

**Plot Twist in My Life as A Traitor  
A Novel by Zarah Ghahramani**

**THESIS**

**Submitted by:  
SANAYA ASLIMA  
The Student of English Education Department  
Reg. No. 200203016**



**FACULTY OF TARBIYAH AND TEACHER TRAINING  
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI AR-RANIRY  
DARUSSALAM BANDA ACEH  
2025 M/1446**

**THESIS**


**Submitted to the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training of  
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh as a Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirement for Sarjana Degree (S1)  
On Teacher Education**

**By:**

**SANAYA TASLIMA**

**Student of Department of English Education  
Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training  
Reg. No. 200203016**

**Approved by  
Supervisor,**



**Dr. Muhammad Nasir, M. Hum**



It has been defended in *Sidang Munaqasyah*  
Infront of the board of the Examination for the working paper  
And has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Bachelor Degree of the Education in English Language Teaching

On  
Thursday July 17, 2025  
21 Muharram, 1446 H

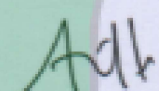
In Darussalam Banda Aceh

Board of Examiners

Chairman


Secretary

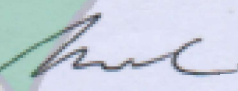
  
Dr. Muhammad Nasir, M.Hum

  
Azizah, S.Ag, M.Pd

Member

Member

  
Dr. Maskur, M.A.

  
Mulia, M.Ed

Certified by the Dean of Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training  
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh



  
Prof. Safrul Mufik, S.Ag, M.A, M.Ed, Ph.D

NIP. 197304021997031003

**PERNYATAAN KEASLIAN**  
(*Declaration of Originality*)

Saya yang bertanda tangan di bawah ini:

N a m a : Sanaya Taslima

N I M : 200203016

Tempat/tgl.lahir : Banda Aceh, 17 Januari 2003

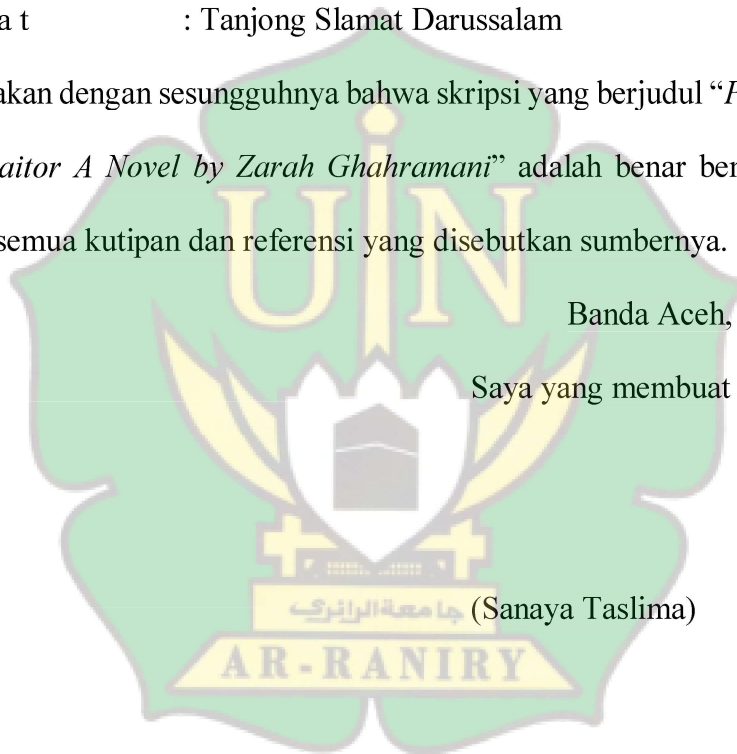
A l a m a t : Tanjong Selamat Darussalam

Menyatakan dengan sesungguhnya bahwa skripsi yang berjudul “*Plot Twist in My Life as A Traitor A Novel by Zarah Ghahramani*” adalah benar benar karya asli saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya.

Banda Aceh, 17 July 2025

Saya yang membuat pernyataan,

(Sanaya Taslima)



## ABSTRACT

This thesis, entitled *Plot Twists in My Life as a Traitor*, a memoir by Zarah Ghahramani, explores the narrative shifts that dramatically shape the author's personal and political journey. A significant turning point occurs when Zarah, once a loyal student supportive of the Iranian regime, is suddenly arrested and imprisoned without clear charges. This profound betrayal by the system she once trusted compels her to confront the brutal realities of political oppression and undergo a transformation in her beliefs and identity.

The purpose of this study is to identify the types of plot twists in the memoir and analyze how they are constructed and presented. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach, supported by a structured interpretive framework.

The findings indicate that *My Life as a Traitor* incorporates several impactful plot twists—**Personal Revelation Twists, Political/Institutional Betrayal Twists, False Hope or Reversal Twists, Character-Based Twists, and Cultural/Irony-Based Twists**. These elements not only propel the narrative but also enhance the reader's insight into the psychological and ideological conflicts experienced under authoritarian regimes.

By framing real-life trauma through literary techniques, Ghahramani's memoir blurs the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. This narrative strategy highlights the power of personal storytelling to expose systemic injustice and cultural contradictions, encouraging readers and scholars to view memoirs as both testimonies and carefully crafted literary works that reveal deeper truths about identity, resistance, and power.

Keywords: *Plot twist, Traitor, Life trauma*

AR-RANIRY

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation, who has blessed me with health, guidance, love, and countless other favours. It is by His mercy and grace that I have been able to complete my studies and this thesis, entitled "*Plot Twist in My Life as A Traitor A Novel by Zarah Ghahramani*" as part of the requirements for a Bachelor's degree in the Department of English Education at UIN Ar-Raniry. May peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who brought light to our lives and guided us to the truth of Islam.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help, encouragement, and support of many individuals to whom I am deeply indebted. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Muhammad Nasir, M. Hum for his steadfast guidance, thoughtful advice, and unwavering support throughout the process. His insights and encouragement have been instrumental in the completion of this work.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to all the lecturers of the Department of English Education. Thank you for generously sharing your knowledge, experiences, and wisdom during my academic journey at this university.

Once again, I thank my beloved parents, who has also served as a constant mentor and source of guidance, Dr. Muhammad Nasir, M. Hum and Suriani, M.A, and my dear siblings—your unwavering love, patience, and encouragement have been my greatest source of strength. I am forever grateful for your sacrifices and constant

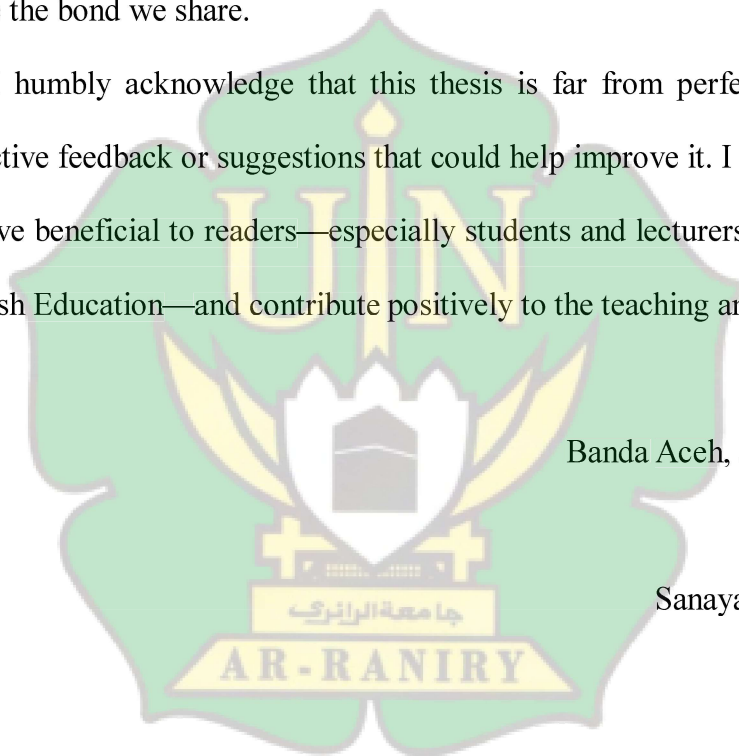
support, which have shaped me into who I am today. I truly feel like the luckiest daughter in the world. May Allah bless you always and reward you abundantly.

I also wish to thank my dearest friends, whose friendship has brought so much joy and meaning to my life. Your encouragement, care, and companionship have helped me through many challenges and made this journey more beautiful. I am deeply grateful for each of you. May Allah grant you happiness, protect you always, and preserve the bond we share.

I humbly acknowledge that this thesis is far from perfect. I welcome any constructive feedback or suggestions that could help improve it. I hope that this work will prove beneficial to readers—especially students and lecturers in the Department of English Education—and contribute positively to the teaching and learning process.

Banda Aceh, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Sanaya Taslima



## CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	vi
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	vii
<b>CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
A. Background of study .....	1
B. Research Questions .....	6
C. Research Aims .....	6
D. Significance of study .....	6
E. Terminology... ..	7
<b>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	10
A. Literature .....	10
B. Definition of Novel .....	11
C. The Concept of Plot Twist .....	12
1. Anagnorisis .....	13
2. In medias res .....	13
3. Unreliable narrator .....	14
4. Peripeteia .....	14
5. Deus ex machina .....	15
6. Non-linear narrative .....	15
7. Red Herring .....	16
8. False protagonist .....	16
<b>CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b> .....	17
A. Research Design .....	17
B. Source of data .....	18
C. Technique of Data Collection .....	19
D. Technique of Data Analysis .....	19
<b>CHAPTER IV: RESULT AND DISCUSSION</b> .....	22
A. Result .....	22
B. Discussion .....	45
<b>CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION</b> .....	62
A. Conclusion .....	62
B. Suggestion .....	67
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	68
<b>AUTOBIOGRAPHY</b> .....	72

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Study

Literature is the most persistence and genuine works that related with real life (Bennet & Royle, 2004). Basically, literary work pictured the fact of real experiences and writer's imagination that expressed through medium of written works. Literature supports human to be more human, because while read a literature, readers are linked with writer's point of view such as sadness, love, struggle, happiness, sorrow, etc. Literature is created by leaned on human approach; the sense, plot, dialogue, characters and wisdom, so, people will see the similiarity form of literature and real life (Reichert, 1977). Based on that connection, literature is very important source which contains information that useful for human's life (Ramrao, 2016).

Furthermore, novel is a kind of literary work. The concept, plot, character, dialogue etc. are adjusted from "word" to "motion picture". Cartmell (2012) has argued that nowadays written form of literary work could be adapted to a novel because they are on same purpose with different tools. It was concern that novel is a development of literature that plays a second role after written form exists, namely literary work-scenario-screen version (Zinnatullina, Davletbaeva & Mukhametsina, 2019). At first, the manuscript was written based on the original design or existing book and then acted out in a visual form. When a film is being shot, that is where the written form of literature has manifested into a real life. A screen version of literature gives viewers a chance to experience a value that they admired or touched

in the book (Zinnatullina et al., 2019). They could visualize what they just imagine previously and fix the misinterpretation.

A novel will be created if it has a plot. According to Stanton (1965) plot is a literary framework that contains sequence of events, and its occurrence connected as cause and effect. Plot has a basic stage, such as introduction, development, turning point, and conclusion. The introduction to the story will begin in the opening section. The more gradually the story progresses, the more detailed information will be displayed until the conflict, and the problem solving will be closed at the end of the story (Ashida & Kojiri, 2018).

As explained above, plot has a basic stage that makes the story structured. However, there is a technique that makes the story run erratic, even surprising the audience, namely plot twist. The plot twist is a technique that presents nonlinear occasion in the plot course in literary works. Lavik (2006) has stated that plot twist is a kind of 'doubling' a plot. Viewers will lead the story in their mind as if straightforward until immediately a new information is presented at the end of the story. It typically showed when a story close to the end, an element of surprise will emerge to break the audience's expectations (Kay & Gelshenen, 2001). The plot twist will give a mind-blowing sensation to the crowd like astounded or even confused about the storyline of the film they are viewing.

