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## The True Meaning Of Justice

Roman Jurist, Domitius Ulpian, once said, “Justice is the constant and perpetual will to allot to every man his due” (Ulpian). As Ulpian explains, humans seek justice by placing blame on those who have sinned, and forcing them to face their necessary punishment. “Serial”, an investigative journalism podcast hosted by Sarah Koenig, “Inferno”, a mystery thriller novel by Dante Alighieri, and “Shawshank Redemption”, a drama based film on Stephen King’s story, all explore the meaning of justice and how people pursue it. The protagonists and antagonists of the aforementioned texts and media share a common desire to seek justice for themselves and others. By seeking redemption, either by punishing those who have sinned or confessing their own sin, the characters’ are simultaneously liberated.

Sarah Koenig’s podcast, “Serial”, explores the murder of 18-year-old Hae Min Lee, a student at Woodlawn High. Lee’s ex-boyfriend, Adnan Masud Syed, was charged with her murder and sentenced to life in prison after an anonymous source reported that he might be guilty. Koenig explores the theme of justice through Hae Min Lee’s family, who sought justice for their daughter by placing the blame on an individual. Hae’s mother says, “I don’t know where to hear her voice, I don’t know where to touch her hand. I would like to forgive Adnan Syed but as of now, I just don’t know how to do that and I just cannot do that right now” (Koenig “To Be Suspected”). Hae’s mother places the blame for her daughter’s murder on Adnan. Hae’s family was able to feel some closure after Adnan’s arrest because they had someone to blame for her cold blooded murder. They ultimately felt that with Adnan behind bars, their daughter was brought to justice. While Adnan was still found guilty and sentenced to life in prison, “he says he’s got a clear conscience, because he didn’t kill Hae...” (Koenig “To Be Suspected”). Adnan empathizes with Hae’s mother and wants her to find the justice that Hae deserves, but he does not carry a guilty conscious because he knows that he is innocent. His definition of justice is manifested very differently than Hae’s mother, who wants simply to blame someone for her daughter’s murder.

The theme of justice is also seen in “Shawshank Redemption,” a story written by Stephen King and directed by Frank Darabont. In his film, Darabont depicts the story of Andy Dufresne, an innocent man who was wrongfully convicted of the murders of his wife and her lover. The judge in Darabont’s film seeks justice for the murdered victims by sentencing Andy “to serve two life sentences, back to back, one for each of [his] victims” because Andy strikes him “as a particularly icy and remorseless man,” (King). Based on the evidence presented before him and his gut-feeling about Andy’s presence, the judge felt that he was able to bring justice to the murdered victims. Unlike Adnan, who believes he was in prison “because of [his] own stupid actions” (Koenig), Andy believes that he is “innocent of this crime” (King). He seeks redemption for his conviction after befriending Tommy, another inmate, who shares that a cellmate from another prison claimed responsibility for the murders of Andy’s wife and her lover. Before Tommy can assist Andy in his redemption, however, “troopers dive in all directions as Norton raises the gun and jams it under his chin,” murdering Tommy. While the true murderers were not brought to justice, Andy managed to redeem himself by escaping the prison.

Finally, Dante’s “Inferno” is a poem that illustrates the manifestation of justice through the

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various punishments assigned to each sinner. Justice in “Inferno” is not about placing blame or capturing the bad guy, but rather about punishing specific types of sinners. Each sinner in “Inferno” receive the punishment that they deserve. There is a circle for each type of sinner, and their corresponding punishment. Dante writes, “this second circle is the true beginning of Hell and is also where the true punishments of Hell begin. Minos, the mythological king of Crete, sits in judgment of the damned souls” (Cliff Notes). The sinners’ justice is determined by the king of Crete, similar to the judge seen in “Shawshank Redemption”. Justice is ultimately served by punishing the sinners based on the crimes that were committed in life. “Circle II is the circle of carnal lust. The sinners are tossed and whirled by the winds, as in life they felt themselves — helpless in the tempests of passion” (Cliff Notes). The punishment assigned to each sinner ensures that they have learned their lesson.

Justice is a common theme presented in “Serial”, “Shawshank Redemption”, and “Inferno”. While Koenig’s “Serial,” does not have a single defined sinner, Darabont’s “Shawshank Redemption”, and Dante’s “Inferno” depict multiple sinners. In all three of the texts, the characters’ seek justice for a sin that was committed. The justice is manifested differently in each story, and whether or not justice was achieved varies in each circumstance as well. In “Serial”, justice is achieved for Hae Min Lee by placing the blame on an individual. In “Shawshank Redemption” justice was determined by the judge but was ultimately not achieved. Andy finds redemption, however, in his escape from the prison. Finally, justice in “Inferno” is determined by the King of Crete, and is achieved by punishing the sinners for the sins they have committed in life.

## Work Cited

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