Serial Essay Rough Draft

When I first started listening to Serial, a podcast that investigates the conviction of Adnan Syed for killing his girlfriend Hae, I went in with the assumption that he was innocent because I felt that if he was in fact guilty than the entire endeavor of casting doubt over his conviction would have been a pointless exercise. But after my opinion has been swayed between guilty and innocent multiple times, I’ve come to the conclusion that Adnan did in fact murder Hae. However, an important distinction to make is that my conclusion is based on more evidence than the jurors had and, if I had been sitting on that jury, I would have voted to acquit. I find the aforementioned distinction important because I think a lot of listeners take into account the additional info provided by the This American Life team and then make a decision that they then feel is coming from the same knowledge basis as the average juror on Adnan’s trial and this is simply not true; the reason this distinction is relevant to my argument is that part of the evidence that persuaded me of Adnan’s guilt relies upon calling into question the testimony Jay presented to the court based upon his statements to his friends before he went to the police. I came to the conclusion that Adnan’s guilty based upon Jay’s conflicting accounts of what happened the day of Hae’s murder, Adnan’s inability to remember what happened on the day of Hae’s murder, and what I see as manipulative, possibly sinister actions by Adnan in his dealings with Sarah.

The key piece of evidence in the prosecution’s case was the testimony of one of Adnan’s friend’s Jay, who said under oath that Adnan had come to him after murdering Hae and the pair had worked together to bury her. There are however many issues with Jay’s story including his changing when Adnan told him that he (Adnan) was going to kill Hae, where Adnan and Jay met up following the murder, and where the pair went after burying Hae’s body. While most of these discrepancies I can justify to myself as Jay’s attempts to dampen his self-incrimination and just having a bad memory, the one that stands out the most to me is where Adnan and Jay met up. When describing the day to his friends, Jay told them that he found out about the murder and picked up Adnan outside of a pool hall, whereas in court and in recorded police interviews he said that interaction occurred outside of a local Best Buy. While some people may see this as an example of Jay’s lying and thus showing Adnan’s innocence, I think it does that opposite. To me, this change in locations shows that Jay did in fact have the interaction with Adnan outside the pool hall but when he went to police they convinced him to change the location to a Best Buy during an unrecorded interview session before Jay made his initial statement. I think the detectives saw the promise in Jay’s testimony and felt that it would only be strengthened if they had him change where he saw the body to Best Buy because it better fit their timeline of the day. I think that Jay’s contradicting statements show him as an honest, scared man who was just trying to do what he felt was necessary to get a cold-blooded killer locked up.

A very big red flag to me in Adnan’s defense is his inability to remember what happened on the day of Hae’s murder despite his getting a call from the police. While getting a call from the police would set off most people, Adnan’s non-reaction to it is even more startling because they were calling to ask him if he knew where his ex-girlfriend and now close friend was; if he was as close to her as he claimed to be at the time then, even if a call from the police did not alarm him, her disappearance should have. Even more telling is the fact he made no attempt to page or call her following her disappearance even though just the night before she was murdered he called her house three times. It seems Adnan most likely does remember what happened on the day of Hae’s murder but does not what to divulge that information; it’s this likelihood of remembering combined with what I perceive as a desire to lie in order to conceal the aforementioned memory that contributes to my conclusion that Adnan murdered Hae.

However, the evidence that takes precedence over all other in my conclusion of Adnan’s guilt is that based on his actions, I genuinely think that Adnan is a manipulative psychopath. I first started to entertain the possibility of Adnan manipulating those around him when he had an extremely negative reaction to the reporter Sarah telling him that she felt she knew him. In general, when manipulating people in this sort of emotional way, where you appeal to their baser feelings of empathy in order to get what you want, it can be quite a shock and lead to you having a negative reaction when they claim to know you; this is because while manipulating them in this way, you are constantly struggling to ensure that they only see the façade you present while you are able to see the full spectrum of their feelings and use it to your advantage. So, when someone acts as though they know you, it can be perceived by the manipulator as threating because it sparks the concern that they many have broken through the façade and unveiled your true intentions. Following this negative encounter Adnan would later write a long form letter to Sarah explaining his conduct and making an attempt to show empathy towards her. The letter is a very important tool of the manipulator because it allows him to engineer a scenario where the manipulated person encounters the message in a manner that is free from surprises and is created in advance so the manipulator can spend as much time as possible constructing a well thought out and human appeal to the manipulated person’s sense of empathy. Adnan is clearly a master of using the long form letter to manipulate because following her reading of it, Sarah concludes that he cannot be a psychopath because he showed her empathy in the letter. It’s important to notice he has only shown her empathy through written communication, but not verbal, which indicates to me that, while he can easily fake empathy, he does not actually feel it, and thus can’t convey it in the spur of the moment. I find Adnan to be a manipulative psychopath who’s playing all of his sympathizers for fools and, because of this, I believe he did murder Hae.

An important aspect of Serial is that it’s a podcast, which means that the only visuals of the subjects I encountered where purely static and therefore disjointed from the information provided by Serial; I find this to be relevant to my conclusion because many people described Adnan’s charm and good looks. It is my position that because there is a disconnection between his audible statements and physical expressions, those who only encounter his testimonies though audio are less susceptible to his manipulation and therefore able to discern it. Additionally, Adnan’s defense relies heavily on casting doubt on the narrative setup by the prosecution while providing no alternate timeline; this strategy is in line with that of someone who is trying to subvert blame through manipulation and discrediting of evidence rather than the redirection that’s usually employed by those sincere in their claim to innocence. In the end, considering what I heard listening to the podcast over several weeks in class, I find Adnan to be guilty because of Jay’s testimony, Adnan’s inability to remember what happened on the day of Hae’s murder, and what I see as psychopathic and manipulative tendencies from Adnan when dealings with Sarah. While I understand the average viewers desire to see Adnan as another victim of our broken criminal justice system, I think that in his specific case he is in fact exploiting these sympathizers in an attempt to get away with murder.