One of great novel that the writer has read using plot twist technique is *My Life as a Traitor* (2007). This novel portrays about an Iranian student named She was swept off the streets of Tehran and taken to the notorious Evin prison, where criminals and political dissidents were held side by side in conditions of legendary

brutality. Her crime, she asserts, was in wanting to slide back her headscarf to feel the sun on a few inches of her hair. That modest desire led her to a political activism fueled by the fearless idealism of the young. Her parents begged her to be prudent, but even they could not have imagined the horrors she faced in prison. She underwent psychological and physical torture, hanging on to sanity by scratching messages to fellow prisoners on the latrine door. She fought despair by recalling her idyllic childhood in a sprawling and affectionate family that prized tolerance and freedom of thought. After a show trial, she was driven deep into the desert outside Tehran, uncertain if she was to be executed or freed. There she was abandoned to begin the long walk back to reclaim herself. In prose of astonishing dignity and force, she recounts the ways in which power seduces and deforms. A richly textured memoir that celebrates a triumph of the individual over the state, *My Life as a Traitor* is an affecting addition to the literature of struggle and dissent. Zarah Ghahramani was born in Tehran in 1981. After her release from prison, she moved to Australia. *My Life as a Traitor* is her first book.

Robert Hillman is a journalist and novelist who have traveled widely in the Middle East. A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year. At the age of twenty, an Iranian student named Zarah Ghahramani was taken from the streets of Tehran to the notoriously brutal Evin Prison, where criminals and political dissidents were held side by side. A desire for freedom as modest as sliding back her headscarf to feel the sun on her hair had compelled her to join a group of university students covertly organizing peaceful campus protests. She was fueled by youthful idealism, and though her parents encouraged her to be

prudent, she underestimated the severity of the penalties imposed by the fundamentalist regime running her country.

She underwent psychological and physical torture, hanging on to sanity by scratching messages to fellow prisoners on the latrine door. She fought despair by recalling her idyllic childhood in a sprawling and affectionate family that prized tolerance and freedom of thought. After a show trial, she was driven deep into the desert outside Tehran, uncertain if she was to be executed or freed. There she was abandoned to begin the long walk back to rebuild her in a world in which she had no trust in her country's government and where she would continue to challenge fundamentalist injustice as she sought to reclaim her own liberty. "A testimony of surviving senseless persecution, imprisonment, torture, and the loss of years of one's youth with one's spirits intact. With deep insights into the meaning of suffering and the futility of hate and thoughts of revenge, the young author, just out of her teens, withstands all psychological and physical abuse and comes out, despite the loss of her faith in authority figures and her country, wise and mature. Her defiance served her well. Read with this in mind, the book is truly an inspiration."— Erika Loeffler Friedl, author of *Women of Deh Lives in an Iranian Village* "A celebration of human courage under duress and a savage indictment of the oppressive regime of Iran. It shocks, angers, saddens, and inspires."— Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* "My Life as a Traitor is an important and revealing book about a culture and a country that figures hugely in modern geopolitics. It is the inner journey of one young woman, of her fear, pride, courage, and ultimate survival in Tehran's brutal Evin Prison. But it is

also a coming-of-age story that haunts and provokes; beautifully written and disturbingly unforgettable. It will stand beside Solzhenitsyn and Primo Levi as a book that shows exactly how human beings survive in the face of true evil."— Janine di Giovanni, author of *Madness a Memoir of War* "A must read for anyone interested in understanding the complex nation that is Iran."— Firoozeh Dumas, author of *Funny in A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America*. "My Life as a Traitor is both shocking and a graphic portrayal of the horrors that are unleashed when the idealism of youth challenges the dogmatism of zealots. She has written a very human story of bravery and fear in the face of violence; her story is one of longing for beauty and freedom. Zarah's memoir of her time in Iran's infamous Evin prison is unforgettable in its portrayal of brutality, but it sings with a young woman's love of life and liberty."— Louise Brown, author of *The Dancing Girls of Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Ancient Pleasure District*.

"The second-year Iranian college student in 2001 knew that making that speech meant trouble, but she had no real expectation of being kidnapped in the heart of Tehran and hustled off to the notorious Evin Prison. Eventually, the 20-year-old Ghahramani is sentenced to 30 days and a few days—and several beatings—later is dumped in a vacant countryside to make her way home. Scenes from a happy family life (crippled by the Iran-Iraq war) and a spirited adolescence (cut short by a repressive regime) alternate with the prison experiences in this multilayered account. She, daughter of a Muslim father and Zoroastrian mother, both Kurdish, dips with brevity and grace into personal family history and public political history. Graphic and powerful as her treatment of torturous imprisonment is, she retains an

irrepressible lightness, perhaps born of knowing that [a] sense of justice can always benefit from a complementary sense of the ridiculous. Her painfully acquired knowledge of how easy it is to reduce a human being to the level of animal does not keep her from wondering if I'll ever be pretty again. Nothing, however, dilutes the bare bones prison experience. Her straightforward style, elegant in its simplicity, has resonance and appeal beyond a mere record."

### **B. Research Question**

Based on the background above, the following research problems are proposed:

1. What kinds of plot twists are found in *My Life as a Traitor*?
2. How are the plot twists presented in *My Life as a Traitor*?

### **C. Research Aims**

1. To find out the types of plot twists founded in *My Life as a Traitor*
- 2 .To describe out how plot twists are presented in *My Life as a Traitor*

### **D. Significance**

After conducting the research, the writer expected that the results of the study would be useful for:

#### **a. Students**

This study will give benefits for students as it will enhance their critical thinking to determine the plot and making plot twist in a story.

## **b. Lecturers**

This study will give benefits for lectures to enhance the critical thinking of students by introducing plot twist technique in making stories.

## **c. Researcher**

This study will give benefits for researcher to expand plot's concept of stories by using plot twist.

## **E. Terminology**

In this part, there are some terms needs to be defined easier. The definitions of key terms are as follows:

### 1. Plot twist

A plot twist is an artistic system that presents a radical change in the course or anticipated result of the plot in a work of fiction. When it occurs close to the finish of a story, it is known as a shock finishing. It might change the group of spectators' view of the first occasions, or present another contention that spots it in an alternate setting. It typically showed when a story close to the end, an element of surprise will emerge to break the audience's expectations (Kay & Gelshenen, 2001).

### 2. Novel

According to Aliyev (2021) does a novel have it, and if so, what is it? Answering this question precisely – by specifying an exact number of words – is hardly possible. The reason for this is that any attempt to do this faces the paradox similar to the paradoxes of the Heap and the Bald Man. Suppose we find out that the shortest novel ever written has 34,381 words. It seems bizarre to say that

anything that is just one word shorter than this novel is not a novel. So, a novel can contain 34,380 words. But taking just one word out of this 34,380-word novel will not turn it into something that is not a novel. So, it is possible for a novel to have 34,379 words. But, again, if we remove only one word from a 34,379-word novel, we will not turn it into a non-novel. Thus, a novel can have 34,378 words. But, again... We can continue this reasoning until we reach an absurd claim – that a novel can have just one word. The absurdity of this claim suggests that there must exist a limit to how short a novel can be. But it seems that, regardless of what we take this limit to be, we face the paradox just sketched. So, how should we proceed?

### 3. My Life as a Traitor

Iranian activist Zarah Ghahramani's memoir, *My Life as a Traitor* (2007), written with assistance from Robert Hillman, recounts the 30 days She spent in the Iranian regime's notorious Evin prison, enduring beatings and psychological terror. She was praised by reviewers for her "shockingly honest recollections" (*Kirkus Reviews*) of her response to this ordeal.

She begins her account with the moment she was picked up on the streets of Tehran, blindfolded, and taken to the Evin prison. From there, she goes on to recount the story of her upbringing and the act of political defiance that has brought her to Evin.

She was born in 1981, two years after Iran's Islamic Revolution. She grows up as part of a well-to-do family in a wealthy part of Tehran. Her father had been a senior army officer under the Shah, but under the new regime, he works as a shopkeeper. He and Ghahramani's mother raise their children to live a double

life. At home, they are taught tolerance and intellectual curiosity—indeed, her parent’s model religious tolerance in their own marriage, as her father is a Muslim while her mother practices the ancient and largely suppressed Zoroastrian faith. Meanwhile, outside their home, She and her siblings are taught to comply with the oppressive rules of the radical mullahs.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A. Literature**

Literature is part of life. Nowadays, people know literature only about poetry, drama and prose. In fact, literature is very broad in scope. Matthew Arnold and TS. Eliot as the figures of American literature (cited in Dinurriyah, 2014) stated that literature is not just a subject for academic study, but it's an element of human souls, in which human should realize, and it is an embodiment of the best thought, the most direct and persistent communication of experience by human to human.

Newbolt (cited in Dinurriyah, 2014) also argued that literature has function of creating a sense of national identity, serving to form a new element of unity, linking together's mental life of all social acceptability. Then, David carter (in Dinurriyah, 2014) defined literature as all kinds of written works including philosophy and history. He also argued that literature is what society offers at a given time considers it to be. It means that literary works will reveal us society concept at a certain time so that we are able to learn the history, philosophy, civilization culture, and mindset of that time. He also identified that in all shapes literature treats human life, its nature and difficulty, its manner of existence, its ways of coexistence and belief, and its faith.

Based on the explanation above, literature is not only limited to written work, but includes all aspects of life such as society, how to be a human, unity,

mindset, and belief. Because of this complexity, it is necessary to study literature throughout human's life (Ramrao, 2016).

## **B. The Definition of Novel**

The word comes from the Italian, *Novella*, which means the new staff that small. The novel developed in England and America. The novel was originally developed in the region from other forms of narrative nonfiction, such as letters, biographies, and history. But with a shift in society and development time, the novel is not only based on data nonfiction, author of novel can change according to the desired imagination. Sumardjo (1998: 29) says that "novel is a story with the prose form in long shape, this long shape means the story including the complex plot, many character and various setting" A novel is a totality, a comprehensiveness that is artistic. As a totality, the novel has passages elements, most related to one another in close and mutually dependent. The elements of a novel-builder that then collectively form a totality that-in addition to the formal elements of language, there are many more kinds. The division of the element in question is the intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic Elements (intrinsic) are the elements that build the literary work itself. Elements are what because the literary present as a work of Martial Arts. Intrinsic elements of a novel element (directly) participate and build the story. Extrinsic elements (extrinsic) are the elements that are beyond the works of Martial Arts, but indirectly affect the building or system of the organism's Martial Arts. Extrinsic elements of a novel must be still seen as something important.

Wellek & Warren (1956). As an intrinsic element, the element also comprises a number of extrinsic elements. The element in question (Wallek &

Warren, 1956: 75-135), among others, is the state of individual subjectivity authors who have attitudes, beliefs, and outlook on life all of which will affect the work that he wrote. In short, elements of the author biographies will also determine the pattern works it produces. Extrinsic element next is psychology, psychology of the author either in the form (which includes the process of creativity), psychology readers, as well as the application of psychological principles in the works. The division of the intrinsic elements of the structure works belonging traditional Martial Arts is the division based on the form and content elements-a dichotomous division of real people with little objection received. Novel is narrative text informing of prose with a long shape that including some figures and fiction event. The intrinsic elements of novel are plot, setting characterization, point of view, and theme.

### **C. The Concept of Plot Twist**

According to Kay and Gelshenen (2011) plot twist is a story system that presents an extreme alters of the plot in a work of fiction. When it occurs close to the finish of a story, it is known as a bend or shock finishing. It might change viewer's expectation based on the previous scenes or present another understanding that spots in an alternateive display. Pplot twist will influencee how the audience understands and appreciates a movie attentionally. It will build audience emotions to stimulate audience curiosity about the story, especially by directing it leading to the next surprise (Perez, 2020).

Plot twist are also assumed to create people's expectations of unexpected events, by activating, preparing and motivating analysis and evaluation of events.

So that unconsciously the audience's focus will increase until the end of the movie (Perez & Reizenzein, 2019).

As contained in '*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*' Plot twist has several types that often found in stories, including:

### **1. Anagnorisis**

The Greek word for 'recognition' or 'discovery', used by Aristotle in his *Poetics* to denote the turning point in a drama at which a character (usually the Protagonist) recognizes the true state of affairs, having previously been in error or ignorance. The classic instance is Oedipus' recognition, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that he has killed his own father, Laius, married his mother, Jocasta, and brought the plague upon, Thebes. The anagnorisis is usually combined with the play's *Peripetia* or reversal of fortunes (Baldick, 2001, p. 10).

