Notes

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One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

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One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Alexander Solzhenitsyn is a critique of Stalinism through the first hand account of the fictionally created character Ivan Denisovich Shukhov. Solzhenitsyn created his literary account of a day in a prison camp through the development of several fictional characters and creative emotional themes appealing to human nature. Essential to incorporating his to work into a larger historical picture of Gulag isolationism, is his emphasis on the politics, organizational structure, and contrasting intellectualisms of the camp system. The novel, narrated through the first person experiences of his main character Ivan Shukhov, provides a historical account of the irrationality of a political system and the oppression of basic human freedoms under the authoritarian rule of Stalin. The struggle for survival is thematically elaborated upon in the novel by the accentuation of hunger, mistrust, and brutality. Within the lager theme of the struggle for survival in the context of existentialism and the notion of God, several subthemes are developed, such as the ethnic differences still fresh in Russia between the people of different regions within the empire, gender relations and the failing system of the kolkhoz, and the organizational and hierarchical structure of Shukhov's labor camp in the geographical region of the Siberian steppe. All of this provides evidence to the uncontrollable nature of events for Russian peoples that have been ever present in their history. The following review will examine the previously mentioned themes within a historical context, concentrating on the continuing despotism of the Russian government that has been intertwined within the system since monarchial rule and the perpetuation of the social institution of serfdom.

The experiences of Shukhov can be used in explaining the absurdity of Stalinism, the terror, the violence, and the fear of dissent from his rule. More importantly, they can be used to describe the horrors of the Gulag system and the contradicting Soviet political system as the product of authoritarian rule. Shukhov is serving in the labor camps for the crime of high treason. In 1942 his whole army was surrounded by Germans and having no other options, surrendered to the Germans. He remained in German captivity and managed to escape, but was not believed by Russian authorities when he stated his story and claimed to be an

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