

## Characterization of Layla Amin in *Internment* Novel: A New Criticism Study

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### Abstract:

This research is conducted to examine the characterization of Layla Amin, the main character of the *Internment*, a dystopian fiction novel written by the British writer Samira Ahmed, and her way of overcoming her problem. This novel is approached using the characterization theory by Edgar V. Roberts, which states that the characterization of a character in literary work could be analyzed in four ways: his/her actions, speeches, thoughts, and what the other characters say about him/her. This research is library research because the primary data consists of the narratives and the dialogues in the *Internment* novel, and the secondary data comes from books and journals related to the topic. After analyzing the novel through library research, the researcher found that through Layla's characterization that is described in the novel, Layla's characterization is persistent, sarcastic, stubborn, and brave. With these characterizations, she can overcome the problems she faces in the novel.

**Keywords:** character; characterization; problem; novel.

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk meneliti penokohan Layla Amin, tokoh utama dalam novel *Internment*, sebuah novel fiksi distopia yang ditulis oleh penulis berkebangsaan Inggris Samira Ahmed, dan caranya dalam mengatasi masalahnya. Novel ini diteliti dengan menggunakan konsep penokohan yang dicetuskan oleh Edgar V. Roberts yang mengatakan bahwa karakterisasi seorang tokoh dalam karya sastra dapat dianalisis melalui empat cara, yaitu tindakan, ucapan, pikiran, dan apa yang dikatakan oleh tokoh lain mengenai dirinya. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan karena data primernya terdiri dari narasi dan dialog dalam novel *Internment* dan data sekundernya berasal dari buku-buku dan jurnal-jurnal yang berkaitan dengan topik tersebut. Setelah menganalisis novel tersebut melalui penelitian kepustakaan, peneliti menemukan bahwa melalui penokohan Layla yang digambarkan dalam novel, Layla memiliki penokohan yang teguh, sarkastik, keras kepala, dan berani. Dengan penokohan yang dimilikinya tersebut, ia mampu mengatasi masalah yang dihadapinya dalam novel.

**Kata kunci:** tokoh, penokohan, masalah, novel.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature is an art formed by an author in a written form. Sulaeman (2014) claims that literature is media that the author uses to pour their opinion and feeling. Sometimes, authors use literature to influence the readers and make them aware of the topic that the author is trying to bring up. To ease the readers' comprehension of the issue, authors use a simple order of words to deliver their thoughts (Situmeang, 2018). On the other hand, several authors enjoy writing literature in magnificent words to deliver the topic more artistically. However, the word choice does not define the quality of literature because everything is defined as literature as long as it consists of the order of texts (Meyer, 1997). Thus, poems, novels, short stories, and movie scripts are examples of literature.

Novels are one type of literature that is heavily consumed by literature-seekers. Derived from the Italian word *novella*, which means "new," a novel is a long prose. Aliyev (2021) argues that the length of a novel is undefined. In other words, no specific number of how long a literature has to be written to name it a novel. As one of the examples of literature, a novel is often used to voice the author's perspective of crucial events that happened and are happening in the world. Through novels, authors define things people do in the real world (Yuliani et al., 2013). Several authors use it as the media to raise readers' awareness about real-life events. Therefore, the novel is not merely a story from the authors' imagination but an art conveying significant aspects (Yuliani et al., 2013).

However, some readers choose to read a novel and use it as escapism. During leisure time, which should be spent on enjoyable activities, novels containing more complex stories can be an option for literature readers. Conversely, a novel could also be an escapism for its author. Literature, including novels, is a form the author uses to express their feelings and ideas (Arizah, 2018). Generally, such thoughts might distract the author's concentration if it is not distributed efficiently. In pouring those imaginative ideas into the novel, authors aspire to please the readers through their words (Gunawati et al., 2021). In other words, a novel could be an escapism for both the creator and the novel enjoyer.

Besides various real-life events that are adapted in the novel and become the historical background that makes it an escapism, the intrinsic element of the novel offers another factor that makes it the best escapism. Intrinsic elements are internal aspects that play a part in the development of the novel (Ardayati & Rahayu, 2017). Character,

characterization, theme, setting, plot, point of view, etc are general intrinsic elements. It is best to define intrinsic elements as the components of the novel that liven up the story. Without those elements, the novel would not be defined as literature.

Along with the character who lives in the story, characterization is one of the intrinsic elements that attracts readers to read a novel. The author functions as a characterization element to build a character living in the story plot (Gill, 1995). The characterization might be a portrayal of a character living in a certain period in the present time (Putri, 2017). Through characterization, authors show the representative of a certain individual who lives in a particular period in which the time setting takes place (DOLAYKAYA, 2017). This kind of depiction adds new knowledge to the readers who live in a different period.