### **2. In medias res**

The Latin phrase meaning 'into the middle of things', applied to the common technique of storytelling by which the narrator begins the story at some exciting point in the middle of the action, thereby gaining the reader's interest before explaining preceding events by flashbacks at some later stage. It was conventional to begin Epic poems in *medias res*, as Milton does in *Paradise Lost*. The technique is also common in plays and in prose fiction: for example, Katherine Mansfield's short story 'A Dill Pickle' (1920) begins in *medias res* with the sentence 'And then, after six years, she saw him again' (Baldick, 2001, p. 124).

### **3. Unreliable narrator**

A narrator whose account of events appears to be faulty, misleadingly biased, or otherwise distorted, so that it departs from the 'true' understanding of events shared between the reader and the implied author. The discrepancy between the unreliable narrator's view of events and the view that readers suspect to be more accurate creates a sense of irony. The term does not necessarily mean that such a narrator is morally untrustworthy or a habitual liar (although this may be true in some cases), since the category also includes harmlessly naive, 'fallible', or ill-informed narrators. A classic case is Huck in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884): this 14-year-old narrator does not understand the full significance of the events he is relating and commenting on. Other kinds of unreliable narrator seem to be falsifying their accounts from motives of vanity or malice. In either case, the reader is offered the pleasure of picking up 'clues' in the narrative that betray the true state of affairs. This kind of first person narrative is particularly favored in 20th-century fiction: a virtuoso display of its use is William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1928), which employs three unreliable narrators—an imbecile, a suicidal student, and an irritable racist bigot (Baldick, 2001, p. 268-269).

### **4. Peripeteia**

“A sudden reversal of a character's circumstances and fortunes, usually involving the downfall of the protagonist in a tragedy and often coinciding with the 'recognition' or *Anagnorisis*. In comedy, however, the peripeteia abruptly restores the prosperity of the main character” (Baldick, 2001, p.189).

## **5. Deus ex machina**

The 'god from a machine' who was lowered on to the stage by mechanical contrivance in some ancient Greek plays (notably those of Euripides) to solve the problems of the plot at a stroke. A later example is Shakespeare's introduction of Hymen into the last scene of *As You like It* to marry off the main characters. The term is now used pejoratively for any improbable or unexpected contrivance by which an author resolves the complications of the plot in a play or novel, and which has not been convincingly prepared for in the preceding action: the discovery of a lost will was a favorite resort of Victorian novelists (Baldick, 2001, p. 63).

## **6. Non-linear narrative**

A story which use Nonlinear narrative in a story works will be delivered by disorder chronology (Steiff, 2011). According to Kim, Bach, Im, Schriber, Gross and Pfister (2017) Nonlinear narrative is a story technique that shows the scenes in the story out of chronological order, so the events which are displayed are not related to each other. As an example, when the scene has reached its climax, the story will be diverted in another direction so that the most crucial parts of the story are caught and that part will be shown again when the audience is off guard. Finally, the audience gets a shock effect when the narrative can return to the story.

## **7. Red Herring**

Red Herring can be interpreted as given of wrong suggestions. For example, as teachers we assign assignments to students in class without providing any information. They tend to be reluctant to do it because they feel it is not important, even though the test is a requirement for their passing in that subject. As the result, they will prepare for the next assignments. The purpose was to plant false beliefs and memories so that subjects will figure out what the real purpose of the study is, and may then change their own behavior accordingly. A red herring is a false clue intended to lead exploration toward inaccurate information (Asong, 2012). The Red Herring technique allows naturally curious subjects to “figure out” what the topic is about without actually guess what the topic is about (and thus becoming subject to demand) and it also known as false memory procedure (Laney, kaasa, Morriz, Berkowitz, Bernstein & Loftus, 2007).

## **8. False protagonist**

The result of the replacement of the protagonist (from the viewer's point of view) achieves several things. First, it was erupted, and therefore easy to remember. it immediately became famous among film critics and audiences. False protagonists is an effective method of surprising the audiences and ensuring that the story is memorable (Thompson, 2018). Simply put, the protagonist who the audience starts to care about, then suddenly turns into the most violent villain.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **A. Research Design and Method**

Research design can be defined as all of the writer's plan and strategy to answer research problems of study. Akhtar (2016) stated that research design can be considered as the research's structure that holds all of the elements in a research project. In essence, it is a blueprint of the proposed research. Research design used in this research is descriptive qualitative method with content analysis approach.

Descriptive qualitative research is a method of research aims to get a circumstance and its essence by describing and analyzing data (Nassaji, 2015). It is concerned to gain a deeper understanding with something. Correlated with Seixas, Smith and Mitton (2017) Argument that descriptive qualitative methodology aims to allow obtaining information from a large number of different sources to be captured efficiently. Qualitative tends to be exploratory, therefore writers write a little about the topic or the population being studied, and writers listen to participants and construct an understanding based on their intentions (Creswell, 2002).

The approach used on this research is content analysis. According to Wilson (2011) content analysis is an approach which purposed for analyzing written, verbal, or visual documentation obtained from the documents and the results are displayed into the text. The reason writer chose this method because flexible to use based on analysis of content and easy to identify (Marsh & White, 2006).

## **B. Source of Data Collection**

The main source used in this study is the novel *My Life as a Traitor* (2007). This novel portrays about an Iranian student named Zarah Ghahramani was swept off the streets of Tehran and taken to the notorious Evin prison, where criminals and political dissidents were held side by side in conditions of legendary brutality. Her crime, she asserts, was in wanting to slide back her headscarf to feel the sun on a few inches of her hair. That modest desire led her to a political activism fueled by the fearless idealism of the young. Her parents begged her to be prudent, but even they could not have imagined the horrors she faced in prison. She underwent psychological and physical torture, hanging on to sanity by scratching messages to fellow prisoners on the latrine door. She fought despair by recalling her idyllic childhood in a sprawling and affectionate family that prized tolerance and freedom of thought.

This novel is classified as heavy and mind-blowing. It is certain that the viewers will confuse and misunderstand with the storyline of the novel as if read for the first time. So, the writer prefers to add texts even though has subtitle to avoid misperception of the storyline and catch every single detail of the texts perfectly.

## **C. The Technique of Data Collection**

According to Gill, Treasure, Stewart and Chadwick (2008) there are various techniques of collecting data in qualitative research, including: observations, textual or visual analysis (e.g from books or videos) and interviews (individual or group). In conducting this research, the writer prefers to use the content analysis in

collecting the data, because the writer uses the novel as the object in collecting or getting the data.

While reading the novel the writer will read the texts. The use of texts when reading novel allows writer to get as much detailed information as possible without any misperception, not only from the dialogues but also the scenes, settings, and movements of the characters. The writer will identify the plot twists contained and how they are described, then the writer will describe the findings well and close with conclusion

#### **D. The Technique of Data Analysis**

According to Tyson (2015) in analyzing this novel, the writer applies a **structured interpretive framework** to a novel involves a step-by-step analysis that helps uncover deeper meanings, themes, and literary techniques. Here's a concise explanation of the steps:

##### **1. The writer Identify the Theoretical Lens**

She reads a literary theory to guide the interpretation, such as feminist theory, postcolonialism, structuralism, or psychoanalysis to find out the plot twist.

##### **2. The writer does Close Reading of the Text**

Close reading is very important to analyze the language, imagery, symbols, character development, and narrative structure. Look for key passages that reflect central conflicts or turning points.

### 3. Contextual Analysis

Then, she considers the historical, political, and cultural background of the novel and its author. This helps situate the text within its broader social discourse. *In Ghahramani's case, understanding post-revolution Iran is critical.*

### 4. Interpretation of Themes and Meaning

She also synthesizes the observations to draw out the central themes, such as power, resistance, identity, and freedom. Explain how these are revealed through plot and character.

### 5. Evaluate the Author's Purpose and Impact

Finally, she reflects on how the narrative strategies support or challenge dominant ideologies. Consider the emotional and intellectual effect on the reader.

Merriam (in Kaulich, 2004) argues the process of data analysis is being complex action moving back and forth between data and concepts, description and interpretation, using deductive and inductive reasoning. In this research, the writer will read *My Life as a Traitor firstly*. In this step, the writer gives a total attention to every dialogues, scenes, settings and motives in order to get deep understanding about the plot twist in *My Life as a Traitor*. Then, writer will read the texts thoroughly. The writer reads all aspects written texts iteratively as to find the plot twists contained in the novel. Then, the writer will Identify the plot twist in *My Life as a Traitor* by reading, and match it to the text. Furthermore, the writer will describe how the plot twist are presented in *My Life as a Traitor* by reading and

match it to the text. At the end, the writer will draw the conclusion in order to make the readers easier find out and understand the result of the study.

By applying a structured interpretive framework,



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **A. Result**

The primary goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the result and discuss plot twists in the memoir *My Life as a Traitor* by Zarah Ghahramani. Additionally, the writer structures her analysis by dividing the types of plot twists into thematic or narrative categories. Since this is a memoir, not a fictional novel, the "plot twists" are real-life events or revelations that shift the writer's understanding, tone, or emotional response, often shaped by memory, trauma, and political context. All in all, this chapter is going to answer the second question of the study: What are the changes observed in the persona's masculinity after the soldiers experienced the violence? The following is a breakdown of possible types of plot twists to be explained:

In examining the narrative architecture of contemporary fiction and speculative media, this study proposes a five-part interpretive schema for categorizing plot twists. These categories—Personal Revelation Twists, Political/Institutional Betrayal Twists, False Hope or Reversal Twists, Character-Based Twists, and Cultural/Irony-Based Twists—are informed by classical narrative theory, structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, and genre-specific conventions. Rather than mutually exclusive, these categories often operate in dynamic interplay, offering insight into how narrative disruption functions across mainstream and avant-garde storytelling.

### **1. Personal Revelation Twists**

This category centers on the protagonist's discovery of hidden truths about themselves, often involving memory, identity, or lineage. These moments of "anagnorisis," as defined in Aristotelian poetics, typically precipitate a transformation in narrative trajectory. Freytag's Pyramid identifies such recognition as a turning point in classical dramatic structure. In modern and postmodern narratives, these revelations are often tied to psychoanalytic readings of selfhood (Freud, Lacan), where the unconscious or repressed truth returns as a narrative rupture. Works like *Fight Club* or *Memento* exemplify such internal revelations, emphasizing the instability of self-perception.

### **2. Political/Institutional Betrayal Twists**

Twists involving the exposure of systemic deception, surveillance, or oppression align with Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses and Foucault's theories of institutional power. These moments often challenge the protagonist's assumed alignment with hegemonic structures, revealing them instead as complicit or victimized. This type of twist is central to dystopian and speculative fiction, from *1984* to *The Hunger Games*, and critiques dominant socio-political paradigms. It also resonates with Marxist criticism and resistance narratives, framing betrayal as structural rather than interpersonal.

### **3. False Hope or Reversal Twists**

Rooted in Aristotle's *peripeteia*, these twists reverse a character's or audience's expectations, often by shattering anticipated resolutions or introducing

fatal consequences. They are common in horror, noir, and thrillers, where tension is built upon audience misdirection. These moments are also discussed in cognitive narratology (e.g., Peter J. Rabinowitz's theory of audience alignment and misreading) as examples of how narrative manipulates expectation and temporality. Twists of this kind expose the illusion of control or justice, reinforcing genre-specific fatalism or irony.

#### **4. Character-Based Twists**

These twists derive not from external events, but from unexpected actions, confessions, or decisions by characters whose motivations have been obscured or misrepresented. This aligns with E. M. Forster's distinction between "flat" and "round" characters, as well as with narratological attention to focalization and interiority (Genette). Unreliable narrators, moral ambiguity, or shifting allegiances are key tools in this mode. For instance, the twist in *Gone Girl* repositions the character as the site of narrative instability, challenging reader empathy and ethical framing.

#### **5. Cultural/Irony-Based Twists**

Operating at the meta-narrative or socio-cultural subtext level, these twists foreground irony, genre subversion, or ideological critique. Often emerging from postmodern aesthetics (as theorized by Linda Hutcheon or Fredric Jameson), these moments rely on cultural literacy and reflexivity. They may expose narrative construction itself or invert genre tropes to comment on race, gender, or colonial histories. For example, Jordan Peele's *Get Out* reconfigures horror conventions to

deliver a racialized twist that is both narrative and political, engaging in what Hutcheon terms "complicit critique."

