

One day in the life of ivan denisovitch

Literature



This essay will consist of a comparative study of two books we have studied in class. The first novel is *One day in the life of Ivan Denisovitch*. A novel about how a man, the protagonist, is imprisoned in Siberia in a Soviet Prison camp. He has a ten-year sentence and he is in his eighth year. We follow this character through out one of his days in this camp. The relevance of a small piece of food or a longer stay in the bed becomes clear, as these prisoners do not have very much to hold on to. The second novel I will use for this essay is *Season of Migration to the North*.

This novel is about how a protagonist returns home after living abroad for a while. We see his life and the life of a man that deeply fascinates him, Mustafa Sa'eed. The way that the protagonist has been alienated from his home village and the effects this has on him. In this essay I will discuss Mustafa Sa'eed. His life seems to become the protagonist life. My thesis for this essay is that each character discussed above reacts differently to their isolation than the other, this I will try and clarify in the essay. The theme of isolation or loneliness in both novels will be discussed.

How this theme relates to the chosen characters and how they compare and contrast. The protagonist of the first novel is Ivan Denisovich Shukov. A common Russian peasant who is serving his ten-year sentence in a Soviet prison for betraying his country during the Second World War or so the authorities were convinced, but in the novel we learn that he is being held in prison whilst he is innocent. The camp he is at now is part of a special political camp. After his eight years in the camp he now knows all the tricks for the camp. How he can get extra food and how he can get favours from people.

He no longer thinks about the small town where he is from. He concentrates his full attention to his work and life in the camp. In Shukov's discussion with his wife, through a letter, which he thinks about after roll call in his day¹ of the men who leave the kolkhoz to become carpet painters, one sees a rudimentary moral code held by the peasant. Shukov is not comforted by organised religion like some other prisoners in the camp. Nonetheless, he clings to certain notions of right and wrong imbedded within him, despite the forces in the camp and in society, which push him to abandon them.

Shukov knows that to be a carpet painter " a man needed to be free and easy with people, to be brash, to know how to grease a palm or two. And although Shukov had trodden the earth for forty years, though he'd lost half his teeth and his head was growing bald, he'd never either given or taken a bribe, nor had he learned to do so in camp. " In a sense, the deprivations of camp have clarified this moral code within Shukov; he can be certain that an action that he would stoop to in the extreme situation of camp life is something he would not do back in the World.

In the novel *Seasons of Migration to the North* we are first introduced to the protagonist of the novel, who tells the story of a part of his life and a character in his village that he has not seen before. Both characters are important to the novel and they have lived similar lives. In the novel the protagonist learns more and more about this mysterious man, and it seems almost as if the protagonist feels that he is becoming this man, this is best described in the following quote: " Thus Mustafa Sa'eed has, against my will, become a part of my World, a thought in my brain, a phantom that does not want to take itself off.

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Mustafa Sa'eed appears more relevant when looking at the theme of isolation. The life he lives in England is described in finer details. Mustafa Sa'eed is a brilliant student from Sudan, who continues his tertiary studies in England. When he returns from his stay abroad he marries a woman from the home village of the protagonist. When the protagonist returns he finds all the people he knows except for this man. He finds out whom this man is and is fascinated by his life. Mustafa shares his bed with several women during his stay in London.

These women must have been attracted to the African mystery this character has. Yet the women he sleeps with are said to be dead. Mustafa describes to the protagonist of this novel that at the point of ecstasy he kills these women. This element adds more anonymity to the already mysterious character of Mustafa Sa'eed. Due to the circumstances in which the chosen characters find themselves, they are some how in a form of isolation, according to the dictionary isolation is defined as the following " Considered without regard to relationships, considered to be in solitude.

To illustrate the ways in which both characters are in isolation one should look at the circumstances, which brought them into isolation. Mustafa is alone in his period in London, he does have people around him as London is not completely deserted but the people he is close to and whom he trust are not with him as he is separated voluntarily from his roots and placed into a completely strange environment to study. Ivan is also away from his home, but not out of free will.

He tries not to think about home, he has learnt in prison that it is a weakness to reminisce the life you had. He too has people around him constantly, but they are not the people from home so it makes it different. Having people around one does not necessarily mean that one does not lose the feeling of isolation. Each individual reacts differently to isolation, Mustafa and Ivan react to their isolation in different ways. Ivan Denisovich handles his isolation by working harder than ever.

He does not have much contact from home, mainly because this is restricted by the prison protocol; he is only allowed to write to his wife and children twice a year. These letters are first read by the guards to ensure no information on Resistance formation is exchanged. His family back home doesn't have enough money to send him much so they don't, unlike Tsezar who frequently receives packages from home, which he then generously shares. He ordered this because the packages he received only made him realise how much he misses home.

From this one day one cannot really tell much about the motivations behind his hard work but one can guess that the time may pass quicker if he doesn't stop to think about home and keeps him concentrated. This impresses the guards and may help in the decision of letting him free when his sentence is finished, as it sometimes has been the case that the sentence was prolonged without any substantial reason. Ivan knows he will only prolong his stay in the prison if he does not co-operate with the officials, and thus strategically becomes an ideal prisoner.

Mustafa is isolated in England, it doesn't say how much contact he has with his home, yet when looking at the point in time he is in London one can say almost with certainty that this contact was limited to letters between England and Sudan. Mustafa fills the emptiness he feels inside due to departing from home by getting involved with as many women as he can. It seems to have become an obsession; this is derived from the way he talks about women⁴. When these women die he feels isolated again, and so takes on the next woman.

All these women are a sign that he is trying to find love, or the feeling of being cared about, what he misses from home. He does fall in love a couple of times, but the way it is seems more like something that is supposed to be. As an example the marriage he has with Mahmoud's daughter seems more as a tool Mustafa uses to be accepted in the village to cope with his isolation. It is clear to the reader that both characters evidently suffer from their isolation.

They do different things as a reaction to being isolated yet one can say they react to the situation that they are by keeping their mind off of home. They both consume some sort of activity that somewhat becomes obsessive, for Ivan it is finishing the mortar he has left, at the risk of being late. For Mustafa it is the women he goes through in England. One can conclude that both men are trying to find something to fill up the emptiness formed by the isolation by keeping themselves busy with other things that keep their mind off of their home.