moment when you go out to the morning roll call—in the dark, in the cold, with a hungry belly, to face a whole day of work. You lose your tongue. You lose all desire to speak to anyone" (p. 23).The only thing that kept them warm throughout the day was the rhythm of their work and the only thing that kept Shukhov feeling human at the end of the day was the meager pride he could take in the work that he and his squadron did accomplish despite such conditions.

Existentialism is an interesting theme portrayed throughout the narrative through the examination of character's attitudes, mind-sets, and willingness to survive by attempting to outsmart the system and function within it simultaneously. Although the prisoner's did interact with one another, through analyzing the character of Shukhov we can conclude that focus on his own emotions, thoughts, responsibilities, and actions in his state of existence as a prisoner in the camp contributed to his survival. "'...Don't worry about those twenty-five years of yours. It's not a fact you'll be in all that time. But I have been here eight full years—now that is a fact.' Yes, you live with your feet in the mud and there's no time to be thinking about how you got in or how you're going to get out" (p. 55). Rather than focusing his energy on intellectual and political debates, as many prisoners and guards do, he focuses his energy on securing himself extra food and tools necessary to his survival without getting caught. He keenly observed the camp hierarchy to avoid getting in trouble as much as he could and perhaps dealt with the reality of his situation better than his counterparts. He forbade his wife to send him parcels and packages to make the burden of camp life easier on himself. "He had less and less cause to remember Temgenovo and his home there. Life in camp wore him out from reveille to bedtime, with not a second for idle reflections" (p. 107). Most of the narrative is solely concerned with Shukhov's immediate needs of hunger, warmth, and getting through the work day while avoiding punishment.

Notions of God are also examined by him in his existentialist state through his interactions with Alyosha the Baptist, but is essentially is own will of the determination to survive that has gotten him through his day of work. The narrative does present a picturesque idea of the mental toil of Shukhov, the reasoning for his imprisonment, and his struggle with God while attempting to maintain a psyche of survival "'Oh, you mustn't pray for that either,' said Alyosha, horrified. 'Why do you want freedom? In freedom your last grain of faith will be choked with weeds. You should rejoice that you are in prison. Here you have the time to think about your soul…Shukhov gazed at the ceiling in silence. Now he didn't know either wanted freedom or not. At first he hand longed for it…and then it became clear that men like him wouldn't ever be allowed to return home, that they'd be exiled. And whether his life would be any better than here—who could tell… 'You see, Alyosha,' Shukhov explained to him, 'somehow it works out all right for you: Jesus Christ wanted you to sit in prison and you are—sitting there for his sake. But for whose sake am I here? Because we weren't ready for war in forty-one? For that? But was that my fault?'" (p. 136). Each man has his own coping method in dealing with survival, justified by notions of an omnipotent spiritual authority, or the basic human instinct of survival. All are necessary themes explored by the author in examining the psychology of the Gulag prison system.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Alexander Solzhenitsyn is an intensely political piece of literature exposing the despotism, violence, absurdity, and utter inhumanness of the Soviet Gulag system under Josef Stalin. Although classified as fiction, it proved to be such a socio-politico bombshell because Solzhenitsyn himself was sentenced to and survived one of Stalin's prison camps. He served as a commander during World War II and was highly honored by the government for his outstanding military service. However, in a personal letter written to a friend, he exposed his dissent towards the Communist rule of Stalin and was sentenced to eleven years in a special prison camp, ordinary work camp, and in exile (xvi). Taking his personal experience into consideration, his literary audience understood that through reading this fictional piece they were in fact encountering an outstandingly real account of a prisoner within the camp system. An example of destalinization and tolerance under the rule of Nikita Khrushchev, he was allowed to publish his work under the guise of the human face of socialism. Ironically, however, after winning the Nobel Peace prize for his work in 1970, he was not allowed to leave the country to receive it (xix). Revealing the secrecy around the Gulag system for the first time and the incredibly massive genocide that occurred, the historicity of Solzhenitsyn's work presented itself in a myriad of ways. Firstly, he successfully depicted the brutality of the Gulags in Siberia and the incorporation of them into the Soviet economy. Secondly, he presented the audience with and understanding of the rigidity, paranoia, and intolerance of Stalin's rule. Thirdly, he added an emotional appeal to the basic human instinct for survival, when the threat of death looms over one's self everyday.

References

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