This schema enables a critical mapping of how narrative twists function not just as surprise mechanisms but as tools of thematic articulation and ideological interrogation. By locating plot twists within broader theoretical discourses, this framework allows for a deeper analysis of narrative ethics, genre evolution, and cultural meaning-making.

### 1.1. Personal Revelation Twists

Personal revelation twists are a powerful narrative device, especially in memoirs like *My Life as a Traitor*, where the author reflects on identity, ideology, and transformation under extreme circumstances. These involve Zarah's realizations or shifts in self-awareness that dramatically change how she perceives herself or her situation.

Through this novel, Zarah undergoes a profound transformation from an idealistic, rebellious university student to a deeply introspective political prisoner, a shift catalyzed by her brutal experience within Iran's authoritarian justice system. At the memoir's beginning, she is animated by a youthful belief in resistance and freedom of thought, seeing herself as someone who can challenge injustice head-on. She recalls,

*"I believed in freedom, the right to speak, to think. I thought that was enough to protect me"* (Zarah, p.142).

However, her sudden arrest and the violence of Evin Prison dismantle this assumption, exposing the vulnerability beneath her idealism. As she endures

interrogations and solitary confinement, Zarah confronts the fragility of her sense of self:

*"I always thought I was strong and stand up to anything. However, now I see how easily fear crawls inside you"* (Zarah, p.136).

This revelation marks the moment her defiant identity begins to fracture. However, her transformation is not merely one of disillusionment; it is also one of inner evolution. Removed from the support of her friends and the energy of protest, she begins to reflect on the meaning of resistance.

*"Maybe strength is not about shouting or resisting. Maybe it is about surviving, quietly, and still believing in something"* (Zarah, p.234).

She realizes, redefining what it means to fight for one's beliefs. By the end of her imprisonment, she no longer views herself as a student rebel but as a survivor whose resistance has turned inward, rooted not in confrontation but in endurance. This transformation, shaped by trauma and resilience, underscores the memoir's more profound message: that identity under oppression is not destroyed, but reshaped in unexpected, often painful ways.

Here, she powerfully recognizes how her identity as a woman, student, and critical thinker is not only marginalized but actively criminalized by the Iranian regime. Her arrest and brutal interrogation underscore how personal identity becomes grounds for state punishment. As she reflects,

*"They do not just want your silence—they want your submission. Your soul."* (Zarah, p.205).

This chilling realization marks her understanding that her intellectual independence, not just her actions, threatens the regime's authoritarian order. As a university student engaged in political thought, Zarah challenges the ideological

conformity demanded of her, explaining that “*at university, thinking for yourself is the most dangerous thing you can do.*” Her womanhood compounds this threat, as she refuses to conform to the regime's expectations of female passivity and obedience. When a guard tells her,

“*A woman like you should be at home, not in the streets with men,*” (Zarah, p.17).

It becomes clear that her gendered defiance is viewed as a political offence. Through her harrowing experiences, she exposes how the state criminalizes not only dissenting acts but the very identities that question its control, revealing a regime that fears thought as much as action.

*My Life as a Traitor* is rich with personal revelation twists, where Zarah undergoes intense inner realization, often unexpected or painful, that shift her understanding of herself, her beliefs, or the world around her. These moments mark crucial turning points in the memoir, revealing how trauma, isolation, and resistance reshape her identity. Here are some significant quotes from the text that illustrate these personal revelation twists, along with context and interpretation, as explained below:

#### *1.1.1. Realizing Her Fear*

In this novel, she offers a harrowing account of her arrest and imprisonment in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison. As a young woman who initially embraces activism with youthful boldness, her experience behind bars forces her to confront the terrifying reality of state power, isolation, and psychological torment. One of the most profound aspects of her memoir is the gradual realization of her fear—a fear that is not immediate or obvious, but one that grows silently as her ideals clash with

brutal authority. This internal awakening marks a turning point in her narrative, revealing the vulnerability beneath defiance and the complex emotional landscape of a prisoner discovering the limits of courage.

This moment reveals Zarah confronting the limits of her bravery. It is a powerful reversal of how she saw herself before imprisonment: as a fearless activist who could face oppression head-on. The twist lies in how she must now grapple with her vulnerability, not as weakness, but as an honest reckoning with survival.

#### *1.1.2. The Prison Cell as a Mirror*

Zarah's prison cell becomes more than just a place of confinement—it becomes a mirror reflecting her innermost thoughts, fears, and identity. Stripped of freedom and comfort, Zarah is forced into a confrontation with herself, her beliefs, and her past. The silence and isolation of the prison cell create a space for intense self-reflection, turning her physical imprisonment into a psychological journey. Through this metaphorical mirror, the memoir explores how moments of extreme hardship can reveal truths about one's character, resilience, and the cost of dissent in a repressive regime.

*"In the silence, I meet myself. Not the girl who shouted slogans, but the one who listens to the sound of her fear"* (Zarah, p.72).

Here, solitude becomes a space for unexpected self-revelation. Removed from the collective energy of protests or campus life, Zarah is forced to reckon with her inner life. The "twist" is that the prison, intended to silence and erase her, becomes the setting for profound introspection and self-awareness.

### 1.1.3. *Breaking of Idealism*

She begins her journey as a passionate and idealistic university student, driven by a belief in justice, freedom, and political change. However, her sudden arrest and brutal experience in Evin Prison shatter these ideals, forcing her to confront the harsh realities of a repressive regime. The memoir powerfully illustrates how idealism begins to crack and fade when met with fear, violence, and betrayal. Zarah's journey reveals the painful transformation from youthful conviction to a more complex understanding of power, resistance, and survival in an oppressive society.

*“I believed in change, in revolution. But what is revolution if it eats its children?” (Zarah, p.48).*

This quote marks a painful ideological reversal. Zarah reflects on the irony that revolutions, meant to liberate, often become indistinguishable from the regimes they overthrow. Her faith in political ideals unravels, replaced by a more complex, tragic view of power and history.

### 1.1.4. *Understanding Betrayal within Herself*

Her imprisonment not only exposes her to the cruelty of an authoritarian regime but also leads her to confront a deeper, more personal conflict: the sense of betrayal within herself. Under the intense pressure of interrogation, isolation, and fear, Zarah finds herself making choices that challenge her sense of identity and loyalty. The memoir explores how betrayal is not always external—it can emerge

from within, in moments of weakness, survival, or silence. Through this internal struggle, Zarah begins to understand the complex nature of human vulnerability, ultimately redefining her understanding of courage, guilt, and integrity.

*"The worst betrayal is the one that comes from inside. When you wonder if they are right, maybe you deserve this"* (Zarah, p.136).

This intensely personal twist captures the psychological warfare of imprisonment. Her revelation is not about others betraying her, but about how trauma can distort one's sense of self-worth. It is a chilling realization that reflects the power of institutional violence to infect the mind.

#### 1.1.5. *Redefining Strength*

In this novel, Zarah's experience in Iran's Evin Prison challenges and ultimately transforms her understanding of what it means to be strong. Initially viewing strength as resistance and defiance, Zarah is forced to reconsider this belief as she endures psychological torment, physical abuse, and isolation. Through her suffering, she begins to see strength not as loud rebellion, but as quiet endurance, the ability to hold on to fragments of dignity, identity, and hope in the face of dehumanization. The memoir reveals how true strength often lies in vulnerability, reflection, and the will to survive with one's spirit intact.

*"Strength is not about shouting or resisting. It may be about quietly surviving and still believing in something"* (Zarah, p.128).

This is one of the memoir's most important personal revelations. Zarah moves from a youthful, outward-facing definition of strength to one rooted in

endurance and inner clarity. The twist is **that survival**, which may appear passive or weak, is a radical form of resistance.

## 2.1. Political/Institutional Betrayal Twists

Zarah powerfully conveys moments where the cruelty, arbitrariness, or hidden workings of the Iranian regime are exposed to her or the reader. She also powerfully conveys political and institutional betrayal twists—moments when the institutions supposed to protect and represent citizens (such as the justice system, education, or even the idea of the state itself) instead **betray, exploit, or abandon** them.

These twists reveal the profound disillusionment she experiences as a young woman who initially believes in truth, justice, and personal freedom, only to find that authoritarianism has hollowed out those ideals. Below are selected quotes from the memoir that speak directly to this theme, as well as brief commentary to help contextualize them for an essay.

### 2.1.1. *The Law as a Weapon*

In the same novel, the narrative explores the complex relationship between personal identity and political resistance, highlighting how the law, often seen as a symbol of order and justice, can be weaponized to suppress dissent. The author's memoir reflects on the oppressive power of legal systems in authoritarian regimes, where the law is used not to protect but to punish and control those who challenge the status quo. Through the lens of the author's personal experience as a "traitor,"

the book sheds light on how the law becomes a tool of oppression, marking a stark contrast between the ideals of justice and the harsh realities of its manipulation. Using law as a weapon is a central theme, illustrating its potential to criminalize resistance and strip individuals of their agency and humanity.

*“There is no law here, only power dressed up in legal language” (Zarah, p.19).*

This quote reveals a central betrayal: the legal system, which is meant to protect rights and provide justice, is merely a façade. The regime uses the language of law to legitimize repression, creating a reversal of its intended function. This twist in perception is key to Zarah’s transformation—from believing in the rule of law to seeing it as a tool of control.

### 2.1.2. *The Betrayal of Education*

In *My Life as a Traitor*, Zarah poignantly reflects on the profound betrayal of education in oppressive regimes. Traditionally seen as a path to empowerment and enlightenment, education becomes a tool of manipulation and control, stripping individuals of their ability to think critically and challenge authority. The memoir reveals how the author's experience with the educational system, once a source of hope, transformed into a space that nurtured compliance rather than independent thought. Through the lens of betrayal, the narrative explores how education is often subverted to maintain power, turning what should be a liberating force into a mechanism for ideological conformity and repression. The betrayal of education is not only an intellectual crisis but a personal one, as it underscores how knowledge can be twisted to serve the interests of those in power.

*"I believed the university was a place for learning, for truth. Now I know it is just another arm of the regime" (Zarah, p.107).*

Here, Zarah expresses her disillusionment with one of society's most sacred institutions: the university. Initially seen as a haven for critical thought and intellectual freedom, it becomes clear that the university is tightly policed, surveilled, and complicit in suppressing dissent. The betrayal is especially bitter for someone who saw knowledge as a path to liberation.

### *2.1.3. The State's Role in Personal Destruction*

Then, she unveils the devastating role that the state plays in the personal destruction of individuals who dare to defy its authority. The narrative exposes how the state, in its pursuit of control and stability, becomes a ruthless force that targets personal identity, agency, and well-being. Through the author's journey, we see how state mechanisms systematically dismantle the lives of those labelled as traitors, whether through surveillance, legal persecution, or ideological pressure. The state's actions go beyond political repression; they delve into the deep psychological and emotional toll on individuals, stripping them of their dignity and forcing them into a perpetual struggle for survival. The personal destruction depicted in the memoir is a powerful critique of the state's ability to invade and ruin lives to maintain order and authority.

*"The state says it protects its people. However, I am one of its people—and it tried to destroy me" (Zarah, p. 87).*

This is a direct expression of institutional betrayal. Zarah is not a criminal or foreign enemy—she is a citizen. Her targeting by the regime exposes how

authoritarian states turn on their own, using their power not to protect but to control and punish.

#### 2.1.4. *Mockery of Justice*

Furthermore, she exposes the harrowing mockery of justice under authoritarian regimes. In this context, what is typically regarded as the cornerstone of fairness and accountability becomes a mere façade—a tool for legitimizing oppression rather than upholding truth. Through the author's personal experiences, the narrative illustrates how the justice system is manipulated to serve the interests of those in power, disregarding any sense of impartiality. Trials and legal proceedings, instead of being a means of protecting the innocent, become a stage for the state's ruthless persecution of dissenters. The mockery of justice in this memoir highlights the stark contrast between the ideals of law and the brutal realities of its distortion, where the pursuit of truth is replaced with the pursuit of control.

*"They do not care what you did. They care what you represent"* (Zarah, p.73).

This quote shows the hollowness of due process. Rather than being judged for actions or evidence, individuals like Zarah are punished symbolically for embodying ideas, questions, or identities that the regime fears. It is a betrayal of legal norms and the principle of justice itself.

