

Darkness at Noon Study Guide

Darkness at Noon by Arthur Koestler

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Plot Summary

Darkness at Noon, by Arthur Koestler, is a political novel that tells the story of Rubashov, a Russian political prisoner. Rubashov is arrested in the middle of the night for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which is a reported plot to assassinate a political leader.

At the interrogation a week later, Rubashov is surprised that his interrogator is a friend named Ivanov with whom he had served during the Civil War. Rubashov and Ivanov have an almost pleasant conversation before Ivanov asks Rubashov to confess. Ivanov tells Rubashov he could save his life by confessing, but Rubashov refuses.

Several weeks go by. Rubashov begins talking with his neighboring prisoners by a series of knocks on the cell walls. After some time, Rubashov is allowed to go for walks in the yard. During these walks, Rubashov meets a fellow prisoner. The man has been in solitary confinement for more than twenty years, a fact that has caused him to become somewhat insane.

Rubashov is unaware that there have been some discussions about the way in which Ivanov has handled Rubashov's case. Gletkin, a fellow warden, thinks that Ivanov should be harsher with Rubashov. Before Rubashov's second interrogation, Gletkin has a fellow prisoner executed, walking him out of the cell block in front of Rubashov. This causes Rubashov to become angry with Ivanov when he comes the following day.

Rubashov decides to confess and sends a letter to Ivanov. However, Ivanov has been arrested and executed. Gletkin takes over Rubashov's interrogation. Rubashov is forced to stay awake for days at a time and is given very little food. Eventually, Rubashov confesses. At the trial, Rubashov is convicted and sentenced to death.



The First Hearing: Chapters 1-7

Summary

Chapter 1: Rubashov is in a prison cell. He looks around and is somewhat impressed with the amenities as compared to another time in which he was imprisoned. Rubashov takes off his shoes, puts out his cigarette, and goes to sleep.

Chapter 2: Rubashov was in bed dreaming about his previous arrest as the officials of the People's Commissariat of the Interior knock on his door.

Chapter 3: The two men who have presently come to arrest Rubashov are outside his door with the porter, Vassilij. Vassilij worries that the two men will realize that he is a supporter of Rubashov and arrest him as well. The men get into the apartment and go to Rubashov's bed where they rudely wake him and order him to dress. Rubashov is polite, but clearly unimpressed with the behavior of the younger man.

Chapter 4: Rubashov is escorted to the car by the two officials. Rubashov makes polite conversation with the chauffeur. The younger official shows his ignorance when he injects himself into the conversation, causing Rubashov to chastise him.

Chapter 5: Rubashov is escorted to a cell that already has his name written on a card outside.

Chapter 6: The warders keep an eye on Rubashov, surprised at how soundly the man sleeps. Rubashov wakes and contemplates his situation, aware that he is likely to be shot. When the warders asks Rubashov why he did not get up at the morning bell, Rubashov tells him that he has a toothache. Rubashov wishes he had a newspaper because he wants to know what is being said about his arrest, if anything. When Rubashov hears footsteps coming toward his cell, he wonders if this will be his first interrogation and if he will be beaten. Instead, the guards go to the cell across the hall from Rubashov's.

Chapter 7: Rubashov is not given breakfast. When he demands to know why, he is told that it is because he had a toothache that morning. Rubashov requests a rag to clean his cell and paper and pen.

Analysis

The first few chapters in the novel introduce the main character and the conflict that will propel the plot. The main character is Rubashov, an older man who has been a director of the Communist Party in Russia. Rubashov has been arrested for crimes against the state, something he has clearly been expecting. Rubashov believes he will be executed, but seems remarkably calm for a man about to face execution.



Rubashov has little respect for the leader of his country, someone he refers to as No. 1. Rubashov thinks about this man as he contemplates his fate. As Rubashov does this, the reader gets the distinct feeling that Rubashov is not happy with the direction the Party is going and wonders if everything he did was for the benefit of his people.

One of the themes of the novel is expressed in the early chapters. The theme of the new versus the old is expressed not only in the age difference of the two men who come to arrest Rubashov, but also in their attitudes. The younger man is more violent, quicker to temper than the older man. The younger man does not seem to understand the concepts behind the founding of the Party and its purpose in the beginning. This seems to illustrate Rubashov's own feelings in regard to all he has done compared to the actions of the current leader.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Rubashov? Why is he being arrested? What are some of the comparisons between Rubashov's arrest this time and a previous arrest he recalls in his dreams?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Rubashov's name already on the door of his cell? How does Rubashov feel after seeing this?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Rubashov denied breakfast? How does Rubashov react to this oversight?

Vocabulary

Resumed, corridor, pince-nez, requests, whether, invalids, remembered, irony, crumpled, reported, expressionlessly, admire, mistaken, argue, regulations, omitted, revolver, prisoner, tension, expressionless, uniform, disappeared, steamed, tension, warder, orderlies, hesitantly, approached, procession.



The First Hearing: Chapters 8-14

Summary

Chapter 8: Rubashov is pacing his cell, contemplating his situation, when he hears faint tapping. Rubashov realizes the man in the cell next to his, No. 402, is trying to communicate. Rubashov attempts to see if the man knows the quadratic tapping system and taps out his name. The man does not respond immediately, but he does eventually. The man refuses to tell Rubashov who he is. They talk for a time about Rubashov's last sexual experience, but Rubashov becomes bored and stops responding.