*Internment* is an example of a novel whose characters have a unique portrayal. Written by the British journalist-writer Samira Ahmed and successfully published in 2019, *Internment* is a dystopian novel that gives Muslim-American nightmares of being the minority in The United States. Through the *Internment* novel, Samira Ahmed describes the struggle of the main character, Layla Amin, and her fellow Muslim-Americans in fighting for their independence of being a Muslim as well as an American citizen during their alienation in an internment camp, 'Mobius.' Even though Layla Amin and her fellow internees faced endless problems, some of them managed to stand up for themselves at the end of the day because of the endless action they did.

Several earlier literary studies used the *Internment* novel by Samira Ahmed. The first study was conducted by Prasetya and Ubaidillah (2024). In their article entitled *Minority Labeling of "Desi" And "Muslim" As Seen in Samira Ahmed's Internment*, two theories, language and identity theory by Joanna Thornborrow as the leading theory and situation context theory by Bronislaw Malinowski as the supporting theory are used in analyzing *Internment* by Samira Ahmed to examine the mentioning label's type and the reason of its appearances in the research object. The researcher found that the labels Desi and Muslim are mostly linked to negative labeling. The reason for this is that the characters that identified themselves as Desi and Muslims are considered minorities in the country, which makes them not confident with their identity.

The second study used *Internment* as Minar did the literary work (Saeed et al., 2021). In their study entitled *Discourse and Power: A Foucauldian Analysis of Samira Ahmed's*

*Internment*, the researchers used Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power to analyze the existing discourses in the novel resulting in power. Several findings of power as the result of discourses are found in this research. For the ruling people who handle the power in the first place, The United States president and the camp director function their power to control the minority, the Muslim-Americans, in America and inside the camp. On the other side, powerless people such as Layla Amin and her fellow Muslim Americans use discourse to fight against power. The discourses they used included books, poems, articles, and slogans.

The third study was conducted by Paramagururaj and Subha (n.d.). In their study entitled *An Element of Totalitarianism in Internment: A Foucauldian Perspective*, the researchers tried to identify the *Internment* novel by Samira Ahmed through a totalitarian perspective. The elements of totalitarianism that contravenes American democracy under the leadership of America's elected Islamophobic president are found in the novel. By spreading false information, the president manipulated Americans' perspective toward Muslims. With the hatred, the president limited Muslims' activities. This includes the application of a curfew, the takeover of the country's police to control the opposite parties, and the alienating of Muslims.

Only a few studies use *Internment* novel as the research subject, and most are research from the linguistic field. As the main character that makes her the central of the story, Layla is an intriguing character to be focused on. Even though she is still a minor who is forced to face discrimination in a dystopian novel, she can overcome the problem she faced inside the internment camp. Thus, the researcher will analyze Layla Amin's characterization and how she overcame her problem. The researcher hopes that this research will add new knowledge for the readers that characterization plays a crucial role in overcoming a problem. Humans have different ways of overcoming their problems depending on their characterization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### New Criticism

New criticism is the dominating literary theory in the middle of the 20th century. Tyson (2006) stated in his book *Critical Theory Today* that the first time the theory was introduced in the United States of America, the new critics introduced it by "close reading," or the phrase used to name the analysis focusing on only the text. Even though

literary critics barely used the theory after the middle of the 20th century, he added that literary students still operate the close reading method it implies.

New criticism theory requires readers' text comprehension. One needs to focus on the existing text when analyzing a literature theory. Everything outside the text does not matter, including the author's opinion and the reader's interpretation (Tyson, 2006). Their experience could influence their perspective, resulting in their interpretation. Tyson (2006) added that New Critics invented intentional fallacy to define the similarity between the author's interpretation and the text. Therefore, we can only figure out the text's actual meaning by examining the intrinsic elements that form the literature, such as character, characterization, plot, setting, etc.

## **Character**

Characters are those who live in the literary work. A character, the fictional one, is conceived in the author's mind. It is not necessarily humans but animals, plants, etc. In contrast, a non-fictional character is a real person who lives or lives in the real world. Hidayat and Wulansari (2016) claim that the character lives up to the plot. In other words, the existence of a character is significant for the literary work. To liven up the story, a character needs to obtain an identity (Gill, 1995). Faisal (2011) argues that a unique identity is needed to be called a character.

There are several ways to diversify one character to another because each is a different type of character. From their development through the story, characters differ by the terms dynamic and static. From their personality, characters differ by the terms round and flat. From their goals, characters differ by the terms protagonist and antagonist. From the frequency of their appearances, characters differ by the terms main character and supporting character.