### 2.1.5. *Loss of Trust in National Identity*

In *My Life as a Traitor*, Zarah grapples with the profound loss of trust in national identity. This shift emerges due to the betrayal and disillusionment fostered by an oppressive state. As the state manipulates legal and political structures to control its citizens, the concept of national identity, once a source of pride and belonging, becomes tainted. The memoir delves into the author's struggle to reconcile the ideals of their country with the harsh realities of its actions, ultimately leading to a profound disillusionment. Losing trust in national identity is not just a political disillusionment but a deeply personal crisis, where a sense of betrayal replaces loyalty to one's homeland. The author's journey reflects how an individual's sense of belonging can be shattered when the very institutions that define national identity are used to oppress and betray their people.

*“I used to be proud to be Iranian. Now I wonder what that means”* (Zarah, p.56).

This line captures a painful twist in Zarah's relationship with her national identity. The betrayal is not just political or legal—it is existential. When the state becomes the enemy of its citizens, it fractures their sense of belonging. Her pride turns into doubt, signaling the personal cost of systemic oppression.

### 3.1. **False Hope or Reversal Twists**

That is a powerful lens to use—Zarah's memoir is full of moments where hope is dangled before her only to be brutally withdrawn, which creates emotional tension and highlights the cruelty of authoritarian regimes.

One of the most emotionally jarring techniques she employs in *My Life as a Traitor* is the use of false hope and reversal twists—narrative moments when she, and by extension the reader, briefly believe in the possibility of freedom, safety, or kindness, only for that belief to be cruelly overturned. These moments not only amplify the psychological torment of imprisonment but also underscore the unpredictability and manipulative power of the Iranian regime.

A striking example occurs when Zarah is unexpectedly offered a moment of respite or leniency, such as a brief visit from her father or the appearance of a seemingly sympathetic guard. These fleeting moments are imbued with the hope that her ordeal may be nearing an end or that she might find an ally within the system. However, each time, the system asserts itself more brutally: the guard's kindness proves superficial or self-serving, or a promise of release is delayed or retracted. The effect is a constant emotional whiplash, keeping Zarah in a state of confusion and vulnerability.

This narrative technique mirrors the psychological tactics used by authoritarian regimes to break down prisoners, not only through physical intimidation but by destabilizing their sense of reality and trust. False hope becomes a weapon. For instance, when Zarah is told she might be released, she begins to imagine freedom, only to be pulled back into the nightmare of Evin Prison. These reversals expose the illusion of control and justice, emphasizing how the regime uses hope not as a gift, but as a trap.

Through these twists, she also comments on the broader sociopolitical reality in Iran: for many citizens, hope for reform or justice often flickers before

being extinguished by the state. Her reversals echo collective experiences, making her memoir a personal story of survival and a reflection of systemic betrayal. Just add a quote.

*My Life as a Traitor* has several poignant passages where false hope or reversal twists are used to powerful emotional and thematic effect. These moments often involve Zarah being misled into believing that relief, freedom, or kindness is within reach, only for that hope to be snatched away. Below are some notable quotes from the memoir that support this theme, along with brief explanations of their context and relevance:

### 3.1.1. *The Illusion of Release*

In *My Life as a Traitor*, she offers a harrowing account of her imprisonment in Iran's notorious Evin Prison. Though her eventual release from captivity might appear to signal freedom, Ghahramani's memoir reveals a more profound truth: the trauma, fear, and psychological scars inflicted by the regime do not vanish with the opening of a prison door. This lingering impact illustrates the central theme of "The Illusion of Release"—the idea that physical freedom does not guarantee emotional or mental liberation. Through her vivid narrative, Ghahramani exposes how authoritarian control extends far beyond bars and walls, shaping identity, memory, and the meaning of freedom itself.

*"They say I will be released tomorrow. I want to believe them; I need to believe them. However, inside me, something stays clenched. I do not let myself hope—not fully" (Zarah, p.58).*

This quote captures the moment Zarah is told she might be let go—a moment that could bring joy, but instead evokes dread. Her instinct to guard against false hope shows how psychological torment is intensified by uncertainty. The state does not just imprison bodies—it manipulates emotions.

### 3.1.2. *Kindness as Manipulation*

In this novel, she recounts her experience as a political prisoner in Iran, where kindness is often used as a tool of psychological manipulation. Within the oppressive environment of Evin Prison, moments of unexpected gentleness—from guards or interrogators—are rarely acts of compassion. Instead, they confuse, control, and weaken prisoners' resolve. This strategic use of kindness blurs the line between cruelty and care, creating emotional instability and dependency. Ghahramani's memoir powerfully illustrates how, in authoritarian systems, kindness can become a calculated weapon rather than a genuine gesture of humanity.

*“The guard brings me water, even a small piece of bread. For a moment, I feel something close to gratitude. Then I remember where I am, and what that kindness might cost me” (Zarah, p.30).*

This is a classic reversal twist: what appears to be compassion is laced with threat. In the context of a prison like Evin, every act of leniency can be a strategy of control, keeping prisoners emotionally off-balance. Hope is used not to heal but to destabilize.

### 3.1.3. *Family Visit Turned Sour*

She recounts a rare and highly anticipated visit from her family during her imprisonment. What should have been a moment of comfort and emotional relief quickly turns into a painful and disheartening experience. The brief reunion is overshadowed by fear, emotional distance, and the oppressive presence of prison authorities. Rather than offering solace, the visit deepens Zarah's sense of isolation and helplessness, exposing how even familial love can be strained and manipulated under a repressive regime. This episode underscores the cruel power of the state to distort and damage even the most intimate human connections.

*"When I see my father, I nearly collapse. I think he is here to take me home. Instead, he is just another reminder of our powerlessness" (Zarah, p.24).*

This moment offers the hope of reunion and liberation—but it is a mirage. The reversal comes quickly when Zarah realizes that even her family, once symbols of safety, are helpless in the face of the regime's power. The contrast intensifies the emotional impact of the scene.

#### *3.1.4. The Promise of Medical Attention*

Zarah describes the harsh physical and psychological conditions of her imprisonment, where even basic medical care becomes a tool of manipulation. The promise of medical attention is dangled before her not as a right, but as a means of control—offered selectively, delayed, or denied to extract compliance or maintain fear. Rather than providing relief, the anticipation of care becomes another form of torment, revealing the regime's calculated use of vulnerability to assert power. Ghahramani's experience exposes how, in such a system, even the most fundamental human needs can be weaponized.

*"They say they will take me to a doctor. I imagine a clean room, a soft voice, someone who will see me as human again. But instead, it is just another hallway, another room, another lie" (Zarah, p.29).*

This passage shows how even basic human needs like medical care are twisted into instruments of control. The idea of being treated "as human again" is powerful, and its reversal, when she is confronted with more cold bureaucracy, is gutting.

### *3.1.5. Hope as a Trap*

She explores the cruel psychological tactics used by the Iranian regime to break the spirits of political prisoners. Among the most insidious is the manipulation of hope. Moments of apparent kindness, promises of release, or small gestures of leniency are used not to comfort, but to confuse and control. For her, hope becomes a double-edged sword—fueling endurance and deepening despair when repeatedly crushed. Her memoir reveals how, under authoritarian rule, hope itself can be turned into a trap, a means of torment disguised as mercy.

*"They give you hope just to see how you will break when it is taken away" (Zarah, p.19).*

This line is the memoir's most explicit statement of the reversal twist dynamic. It reveals how hope itself becomes a weapon, administered strategically by the regime to maximize emotional pain and compliance.

## **4. Character-Based Twists**

Character-based twists are fascinating in *My Life as a Traitor*, especially since the memoir unfolds in a psychologically intense environment. These twists

often arise when Zarah or the reader is forced to reassess a character's motives, loyalties, or humanity. They add moral complexity to the narrative and challenge the idea of easily defined "heroes" and "villains."

#### *4.1. Character-Based Twists in My Life as a Traitor*

Zarah uses character-based twists to destabilize the reader's assumptions about morality, power, and trust. These twists occur when individuals who initially appear to be allies or enemies reveal unexpected dimensions, complicating the binary logic of oppressor and victim. Her nuanced portrayals of key figures—especially correctional officers and interrogators—transform them from flat symbols of tyranny into conflicted, sometimes even pitiable, human beings.

One particularly compelling twist involves the character of her interrogator, referred to as “the Gentleman.” Initially, he seems to defy the brutal image of an Evin Prison interrogator: he is polite, softly spoken, and sometimes even courteous. Zarah reflects:

*"He wants me to think he is different, that he is educated, and that he can be trusted. Moreover, for a while, I almost did" (Zarah, p.8).*

This manipulation of her perception creates a momentary belief that he might represent a softer form of justice or even empathy within the system. However, the twist arrives when his gentleness is revealed as a calculated control method. He is no less a tool of the regime than the overtly cruel guards; his demeanor merely conceals the psychological violence he enacts.

Similarly, a moment of character revelation occurs with the female correctional officer who allows Zarah a brief moment of comfort or shows her a

small kindness. This act might suggest solidarity or shared suffering, especially given the gendered dimension of her experience. However, these moments are often undercut by a return to coldness or complicity, highlighting the difficulty of trusting anyone in a system built on fear. As she notes:

*"Even kindness here comes at a price. It is never free, never without consequences" (Zarah, p.18).*

The realization that even minor kindnesses are part of a larger performance of power is both disheartening and revealing, forcing her—and the reader—to reassess these characters' roles in her captivity. Perhaps the most painful character twist, however, is internal: Zarah's own evolving perception of herself. Early in the memoir, she clings to her identity as a student and a rebel, but as her imprisonment wears on, she confesses:

*"I begin to wonder what kind of person I am. I am not the fearless girl I thought I was. I am afraid. I want to live" (Zarah, p.8).*

This moment is a twist in character not imposed by others, but uncovered within. Her internal transformation forces the reader to confront how trauma reshapes identity, not by erasing it, but by revealing its limits and vulnerabilities.

These character-based twists are essential to the memoir's more profound message: no character can be understood simply in a system defined by surveillance and suppression. Everyone, even the narrator, is vulnerable to manipulation, self-doubt, and moral compromise. Through these revelations, she paints a portrait of life under authoritarianism far more complex than simple resistance or submission—a landscape of shifting masks and uncertain loyalties.

## 5. Cultural/Irony-Based Twists

Cultural and irony-based twists are compelling in this novel, where Zarah often contrasts her personal experiences with the official narratives and values of post-revolutionary Iran. These moments of irony—when the brutal reality of her imprisonment upends cultural norms or state rhetoric—reveal the hypocrisy and absurdity of authoritarian control.

### 5.1. *Cultural and Irony-Based Twists in My Life as a Traitor*

Zarah's memoir is filled with moments of cultural and irony-based twists that expose the deep contradictions at the heart of the Iranian regime. These twists often occur when the ideals publicly celebrated by the Islamic Republic—such as justice, morality, and national pride—are revealed to be hollow, manipulated concepts that serve as tools of repression. Through irony, she critiques a system that punishes its youth for embodying the very values it claims to uphold.

One of the most striking examples of cultural irony is the regime's treatment of education and intellectualism. Zarah, a university student studying literature, believes in the power of words, critical thinking, and the pursuit of truth, values supposedly revered by any civilized society. However, in Iran, these very qualities mark her as a threat.

*“To them, a student who thinks is dangerous. A student who speaks is criminal”* (Zarah, p. 96).

Here, the irony lies in the fact that the Islamic Republic claims to be the guardian of Iranian culture and education. However, it persecutes those who engage

in independent thought or question authority. Her imprisonment becomes a symbol of the betrayal of these cultural ideals.

Another moment of ironic reversal occurs in the way the regime weaponized Islamic morality. The state presents itself as the moral guardian of its citizens, policing behavior, speech, and even clothing under the guise of protecting virtue. However, Zarah's experience reveals how this moral framework becomes a cover for psychological and physical abuse. She recalls:

*"They want you to believe that they are saving your soul. But all they are doing is breaking your mind"* (Zarah, p. 11).

