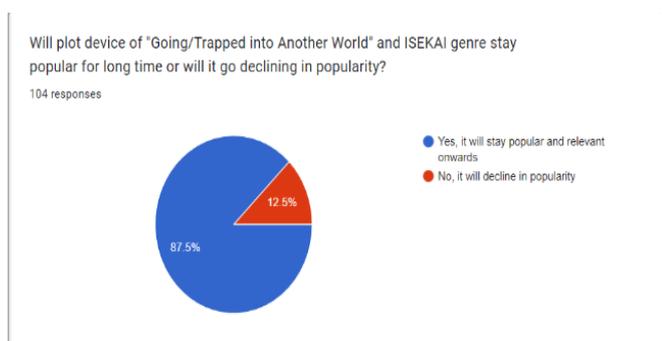
Are you interested in ISEKAI genre?

105 responses



In terms of motivation, those interested in the *Isekai* genre found it to be a source of entertainment, comfort, and fascination. They appreciated the genre’s ability to transport them to fantastical realms, offering a break from reality’s mundane and predictable elements. It also gave them a second chance at life and to explore what might have been. For them, it was a means of escape from the burdens of the real world through imaginative travel.

Conversely, those uninterested in the genre cited a general aversion to anime, a preference for different genres, a perceived blandness in the plot, or a lack of appeal as their primary reasons for disinterest.



The survey results indicated that 87.5% of respondents believed that the plot device of 'going/trapped into another world' would continue to maintain its popularity and relevance in the future. In comparison, 12.5% believed it would face a decline. Most respondents cited the *Isekai* genre's ability to allow individuals to fantasize about being transported to different worlds as a powerful coping mechanism for the challenges of real life, a sentiment shared regarding children's literature to enjoy (Nichols, 1976). This survey provides valuable insights into the enduring allure of 'going/trapped into another world' as a plot device and the broader resonance of the *Isekai* genre in contemporary pop culture.

Discussion

With the familiarity of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the plot device of 'going/trapped into another world' among respondents, a strong association between the source material and plot device with their familiarity of *Isekai* genre. The plot device is not exclusive only to literature, but also prevalent in other forms entertainment such as TV series, movies, animation, and even video games. Thus, it correlates to their interest to continue taking interest in the plot device with small fraction of respondents expressed disinterest. Widespread recognition and acceptance of the plot device signifies the familiarity and the popularity among two-third of respondents as well.

As the narrative device is accessible and comprehensible according to the majority of the respondents, the result indicates a positive inclination and appeal towards narratives employing the plot device with substantial interest among the respondents. Those not interested in the genre and plot device cited their lack of excitement as compared to other genres in the context of entertainment, comfort, and especially imaginative escapism. This finding notably shares the sentiment of what the respondents are feeling, much like the study that suggest the Japanese society is feeling

about the popularity of *isekai* genre (Lu, 2020).

Furthermore, the genre's ability to facilitate imaginative escapism, served as coping mechanism from real life challenges, it helps their opinion that the genre remains popular and relevant in the future with strong confidence in its enduring appeal. Relatable experiences become the primary reason for its popularity to stay in the pop culture world.

IV. CONCLUSION

Understanding literary works should be done by reading their artistic value before reading their political content in today's climate. The narrative that attracted readers to continue reading and further explore the plot device of going or being trapped in another cannot be underestimated. The exposure to popular culture combined with the interest in variants of narrative patterns of going to another world and the *Isekai* genre makes this research very important to discuss.

With more than two-thirds of respondents saying the plot device and the *Isekai* genre would stay popular, it signifies that the students are adequately exposed to how popular the genre is today. Given their familiarity with the plot device stemming from their knowledge of literary works such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice Adventure in Wonderland*, they explore other texts that expand the territories to movies, television series, animation, and other literary works, except video games.

The comprehensive understanding of respondents' perception and engagement with the plot device 'going/trapped into another world' and the reader response approach provides the broader *Isekai* genre. The data reveals a strong familiarity and positive reception of this narrative device, indicating its appeal extends beyond literature to other forms of entertainment. The respondents express a keen interest in the *Isekai* genre, finding it a source of comfort, entertainment, and imaginative escape. Furthermore, the overwhelming belief in the continued popularity of the plot device signifies its enduring relevance in contemporary storytelling.

The result further requires a deep philosophical and psychological understanding of why the plot device and the genre are popular with the students. Further research should explore the potential answers to said understanding above.

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