### ***Main Character***

The main character is the center of a literary work. The main character is highlighted in a literary work (García, 2015). Friedman (1995) claims that the main character is the character that affects the literary plot. In other words, the ending of literature would be defined by the main character's actions in the story. For example, in the very first franchise of *Harry Potter* book by J.K Rowling, entitled *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, Harry, who is born as a half-blood wizard, is invited by Rubeus Hagrid, a Hogwarts professor, to come to Hogwarts School. Harry's decision to join the school leads the book's plot. In

other words, if Harry declined the invitation, Harry might not end up being a wizard. He might live a normal human life, and the book might end the other way.

### ***Supporting Character***

The supporting character is the character that is surrounding the main character. The role of the supporting character is not less crucial than the main character because what the supporting character does and says affects the main character's decision. For example, in the *Dead Poets Society* novel by Nancy Horowitz Kleinbaum, the passionate main character Neil Perry, who dreams of becoming an actor, is not permitted to achieve his dream. Instead, his father sent him to a military academy as punishment for doing a theatre. The upsetting news leads to Neil's decision to end his life by shooting himself with his father's gun.

### **Characterization**

Characterization in literary work is how the author reveals the character's personality. A character's characterization purely comes from the author's imagination. However, a real-life person's personality might influence the author's mind, which might also affect the characterization of the fictional character. Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017) argue that a fictional character's personality differs from a real person's. A real-life person's personality cannot entirely be known, but by the person itself; on the other hand, the entire personality of a fictional character could be figured out only by reading the literature that the fictional character is in.

The author gives a character personality to deal with the character's goal in the story (Fitria, 2021). The author completely shows the personality of a character through the literary text. The author has a variety of ways to describe it. García (2015) claims that the author might reveal the characterization of a character through the interaction of one character and others. Similarly, Roberts (2003) stated that a character's characterization is summarized by the character's speech, actions, thoughts, and other characters' opinions about him.

### ***Characterization by character's speech***

One of the author's ways to characterize the characters is from their speech. Their speech is those statements that are uttered while they are in conversation with other characters. This includes when the character is doing a monologue.

### ***Characterization by character's action***

Everything characters do in the story is called an action. The author uses characters' reactions to particular topics throughout the story to show their personalities. The character's personality can be concluded from the actions performed by the character.

### ***Characterization by character's thought***

There are three types of points of view when narrating a literary story. The first-person point of view means that the character narrates the literature. From this point of view, the characters' thoughts about certain topics could be identified.

### ***Characterization by other character's opinion***

Sometimes, other character talks about that one character. There might be an occasion for them to express their opinion about the character. Their utterances about the character are spoken to either the other character or to that one character.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The researcher noticed that a qualitative approach is the most suitable for this research, knowing that the analyzed data consists of narratives and dialogues taken from The *Internment* Novel by Samira Ahmed. Because the supporting data attached to this research comes from reliable journals and books, this research is considered library research.

While collecting the data, the researcher closely read Samira Ahmed's *Internment* novel to gain a deeper understanding and comprehension of the story. After that, the researcher took notes of quotations containing Layla Amin's characterizations and her way of overcoming her problem and analyzed them using Edgar V. Robert's characterization theory.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Layla's Characterization**

#### **1. Persistent**

Persistent is the word that defines someone who refuses to give up in a discouraging circumstance. In the internment camp, several internees are tortured and taken away in their attempts to resist. On one occasion, Layla saw fear in the other internees' faces, who witnessed the tragedy when the exclusion guard's rifle was hitting

the resisting internee. Layla then thinks, *"That's why I have to figure some way to get out of here- to escape. When people lose hope, that's when the Authority knows they've broken you"*. When Layla tries to resist, and her surroundings remind her not to act recklessly, she says, *"but I can't sit by and do nothing,"* and *"...if we don't do something now, if we stay silent, what's next? If we're going to disappear anyway, we can't go down without a fight"*. Layla's thoughts and speeches above describe how she would not take her condition for granted. She declares that she will fight back and attempts to resist instead, even though she will be taken away at the end of the day.

## 2. Sarcastic

A sarcastic person is a person who expresses their opinion by using words that are opposite to their intent. The expression sounds ironic in that it results in someone feeling hurt. Layla's sarcastic characterization is described by her mother, Sophia Amin. It was the occasion when she warned her for being sarcastic to her family's Jewish acquaintance, who drives her family to the Union Station in Los Angeles before being turned to the Muslim-American Internment. When the car arrived, Layla said to the acquaintance, *"thanks for your service, Chief,"* when Layla would rather stay home than be driven to the Internment. Because of her words, Sophia warned her, *"you're far too sarcastic for your own good. There might be a time for it, but it's certainly not right now,"* from her warning, Sophia stated her opinion that Layla was being sarcastic in a condition when she should not.