The regime's insistence on moral purity contrasts sharply with the obscenity of its actions—beatings, solitary confinement, and manipulation—rendering its moral claims grotesquely ironic. The memoir also uses cultural irony in more subtle, personal moments. For instance, her father, who once worked for the Shah's regime, now finds himself pleading with the Islamic authorities for his daughter's release. The reversal of fortunes is both personal and political. Zarah reflects on this with painful clarity:

*"My father, who once moved through the halls of power, now stands like a beggar at the gates of Evin"* (Zarah p.14).

This image encapsulates not only a personal twist but a broader irony about the cycles of power in Iran—how revolutionary regimes often become indistinguishable from the tyrannies they replace.

Finally, the most profound irony of the memoir is that Zarah's punishment stems from her desire to be a better citizen. Her activism is not rooted in violence

or destruction but in idealism and a desire for freedom, yet the regime treats her as a traitor.

This contradiction is embedded in the book's title—My Life as a Traitor—which drips with irony. Zarah never betrays her country; instead, her country betrays her.

*"They call me a traitor, but I only tried to tell the truth. In Iran, truth is the greatest crime" (Zarah. p.14).*

Through these cultural and irony-based twists, she exposes the regime's hypocrisy and lays bare the absurdity of a system that punishes sincerity, truth, and patriotism. Irony becomes a tool of resistance, allowing her to subvert the state's narrative even as she recounts her suffering within it.

## **B. Discussion**

Here, Zarah poignantly explores how internal conflict evolves into externalized suffering, particularly through her portrayal of her struggle with the oppressive political regime in Iran. Her memoir reflects the harsh realities of navigating a society that stifles dissent and individual autonomy, turning her inner turmoil into a visible confrontation with authority. One powerful example of this externalization occurs when she recounts the psychological toll of her imprisonment:

*"I felt a deep rage building inside me, but I had nowhere to direct it. The government had stolen my soul, leaving me with nothing but the need for revenge" (Zarah, p. 89).*

Here, her internal rage, fueled by betrayal and helplessness, becomes manifest in her desire for retribution, reflecting how deeply political oppression can distort personal identity. The more she resists, her conflict expands from a personal identity crisis into a larger, systemic battle. The memoir further exemplifies this externalization when She describes her torture, not only as physical abuse but as a means of breaking her spirit:

*"They sought to destroy me, to take everything that made me who I was"* (Zarah, p. 112).

The state's attempt to crush her will directly mirror the internal battle she faces to maintain her integrity and sense of self. By transforming internal conflict into external resistance, she powerfully underscores how authoritarian regimes can push individuals into extreme acts of defiance, forever altering their sense of self and their place in the world.

*- Impact on reader empathy and narrative momentum.*

In this novel, Zarah masterfully crafts a narrative that fosters deep empathy in the reader and maintains an intense, forward-driving momentum. Through her vivid portrayal of her imprisonment and the profound emotional and psychological toll it takes on her, she invites readers to experience her journey of defiance and survival on a profoundly personal level. The stark portrayal of her emotional and physical suffering serves as a poignant call to empathy. For instance, when she recalls her feelings of betrayal after her arrest, she writes,

*"I had trusted them, my friends, my country, and they had turned me in without a second thought"* (Zarah, p. 63).

This moment taps into a universal human experience of betrayal, allowing readers to feel her anguish and frustration. The raw honesty with which she describes her trauma compels readers to root for her resilience, creating a deep emotional connection. Simultaneously, the relentless pace of her narrative drives the story forward with a sense of urgency. Her recounting of her time in the prison cell, where she is constantly pressured and tortured, is presented with a sense of escalating tension:

*"Each day felt longer than the last, each moment stretched thin by anticipating what would come next" (Zarah, p. 94).*

The tension within the narrative accelerates the emotional impact, pulling the reader deeper into her experience and heightening the stakes of her eventual escape. She makes her story gripping through this careful balance of empathy and momentum. She ensures readers are emotionally invested in her survival, reflecting political repression's personal and collective cost.

1. *How institutional oppression operates as an unpredictable force.*

Zarah portrays institutional oppression not as a systematic or predictable mechanism, but as a chaotic and arbitrary force designed to instill fear and submission. The unpredictability of her arrest, interrogation, and imprisonment underscores how oppressive regimes thrive on uncertainty to maintain control. She reflects on the suddenness of her detention, writing,

*"One moment I was walking to class, the next I was blindfolded, dragged into a car, and swallowed by the system" (Zarah, p. 3).*

This abrupt transition from ordinary life to incarceration illustrates how the regime weaponized unpredictability, making citizens feel perpetually unsafe. Once inside the prison, the arbitrary nature of power becomes even more apparent. Guards alternate between silence and cruelty without warning, and rules shift without explanation.

*“I never knew what would provoke them,” Ghahramani recounts. “A glance, a question, even breathing too loudly could bring punishment” (Zarah, p. 47).*

This instability erodes a prisoner's sense of reality and self, reinforcing the institution's total control over body and mind. By depicting this erratic and terrifying nature of state power, she exposes the psychological warfare inherent in authoritarian regimes—oppression is most effective, she suggests, when it is not only brutal but also unknowable. The memoir thus invites readers to witness how such uncertainty paralyzes resistance and dehumanizes those subjected to it.

2. *The twist as a narrative device to reflect state paranoia and instability*

Here, Zarah employs narrative twists not simply for dramatic effect, but to mirror the broader atmosphere of paranoia and instability that defines life under an authoritarian regime. These unexpected turns in the narrative echo the state's erratic behavior, where trust is a liability and reality are constantly shifting. One such twist occurs when she realizes that her arrest was not the result of any clear-cut offence, but rather a consequence of being observed, suspected, and arbitrarily targeted:

*“There was no reason, no logic. I was taken because someone had spoken my name in the wrong place” (Zarah, p. 58).*

This revelation destabilizes her understanding of justice and the reader's expectations, creating a sense of vertigo that mirrors the unpredictability of living under surveillance. Another twist comes when those she believed were allies turn out to be informants, a betrayal that underscores the regime's strategy of sowing distrust.

*"I looked at him and knew—he had told them everything. He was not a prisoner like me; he was part of it" (Zarah, p. 102).*

These reversals deepen the reader's sense of unease, reflecting the fractured, deceptive world she inhabits. By embedding such twists into the memoir's structure, she dramatizes the psychological effects of state control—how it manipulates events and perception. The instability of her narrative thus becomes a mirror for the instability of the regime, blurring the lines between truth and illusion in a society built on fear.

Zarah strategically uses narrative twists to reflect the pervasive paranoia and instability of the Iranian state, illustrating how authoritarian regimes weaponize uncertainty to disorient and control. These twists—shocking revelations, betrayals, and sudden shifts in tone—mirror the irrational and opaque mechanisms of state power. For instance, the moment she realizes that her arrest was not triggered by any specific crime but by arbitrary suspicion reveals the state's logic-defying paranoia:

*"No one ever told me what law I had broken. There was only silence, and then violence" (Zarah, p. 29).*

The absence of clarity or cause forces Zarah and the reader to confront the frightening unpredictability of life under surveillance. The memoir's twists also

reveal how instability is embedded into everyday relationships. A particularly jarring moment occurs when she discovers that someone, she trusted may have been complicit in her betrayal:

*"The thought struck me suddenly—he was not one of us. He had been watching, listening, all along" (Zarah, p. 102).*

This moment reframes earlier interactions and casts a long shadow of suspicion over the narrative, much as the regime cultivates mistrust among citizens to fracture solidarity. These narrative shifts are not just storytelling techniques; they replicate the psychological landscape of life under authoritarianism, where truth is mutable and danger often comes from unexpected places. By aligning the memoir's structure with the emotional reality of political oppression, Zarah uses the twist to engage the reader and convey the fear and disorientation bred by state paranoia viscerally.

Zarah also exposes the terrifying unpredictability of institutional oppression, revealing how authoritarian regimes maintain control not through consistency but through arbitrary and erratic displays of power. The memoir illustrates how the Iranian state's unpredictability becomes a weapon, destabilizing its citizens and eroding their sense of safety and reason. Her arrest itself is marked by bewildering suddenness:

*"They gave no reason, no explanation—just a blindfold and the backseat of a car" (Zarah, p. 5).*

This randomness signals a system in which justice is not rooted in law but fear. Once imprisoned, she is subjected to deliberately unstable routines:

interrogations occur without pattern, punishments are given without cause, and moments of calm are shattered without warning. She reflects,

*“There was no logic to it. One day they let me rest; the next, they screamed until my ears rang. I never knew what I was supposed to have done”* (Zarah, p. 47).

Such inconsistency is not accidental—it is part of the state’s strategy to keep prisoners in a constant state of anxiety and self-doubt, unsure of what will provoke punishment. By depicting this chaotic structure, she emphasizes that the cruelty of institutional oppression lies not only in its brutality but also in its refusal to be understood. The system's unpredictability becomes a psychological tool, breaking down resistance by making its victims feel powerless in the face of arbitrary power.

Zarah reveals that hope is not only scarce but emotionally exhausting in repressive regimes—a fragile, often dangerous force that can sustain or destroy. While hope occasionally flickers as a form of resistance, it also becomes a source of torment, intensifying the psychological strain of imprisonment. She reflects on moments where hope offers brief relief, only to deepen her despair when it proves unfounded:

*“Each time I heard footsteps outside my cell, my heart leapt. Maybe this time they would say it was over. But they never did. And that was worse than anything—they let me believe”* (Zarah, p. 72).

In such moments, hope becomes a cycle of anticipation and devastation, manipulated by her captors as a tool of control. Even when imagining release, she is haunted by the uncertainty of what freedom would mean in a society that punishes individuality:

*"I began to fear freedom more than the prison walls—what kind of life was waiting for me out there?" (Zarah, p. 118).*

Here, hope is laced with dread, a reminder that the regime's reach extends beyond physical confinement. Hope's emotional toll lies in its duality—it fuels survival yet exposes the prisoner to repeated emotional collapse. Through this nuanced portrayal, Zarah underscores the psychological violence embedded in authoritarian systems, where even the most human impulse—the desire for freedom—is turned against the individual.

She tries to construct a powerful narrative tension between resilience and despair, portraying survival under authoritarian rule as a constant emotional balancing act. This tension fuels the memoir's emotional intensity, as she vacillates between moments of inner strength and utter hopelessness. Her determination to maintain her identity and beliefs serves as an act of resistance, even in the face of overwhelming cruelty:

*"I told myself I would not break. They could take my body, not my thoughts" (Zarah, p. 65).*

This assertion of mental autonomy becomes a quiet form of defiance, revealing the depth of her resilience. However, even this inner strength is repeatedly challenged by the dehumanizing forces around her. After a brutal interrogation, she confesses,

*"I wanted to disappear, to stop existing. There was nothing left inside me but numbness" (Zarah, p. 91).*

Despair, here, is not simply the absence of hope—it is the erosion of the self. The narrative does not resolve this tension efficiently; instead, it lingers in the

space between, showing how resilience and despair can coexist, feeding into each other. Her survival is not framed as triumph, but as endurance—a testament to the human spirit's capacity to persist even when unsure whether it should. Through this complex interplay, the memoir resists simplistic narratives of heroism, offering a profoundly human portrait of life under oppression instead.

Zarah reveals that under a repressive regime, hope is not simply a source of comfort—it becomes a site of emotional torment, a double-edged force that both sustains and wounds. Trapped within Evin Prison, she clings to the possibility of release, justice, or even a moment of kindness. However, in such an unpredictable and brutal environment, hope is repeatedly weaponized against her, deepening her suffering. She recalls,

*“Sometimes I imagined someone would come, say it was all a mistake, and take me home. That thought kept me breathing—but it also broke me a little more each day”* (Zarah, p. 54).

The illusion of possible rescue fuels a cruel cycle of anticipation and disappointment, heightening the psychological pressure of captivity. Even fleeting signs of normalcy—a kind word, a change in routine—become emotional traps.

*“The smallest kindness felt like a promise,” she writes, “and when it passed, it left a deeper kind of ache”* (Zarah, p. 78).

In this way, hope becomes a paradox: necessary for endurance but also a source of vulnerability. Her portrayal underscores how, in authoritarian systems, emotional survival is about resisting fear or pain and managing the dangerous seduction of hope itself. Her memoir forces readers to confront how regimes

manipulate even the most human instincts to maintain control, not only through violence but also through the cruel deferral of relief.

