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The Soviet Experience

During times of war, the Soviet Union would punish people for their crimes by sending them to gulags, or Soviet labor camps. The Soviet leaders would punish people regardless of if the people were guilty or not if they even slightly skeptical. The novel, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes the life in a Soviet gulag through the eyes of Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, who was falsely convicted of treason. The struggles of Soviet Experience are showcased throughout the novel as the workers have a lack of food and a potential risk of death every day. Solzhenitsyn’s use of figurative language and sarcasm, in the novel, characterizes the Soviet experience as one of submission and struggle.

The use of figurative language in the novel exemplifies the overbearing power the Soviet Union possesses. For example, when Buinovsky was protesting that stripping of the men’s clothes in the cold was not communist or Soviet behavior, Lieutenant Volkovoi “like black lightning, he flashed: ‘Ten days in the guardhouse’” (Solzhenitsyn 34). The use of the word “black” creates a dark and fearsome tone because of the color black is the direct contrast to the color of lightning. This dark tone represents the feeling of living in the camp, always overshadowed by the Soviet power. Volkovoi flashing signifies how rapidly he sentences the men to their punishment; he will sentence the men to the guardhouse without hesitation. This small-scale punishment is important because it emphasizes how much power the Soviet Union has over its people. The Soviet Union will severely punish anyone that even remotely disobeys.

Solzhenitsyn also utilizes sarcasm to demonstrate the submissive nature of the Soviet experience. For example, when it is nearly dinnertime for Shukhov and the other workers, the captain says, “‘but since their day a new decree has been passed, and now the sun stands highest at one.’ ‘Who passed that decree?’ ‘Soviet power’” (Solzhenitsyn 64). The captain’s sarcastic remark about the Soviet power being able to change the natural timing of the sun exemplifies the people’s discontent of the Soviet Union. Stating that the Soviet power has the ability to change anything emphasizes the overbearing power they possess. The people act submissively under the rule of the Soviet experience because the pure power implied in a sarcastic comment such as this. The comment by Shukhov asking who passed the decree, further emphasizes the immense strength of the Soviet Union. Even though it was a sarcastic joke, Shukhov questions it as if the decree may be a possibility.

Throughout One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the use of figurative language and sarcasm emphasizes the submissive nature and struggle of the Soviet experience. The Soviet Union always has some fear in it as a result of the massive power the Soviet Union possesses. Disobeying the rules or doing anything other than what is told can result in a severe punishment. However at the end of the day for Shukhov, “a day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day” (Solzhenitsyn 167). Although Shukhov lives in the gulag for ten years for a false conviction, him and the others in the Soviet Union may potentially experience happiness under the oppressive Soviet rule.