Sophia says that Layla is a sarcastic person in their other conversation when she asks if Layla ever goes somewhere with the Exclusion Guard, who never smiles. Sarcastically, Layla answered, *"none of the guards ever smile, Mom. They're guides, not the fun squad on a Carnival cruise,"* Sophia added, *"no need to be so sarcastic."* Layla could answer the questions properly, but she used sarcasm instead. Thus, Sophia told her not to be sarcastic.

## 3. Stubborn

A stubborn person is a person who insists on maintaining his opinion. She will not accept the opinions of others despite knowing that her opinion has flaws. Through the narrative in the novel, Layla reveals that Sophia describes her as a stubborn person, *"maybe my mom is right when she says I'm sometimes stubborn for no reason."* The narrative is explained after Layla endlessly responds to her family acquaintances' remarks when her mother tells her to stop talking.

On another occasion, Layla is found acting stubborn. It is when Layla's parents know that she risks her life to call David, her boyfriend, with the help of Corporal Reynold, her Exclusion Guard friend. *"We have no rights and no power, and no one in this family is going to take any risks. Do you understand me?"* Sophia told her not to try to call David, let alone with the help of an Exclusion guard, who mostly consisted of people from the other party. Calling David in this situation might endanger her life and her family. Layla apologized to her parents and acknowledged that what she did was wrong. However, her actions are different. *"I reach into my back pocket and hand over the post I wrote. Tell him my idea ... About what I need him to do. What I know he will do,"* A few days after the argument with her parents, Layla meets David to give him the article she wrote about the terrifying situation inside the camp. Layla seems to believe that David could help her distribute her article to the reporter who will publish it.

#### 4. Brave

A brave person dares to face fears and difficulties. They know they will face risks but still do what they should do. Layla is a brave person. It is shown when she tries to make a phone call to David. *"I know. But I'm going to roll the dice on a hunch,"* Ayesha, her friend, reminded her that the guard would listen to the call, but she answered it with the slang 'roll the dice,' a slang to describe a risky action to do. It means that Layla is going to take the risk of calling David.

Layla's brave characterization is also acknowledged by Corporal Reynolds when he and Layla conversed in front of her trailer, *"you're brave. Braver than anyone I've met,"* Corporal Reynolds said as one of the witnesses of Layla's several attempts to resist that most likely put her at risk.

### Layla's attempts to overcome her problem

#### 1. Writing articles

As an American citizen who was forced to be alienated from the American population because of her religion, Layla, who is a persistent person, has made several attempts to free herself and other Muslim Americans from the internment camp and its regulations. It is called resistance. One of her attempts to resist is by writing articles. When Layla and her friends, Ayesha and Soheil, were discussing the resistance they would do, Layla said, *"I want to write stories that will rile people up on the outside."* To actualize her plan, Layla asks Corporal Reynold, an Exclusion guard on her side, to

take her to meet David, her boyfriend, in secret so that David can distribute Layla's article to a reporter willing to release the article.

At their next secret meeting, David informs Layla of good news, *"KALA-TV ran the story and read your post on the air. The reporter said to expect it to explode. It probably already has. The whole world is going to know you, or at least your words"*. In other words, Layla's attempt to free herself and the other internees from the internment camp by reporting the bad things that happened to Muslim Americans in the internment camp for the past few days yielded good results because it managed to get public attention.

## 2. Live streaming

Consequences follow every decision. A consequence also comes to Layla when she risks secretly meeting David to give him the second article she wrote. In the middle of their meeting inside the Mess, the Director caught them up and ordered the exclusion guards to restrain Layla, *"good work, Corporal Reynolds. Restrain Miss Amin"*. Layla acknowledged that the Director would touch her like her fellow internees who resisted. Thus, Layla whispered to David, who is not an internee and can operate his phone to do live streaming, *"your phone. Instagram. Now"*. David seems afraid to obey Layla's order at first, but when the Director slams Layla's cheek, he directs his phone camera while doing Instagram Live, *"I'm sure the world is interested in how you're the law and how you're hurting kids in here. Kids... I'm live streaming on Instagram Live. That's Layla Amin. Californian. American citizen"*. David is reporting what is happening at that time. He is also indirectly saying that the Director hurt Layla, who is underage.