She crafts a compelling narrative shaped by the tension between resilience and despair, revealing how both quiet defiance and moments of emotional collapse mark survival under authoritarian rule. Throughout the memoir, Zarah clings to fragments of inner strength, even as her circumstances push her to the edge of psychological endurance. Her resilience surfaces in small acts of resistance, as when she states,

*"They could shackle my body, but my mind was still mine"* (Zarah, p. 65).

This assertion of mental autonomy amid physical imprisonment demonstrates her refusal to be fully broken. However, this strength is constantly shadowed by despair, which seeps into her narrative through scenes of isolation, betrayal, and the erosion of identity. After a harrowing interrogation, she admits,

*"I began to feel like a ghost—someone who had already died but did not know it yet"* (Zarah, p. 87).

These expressions of emotional numbness and dislocation reveal the depth of her suffering, complicating any simplistic view of resistance. The memoir sustains its emotional momentum by holding these two forces in constant tension, never fully allowing one to overpower the other. In doing so, she captures the complex psychological reality of political imprisonment, where endurance is not about heroism, but about surviving each moment without knowing whether it will lead to freedom or further suffering. The result is a narrative as emotionally raw as

it is politically powerful, drawing readers into the intimate and often contradictory space between holding on and letting go.

#### 4. Character-Based Twists

Zarah uses ambiguity in character portrayal to enhance the memoir's emotional realism, capturing the psychological complexity of life under authoritarian rule. Rather than presenting clear heroes or villains, she depicts those around her—interrogators, guards, even fellow prisoners—as morally ambiguous figures shaped by fear, power, and survival. This uncertainty mirrors the emotional disorientation she experiences and forces the reader to reckon with the unsettling truth that cruelty and compassion can coexist in a single person. For instance, she describes one guard who, after days of harsh treatment, suddenly offers her a moment of gentleness:

*“He placed the cup of tea down quietly, avoiding my eyes, and for a second I thought he looked sorry”* (Zarah, p. 83).

This fleeting moment blurs the line between enemy and human being, deepening the memoir's emotional impact. Similarly, she grapples with her conflicting feelings toward those who betray her, noting,

*“I wanted to hate them, but I also understood their fear. In this place, fear was stronger than loyalty”* (Zarah, p. 102).

These contradictions reflect the moral murkiness of survival in a repressive system, where choices are rarely clean and emotions are layered with guilt, empathy, and uncertainty. By refusing to flatten her characters into archetypes,

she builds a world that feels painfully real—one in which emotional truth is found not in certainty, but in ambiguity.

Zarah explores the fragile boundaries of trust and the devastating weight of betrayal, revealing the profound moral complexity that emerges under the duress of political imprisonment. Within the oppressive world of Evin Prison, relationships become distorted by fear, manipulation, and survival instincts, making trust both dangerous and necessary. She captures this emotional tension when she writes,

*"I could not tell who was a friend and who was planted there to watch me. Silence became safer than loyalty" (Zarah, p. 59).*

This pervasive uncertainty corrodes the foundation of human connection, isolating prisoners not only physically but also emotionally. One of the memoir's most painful moments comes when she suspects that someone close to her may have betrayed her:

*"It hit me all at once—he had said too much, known too much. And I realised he was not with me; he was watching me" (Zarah, p. 102).*

The emotional impact of betrayal is intensified by the recognition that such actions are often driven by desperation, not malice. She refuses to frame her betrayers as simple villains, noting instead that

*"Fear makes people do things they swore they never would" (Zarah, p. 110).*

This acknowledgement underscores the memoir's ethical complexity, as it asks the reader to consider how morality bends under pressure and how survival can blur the lines between right and wrong. By delving into these fraught emotional landscapes, she offers a nuanced portrait of life under tyranny—one in

which betrayal is not a failure of character, but a consequence of a system designed to destroy trust itself.

Zarah explores the intricate dynamics of trust, betrayal, and moral complexity under the pressure of political duress, offering a poignant reflection on the human psyche in extreme circumstances. Her experience as a young woman in Iran, caught between her loyalty to her country and her interactions with both oppressive authorities and fellow dissidents, exposes the fragility of trust in such a hostile environment. One particularly striking moment occurs when she reflects on the emotional toll of being coerced into betraying a friend:

*"I had to turn her in, to secure my safety. But every time I thought of her face, I felt as though my heart was being torn apart"* (Zarah, p. 114).

This admission reveals her moral turmoil, as the distinction between survival and betrayal becomes painfully blurred. The author deftly portrays the moral complexity of her choices, showing how the intense pressure of the regime forces individuals to weigh their survival against their ethical convictions. Trust, once shattered, becomes a weapon of self-preservation, and her internal conflict highlights the unbearable weight of having to navigate moral boundaries in such a perilous situation. Her story is a reminder of the profound human cost of living under oppressive regimes, where betrayal often emerges not from malice but from the unbearable duress of self-preservation.

In this novel, character ambiguity heightens the memoir's emotional realism, allowing the reader to grapple with the complexities of identity and survival under oppressive conditions. Zarah masterfully blurs the lines between

friend and foe, ally and betrayer, reflecting the fluid nature of relationships when trust is continuously tested by fear and survival instincts. One striking example of this ambiguity appears when Zarah describes her interactions with the interrogator:

*"He was not just an enemy to me; in some twisted way, I began to see his humanity in moments of weakness, but I knew I could not afford to feel anything for him" (Zarah, p. 87).*

This complex portrayal of the interrogator demonstrates how even those who embody authority and violence can elicit conflicting emotions. Her internal struggle between seeing her captor as human while simultaneously recognizing him as a threat reflects the moral grey areas she navigates throughout her ordeal. The ambiguity of character, not confined to straightforward labels of good or evil, serves to ground the memoir in emotional realism by showing how people, in dire circumstances, are not always easily categorized. By depicting characters as multifaceted and often contradictory, she offers a raw and honest portrayal of the psychological toll of living in a world where the lines between right and wrong, loyalty and betrayal, constantly shift.

## **5. Cultural/Irony-Based Twists**

In the same novel, Zarah employs irony as a potent form of critique, exposing the contradictions within the political regime and the personal experiences of those caught in its web. Throughout the memoir, Zarah reflects on the absurdity of the system that forces individuals into moral compromises, often highlighting the ironic distance between the regime's propaganda and the lived realities of its

citizens. One particularly sharp instance of irony occurs when Zarah recounts the state's rhetoric of patriotism, noting,

*"The government claimed to protect our nation, but it was the people they sacrificed to preserve their power, as though the country could only survive by dismantling its soul" (Zarah, p. 65).*

This ironic observation reveals the profound dissonance between the regimes' professed ideals and brutal actions, turning the official narrative into a bitter mockery of the truth. She uses irony to critique the political system and to reveal the emotional dissonance she faces as she is forced into a role that contradicts her values. The irony of her situation—the compulsion to betray, the crushing of her individuality under the weight of state control—becomes a sharp tool for exposing the moral decay fostered by oppressive regimes. In this way, irony in Zarah's narrative serves as a lens through which the absurdities of political oppression are illuminated and as a form of resistance, an act of defiance against the dehumanizing forces that seek to control her actions and identity.

Zarah vividly illustrates how cultural norms, particularly those related to gender, are weaponized by the regime to exert control over individuals, particularly women, in an oppressive society. Zarah's experience of being forced to navigate the tension between her personal beliefs and the societal expectations imposed on her as a woman becomes a central theme in the memoir. The regime manipulates traditional values, using them as tools of subjugation to maintain power and silence dissent. Zarah reflects on this manipulation, stating,

*"They told me my worth was tied to my silence, my compliance to a role I never chose, all wrapped up in the tradition of honour that had become a weapon against me" (Zarah, p. 121).*

This statement highlights the paradoxical use of cultural norms, where the expectations meant to uphold societal cohesion, such as respect, modesty, and family honour, are turned into oppression. By portraying her struggle against these weaponised norms, Zarah critiques the political system and the deep-rooted societal structures that enable such control. The exploitation of cultural norms as a means of enforcing conformity places immense pressure on individuals, particularly women, to adhere to roles that stifle personal autonomy and dissent. Zarah's narrative underscores the insidious power of these norms, revealing how regimes can co-opt them to suppress resistance and maintain an illusion of order and stability.

Zarah's creative work employs irony as a sharp form of critique, highlighting the contradictions inherent in the regime's propaganda and the moral dilemmas faced by individuals under its control. Through her ironic observations, Zarah critiques the vast dissonance between the state's official narratives and the lived experiences of those oppressed by it. One poignant moment of irony occurs when Zarah reflects on the government's public declarations of national unity, saying,

*“They said we were one people, one nation—yet every day, they tore us apart, dividing us into the loyal and the disloyal, the obedient and the rebellious” (Zarah, p. 74).*

This irony exposes the fundamental hypocrisy within the regime's rhetoric: while they preach unity and patriotism, they simultaneously create divisions and cultivate mistrust to maintain their power. Zarah's use of irony also emphasises the

absurdity of her situation, as she is forced to make choices that contradict her core values for survival. This irony is not just a tool of humour or cynicism; it functions as a searing critique of the moral and political contradictions perpetuated by oppressive regimes. Zarah's ironic reflections allow readers to see beyond the surface of political discourse, revealing the disturbing truths hidden beneath the regime's carefully crafted narrative.

Zarah also discusses how cultural norms, especially those surrounding gender, are weaponised by the state to control individuals and suppress dissent. The memoir reveals how the regime manipulates deeply ingrained cultural values to impose strict conformity, primarily upon women, using these norms not as tools for community building but as mechanisms of control. One powerful example of this occurs when Zarah reflects on the societal pressure to conform to traditional notions of womanhood, as stated below:

*“The expectations placed on me as a woman were not just burdens; they were traps designed to keep me in my place, under the guise of tradition and respect”* (Zarah, p. 104).

This statement illustrates how cultural norms, such as modesty and family honour, are twisted into instruments of subjugation, with the state using these societal expectations to undermine individual autonomy. Rather than fostering social cohesion, the regime exploits these norms to enforce silence and compliance, forcing individuals, particularly women, to uphold roles that limit their freedom and agency. The weaponisation of cultural norms becomes a critical point of critique in Zarah's narrative, exposing the insidious way authoritarian forces co-opt tradition to legitimise their power and suppress resistance. Zarah's experience shows how

cultural norms, far from being neutral or benign, can be perverted by oppressive systems to maintain control over personal identity and freedom, particularly when those norms become tied to the state's political agenda.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### A. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nuanced and emotionally charged plot twists in *My Life as a Traitor*, particularly through the lens of personal revelation. By applying a structured interpretive framework, the analysis reveals that Zarah Ghahramani's memoir, though non-fictional, contains narrative shifts as powerful as those in fiction—shifts that redefine identity, expose ideological power, and transform notions of resistance. The "twists" in this memoir are not devices of suspense, but moments of profound psychological and ideological rupture shaped by trauma, fear, and introspection. Ultimately, these personal revelations serve not only to trace Zarah's transformation under authoritarian violence but also to illuminate the broader implications of how identity, particularly gendered and intellectual identity, is criminalized and reshaped under systemic oppression. In doing so, this chapter answers the second research question by showing that the experience of violence forces a redefinition of strength and masculinity—not as domination or resistance, but as endurance, reflection, and quiet resilience.

#### 1. Political/Institutional Betrayal Twists

In *My Life as a Traitor*, Ghahramani reveals the devastating impact of political and institutional betrayal through her lived experiences under Iran's authoritarian regime. Her memoir exposes how systems meant to uphold justice, education, and national identity are weaponized to silence, punish, and control

dissent. Each betrayal twist—whether through the perversion of law, the manipulation of education, or the hollowing of national pride—marks a turning point in her understanding of state power and personal identity. These revelations underscore a central truth: under authoritarian rule, the very institutions that claim to serve and protect can instead become instruments of destruction. Through these moments, Zarah's narrative not only indicts systemic oppression but also captures the emotional and ideological unraveling that occurs when a citizen is betrayed by the foundations of their society.

## **2. False Hope or Reversal Twists**

In *My Life as a Traitor*, she masterfully captures the emotional torment inflicted through false hope and reversal twists—moments when the promise of freedom, kindness, or relief is cruelly withdrawn. These narrative turns not only reflect the psychological warfare waged against political prisoners, but also symbolize the broader experience of life under authoritarian rule, where hope is manipulated as a tool of control. Zarah's story reveals that under such regimes, even compassion and care are suspect, often masking deeper strategies of oppression. As she writes, "*They give you hope just to see how you will break when it is taken away,*" encapsulating the regime's calculated cruelty. These reversals deepen the memoir's emotional resonance and expose how totalitarian power does not simply punish the body—it seeks to unmake the spirit.

## **3. Character-Based Twists**

In *My Life as a Traitor*, character-based twists serve as a powerful narrative tool that complicates the moral landscape of life under authoritarian rule. She

challenges the reader's assumptions by revealing hidden depths in both her captors and herself—exposing moments of unexpected kindness, manipulation, and vulnerability. These shifts blur the line between oppressor and victim, showing how power distorts not only actions but identities. As Zarah admits, "*I begin to wonder what kind of person I am... I am afraid. I want to live,*" she confronts her own transformation, just as the reader must re-evaluate each character through a lens of moral ambiguity. Ultimately, these twists reveal that in a system built on fear and control, no one remains unchanged—and no one is ever simply what they seem.

the cultural and irony-based twists in *My Life as a Traitor* powerfully illuminate the deep contradictions of life under authoritarian rule in post-revolutionary Iran. Zarah's experiences reveal how the regime weaponizes cultural values and moral rhetoric to justify oppression, exposing the hollow core beneath its official ideals. Through irony, she not only critiques the hypocrisy of the state but also reclaims her voice as a form of resistance. Her memoir stands as a testament to the subversive power of truth, showing how even under immense pressure, irony can unveil injustice and affirm the dignity of independent thought.

*My Life as a Traitor* vividly illustrates how internal conflict, institutional oppression, and personal betrayal intertwine to shape a deeply affecting narrative of resistance. Ghahramani's memoir transforms her private anguish into public defiance, showing how authoritarian regimes force individuals to externalize their inner struggles in order to survive. Through her raw and intimate storytelling, she evokes powerful empathy, drawing readers into the emotional and psychological toll of political imprisonment. Moreover, by portraying institutional oppression as

unpredictable and chaotic, she reveals the insidious nature of authoritarian control—one that thrives on fear, confusion, and the erosion of self. Together, these elements create a compelling account of resilience, inviting readers to bear witness to both the personal and collective costs of repression.

Ghahramani's use of narrative twists in *My Life as a Traitor* serves as a powerful reflection of the paranoia and instability that define authoritarian regimes. These twists are not merely stylistic flourishes, but structural echoes of the disorienting reality she endured—where betrayal is common, logic is absent, and fear is cultivated through unpredictability. By mirroring the state's arbitrary and erratic use of power, the memoir immerses readers in the psychological turmoil of life under constant surveillance and suspicion. In doing so, she effectively transforms the twist into a narrative embodiment of repression, allowing readers to viscerally experience the fragility of trust and the pervasive sense of dread that characterise totalitarian control.

*My Life as a Traitor* presents a harrowing exploration of survival under authoritarianism, where cruelty is not just physical but deeply psychological. She reveals how the state's unpredictability, far from being accidental, is a calculated strategy designed to erode the prisoner's sense of control and identity. Within this chaos, hope emerges as both a vital force and a profound vulnerability—sustaining her at times, yet often exploited as another form of torment. The memoir's emotional power lies in its refusal to simplify this experience; instead, it lingers in the uneasy space between resilience and despair. By portraying survival as a constant, painful negotiation between mental defiance and emotional collapse,

Zarah offers a deeply human portrait of endurance—one that exposes the full emotional cost of life under oppression.

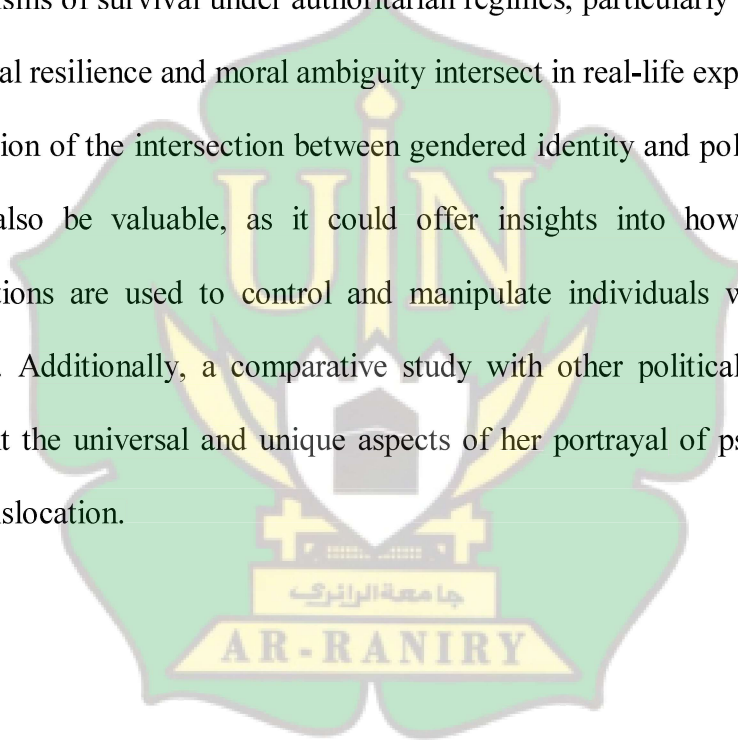
Ghahramani's memoir powerfully illuminates the psychological and moral complexities of life under authoritarian rule. Through her portrayal of mental autonomy amid physical imprisonment, she captures a resilience that is constantly tested by despair. Her emotionally raw narrative resists simplifications, showing that survival is not marked by triumph but by the painful endurance of uncertainty, fear, and moral ambiguity. By blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator, ally and betrayer, Zarah forces readers to confront the uncomfortable truth that in oppressive systems, cruelty and compassion often coexist. Her story is not one of clear heroes or villains, but of deeply human figures shaped by desperation and fear. In doing so, she offers a deeply honest and haunting reflection on the emotional toll of political oppression and the fragile strength it takes to hold on to one's sense of self.

Her memoir offers a piercing exploration of the emotional, moral, and cultural complexities of life under authoritarian rule. Through morally ambiguous characters, moments of irony, and the manipulation of cultural norms—especially gender expectations—she reveals how oppressive systems exploit fear, tradition, and even basic human instincts to maintain control. Her internal conflict between survival and integrity underscores the devastating cost of living in a society where betrayal becomes a means of preservation, and trust is a liability. By refusing to present clear moral binaries, Zarah compels the reader to confront the psychological toll of repression, where identity, autonomy, and truth are all under siege. Her

narrative becomes a quiet but powerful act of resistance—an honest account of endurance, defiance, and the fragile complexity of being human in an inhuman system.

### **B. Suggestion**

A clear suggestion based on the above explanation is that future research or analyses of *My Life as a Traitor* could delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms of survival under authoritarian regimes, particularly focusing on how emotional resilience and moral ambiguity intersect in real-life experiences. Further exploration of the intersection between gendered identity and political oppression would also be valuable, as it could offer insights into how gender-specific expectations are used to control and manipulate individuals within repressive systems. Additionally, a comparative study with other political memoirs could highlight the universal and unique aspects of her portrayal of psychological and moral dislocation.



## F. Reference

- Akhtar, Inaam. (2016). *Research Design*. New Delhi: Jamia millia islamia
- Aliyev, Alexey (2021). 'What Is a Novel?' *Estetika the European journal of aesthetics*. Volume: 58 Issue: 1, pp. 19–34. DOI: 10.33134/eeja.215. <https://estetikajournal.org/articles/10.33134/eeja.215>
- Ankersmit, K. S (1962). *Beginner's Guide to Cine-photography*. London: George Newnes LTD.
- Ashida, Atsushi & Kojiri, Tomoko. (2018). Plot-creation support with plot construction model for writing novels, *Journal of Information and Telecommunication*, DOI: 10.1080/24751839.2018.1531232
- Asong, Linus (2012). *Detective Fiction and the African Scene: From the Whodunit? to the Whydunit?*. African Books Collective. p. 31. ISBN 978-9956-727-02-5. London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000.
- Bennett, A. N. R. (2004). *Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Boggs, Joseph M. and Dennis W. Petrie. *The Art of Watching Films, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*.
- Cartmell, D. (2013). 100+ Years of Adaptations, or, Adaptation as the Art Form of Democracy. A Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation, 1-14.
- Creswell, W, J. (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Dinurriyah, S., I. (2014) *Theory of literature: an introduction: a handbook for English Department Undergraduate Students Faculty of Letters and Humanities UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya*: IAIN Press.
- During, Lisabeth & Trahair, Lisa. (2008). Film Theory. *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*. 16. 166-195. 10.1093/ywcct/mbn009.
- Gill, Paul & Stewart, Kate & Treasure, Elizabeth & Chadwick, Barbara. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British dental journal*. 204. 291-5. 10.1038/bdj.2008.192.
- Kawulich, B. (2004). Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques. *ResearchGate*. 98-99.

Kay Judith & Gelshenen Rosemary. (2001). *Discovering Fiction Student's Book 2: A Reader of American Short Stories*. Cambridge University Press. p. 65. ISBN 978-0-521-00351-3.

Kim, Nam & Bach, Benjamin & Im, Hyejin & Schriber, Sasha & Gross, Markus & Pfister, Hanspeter. (2017). Visualizing Nonlinear Narratives with Story Curves. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics*, PP. 1-1. 10.1109/TVCG.2017.2744118.

Koutsourakis, Angelous. (2018) *Rethinking Brechtian film theory and cinema*. Edinburgh University Press.

Laney, Cara & Kaasa, Suzanne & Morris, Erin & Berkowitz, Shari & Bernstein, Daniel & Loftus, Elizabeth. (2008). The Red Herring technique: A methodological response to the problem of demand characteristics. *Psychological research*. 72. 362-75. 10.1007/s00426-007-0122-6.

Lavik, Erlend (2006): Narrative Structure in The Sixth Sense: A New Twist in "Twist Movies"? *The Velvet Light Trap*, No. 58, 55-64

Leiendecker, Bernd. (2013): *Leaving the Narrative Maze*. The Plot Twist as a Device of Re-orientation. In: Julia Eckel et al. (eds.): (Dis) Orienting Media and Narrative Mazes. Bielefeld: transcript p.257-272.

MG Lia Rosaria I (2004) A Study of Plot, Character, and Setting to Convey the Theme as Seen in Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*. Yogyakarta: Sannatha Dharma University.

Nassaji, Hossein. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*. 19. 129-132. DOI: 10.1177/1362168815572747.

Pérez, Héctor J., and Rainer Reisenzein. 2019. "On Jon Snow's Death: Plot Twist and Global Fandom in Game of Thrones." *Culture & Psychology*. doi:10.1177/1354067X19845062.

Perez, Hector, J. (2020) The Plot Twist In Serial TV Narratives. *Projetions*. DOI: 10.3167/proj.2020.140105

Ramrao, T. N. (2016). *Epitome Journals*. Film and Literature: An Overview, Vol 2, Issue 9, September 2016, ISSN: 2395-6968

Robert, Edgar V and Henry E. Jacobs. *Fiction: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987.

Seixas, Brayan & Smith, Neale & Mitton, Craig. (2017). The Qualitative Descriptive Approach in International Comparative Studies: Using Online Qualitative Surveys. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. DOI: 10.15171/ijhpm.2017.142.

Stanton, E Mc Masters. (1965). *Dictionary of American Biography*, volume 9.

Steiff, Joseff (2011). Sherlock Holmes and Philosophy: The Footprints of a Gigantic *Mind*. Open Court. p. 96. ISBN 978-0-8126-9731-5.

Strank, Willem. 2014. *Twist Endings: Umdeutende Film Enden*. Marburg: Schüren Verlag.

Thompson, Tonya. (2018, November 29). *The False Protagonist: Dont be afraid to fool your readers* [Blog]. Retrieved in <https://www.servicescape.com/blog/the-false-protagonist-dont-be-afraid-to-fool-your-readers/> on 01-02-2021 10:24

Tyson, L. (2015). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

White, Marilyn & Marsh, Emily. (2006). Content Analysis: A Flexible Methodology. *Library Trends*. 55. DOI: 10.1353/lib.2006.0053.

Wilson, Virginia. (2011). Research Methods: Content Analysis. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*. 6. DOI: 10.18438/B8CG9D.