A few days later, more protestors are marching outside the internment camp's electric fence. Layla was questioning the reason for it. Corporal Reynolds then informed her, *"your blog posts went viral in a huge way. And that Instagram Live clip. They were on all the major news stations, and they set social media on fire. There were already people coming together to raise their voices, but your words—you—were a catalyst"*. It turns out that Instagram Live mentioning her name has reached many people outside the internment camp. Her idea to do the live streaming has gained a great impact in seeking people's empathy that they come to march in front of the gate to protest regarding the illegal action of Islamophobic and Racist people towards Muslim Americans.

## 3. Fasting

Another resistance Layla made was fast. Layla and the other teen internees plan to do a fast at dinner time. The fast is planned to create another big impact from their

resistance when the Red Cross, a humanitarian organization, and several reporters visit the internment camp. The goal is to show the Red Cross and the reporters the fast, as the silent resistance the internees do. The situation during the fast is explained through Layla's point of view, *"when a minder calls Table 1 to head to the food line, none of us moves"*. The minder called their table, but they ignored all of them. Their act makes the Director furious. Moreover, Soheil shouts a statement as a part of their resistance;

*"We're protesting the illegality of Mobius. We're protesting the violation of the civil rights of the Muslim community. We want the world to know that there are internees who have been tortured and disappeared. Here. On American soil. We are being held without cause or trial"*.

Even though the Director punches Soheil on the nose, which makes it broken, the fast, including Soheil's statements, gains the Red Cross and the reporters' attention. Both of them notice the law violation the internment camp system commits. Addressing Soheil, Corporal Reynolds informed Layla, *"an articulate and charismatic young man who will be on the outside with the Red Cross protecting him, ready to tell his story to hungry press outlets."* Corporal Reynolds ensures that the Red Cross, a humanitarian organization, is most likely to protect Soheil from the disappearance of the Director to the resisted internees. Red Cross' protection free Soheil from the Internment would give Soheil a chance to tell the outsiders the facts of how the system treats the Muslim-American internees.

#### 4. Silent protesting

As a persistent person, Layla does not remain silent after the fast that took Soheil away from the Internment. Instead, Layla plans to do the next resistance with the other teen internees. *"We're going to march out toward the front gate and stand in a silent protest,"* the next resistance they will do is silent protesting in front of the gate that is separated by the electric fence. It is where the protestors and media are at. *"We face the crowd near the fence and raise our fists,"* they are marching towards the fence and raising their fists in the air without saying anything as a form of silent protest.

On the other side of the fence, the protestors see them and scream, *"set them free! Set them free!"* as part of their support for the internees. The nightmare of the internment camp is once more witnessed by the outsiders when the Exclusion Guards start to shoot their guns to the sky as a warning for the internees to go back to their trailer. *"The crowd outside surges forward, toward the fence."* The outsiders are trying to break the fence as a part of their protest. They might also mean it was a movement to free the internees.

## 5. Marching

The last resistance Layla did in the internment camp was Marching along with the other internees. This is the Muslim-American internees' final resistance inside the camp that is joined by most of the internees. They are marching while walking to the Hub, *"we turn onto the Midway, banging our pots and pans and spoons,"* this time, they are not silent but producing a sound as noisy as they can with their kitchen tools to draw the attention from people outside the fence, the other internee, and the Director. Meanwhile, Layla protests and fires the internees up through the bullhorn Fauzia gave to her, *"The people united will never be defeated!"*

Her final resistance is heard by the people outside, *"We are Americans!"* they shout, following Layla's words. It is seen as a support for the internees. The march draws the Director's attention. He was furious to see the resistance led by Layla and Layla's words. The Director ordered his security to shoot Layla, but they did not do it because Layla is a minor. Thus, the Director took the gun that was placed on his waist and aimed the gun at Layla. Fortunately, Layla is saved because Corporal Reynolds protected her. *"The government ordered the immediate closing of Mobius and the release of all the internees,"* the internment camp is forced to close by the governor after the murder attempt of the Director to a minor yesterday. The march, as Layla's final resistance, successfully frees her and her fellow internees from being interned. The next day, the internees return to their house from the internment camp.

## CONCLUSION(S)

Characterization plays an important role in the character's way of overcoming their problem. The characterization of a character would influence their perspective in seeing a problem and solving it. It decides how their problem will end up. In the *novel Internment*, the author describes Layla's characterization in four ways: her speeches, thoughts, actions, and the other characters' opinions about her. It is found that Layla is a persistent, sarcastic, stubborn, and brave person. Layla's characterization gets along to overcome her problem. All of it influences her to not stay silent during the Internment. With Layla's characterization, she can overcome her problem in her own way.

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