Chapter 9: Rubashov begins to think about the past, of a German town where he once worked. It is 1933 and Rubashov has been sent to Germany to work with the Communists there. Rubashov recalls a man named Richard. Richard told Rubashov that he did not have a list of the people in his community who were loyal to the Party, only his wife had one. Unfortunately, his wife was arrested the night before. Richard then went on to tell Rubashov about the actions of his group recently, but Rubashov already knew most of it because the Party had a spy in their group.

Rubashov then told Richard that his group was supposed to have distributed materials that they had been given. Instead, they made up their own materials. A soldier and his girlfriend came into the room, making Richard nervous. When they left, Rubashov told Richard that because he took it upon himself to change the materials the Party had wanted distributed, he has been kicked out of the Party. Richard was upset, but Rubashov had no other options.

Chapter 10: Rubashov speaks to No. 402 again, learning that most of the prisoners around them are there for political divergences. The neighbor even tells Rubashov that one of the men had been tortured the day before.

Chapter 11: The warders do not bring Rubashov lunch, either. Rubashov asks for cigarettes, but the warders tell him he has to wait to buy things when his money has been turned into vouchers. Rubashov asks No. 402 for tobacco, but is initially refused. No. 402 then tries to send Rubashov tobacco through the warder, but the warder refuses. Rubashov is then told that another neighbor, one referred to as hare-lip, has sent his greetings.

Chapter 12: Memories keep swirling in Rubashov's mind, mostly of the past when he was an idealistic youth. Rubashov also remembers a man named Little Loewy. It was two years after the affair with Richard, after he had been arrested and tortured. Rubashov asked for a mission abroad and was sent to Belgium. Rubashov met Little Loewy as a group of other Party members who hung out in a bar. Little Loewy shared his story with Rubashov. Rubashov liked Little Loewy, even felt a little sorry for him. However, Rubashov was there for a reason.



The dock workers in Belgium who were loyal to the Party were told to boycott all products from a newly established dictatorship. In complete disregard to this, Rubashov told the dock workers that they were to disregard the boycott and unload incoming ships headed to this dictatorship. Little Loewy was one of the only ones who understood what Rubashov said and he explained it to his friends. The dock workers refused to go against the boycott. All the dockworkers were thrown out of the Party. Little Loewy hung himself.

Chapter 13: The next morning, Rubashov is taken to the doctor for his toothache. The doctor identifies a broken tooth with the root still in the gum, but Rubashov refuses the dentist's offer to remove it without anesthesia.

Chapter 14: Rubashov is taken for his first interrogation. Rubashov is surprised to find his interrogator will be an old friend, Ivanov. Ivanov and Rubashov talk about old times together. Ivanov then asks Rubashov how long he has worked for the organized opposition. Rubashov refuses to answer. Ivanov finally tells Rubashov it would be easier on him if he would simply confess. Rubashov refuses.

Analysis

Rubashov speaks to No. 402 for a time, using a system of knocks so that they will not be caught by the warden. While the neighboring prisoner is fixated on Rubashov's recent sexual conquest more than anything else, Rubashov just wants to know who is in the cells around him.

As Rubashov is stuck in his cell, he finds himself thinking often of the past. Rubashov's memories seem to center on people he hurt in some way. As these thoughts play through Rubashov's mind, he seems to be wondering if all of that was worth what was happening to him now. Rubashov clearly knows where this stint in prison is going to end. Rubashov has been a part of the Party for a long time. He knows what happens to people in his position. For this reason, Rubashov also spends a great deal of time preparing himself for his execution.

Rubashov is finally interrogated, but it is done by a man he has known for years, a man he once saved from committing suicide. This man is gentle with Rubashov, actually talking about old memories instead of interrogating Rubashov. Rubashov, however, refuses to confess to having done anything wrong and insists he no longer wants to play their game. It is clear that Rubashov is resolved to his own fate.

Discussion Question 1

What is significant about the taxi driver who refuses to accept Rubashov's payment while he was in Germany? What does this suggest about the way the Party was viewed at the time?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Rubashov speak to the man in the neighboring cell? What do they talk about? What does this suggest about the other prisoner's character?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rubashov refuse to confess when he is interrogated? What does this mean about Rubashov's future?

Vocabulary

Saluted, amputated, conversation, fortnight, proposition, article, decade, accusation, confrontation, refute, impression, willingness, selected, judicial, subtleties, repeated, opportunity, summary, instructions, reversed, removed, public, administratively, confession, liquidated, impatience.



The Second Hearing: Chapters 1-7

Summary

Chapter 1: This is an excerpt from Rubashov's diary dated five days into his imprisonment. It seems that Rubashov is struggling to find where he belongs in the Party. It has evolved since he joined it many years before.

Chapter 2: Ivanov speaks to another man named Gletkin on the evening after his interrogation of Rubashov. Gletkin does not believe that Rubashov will ever confess; but, Ivanov thinks that Rubashov is logical enough to realize that confession is his only chance. Gletkin seems to think that the only way to get Rubashov to confess will be to force him to witness the execution of a fellow prisoner.

Chapter 3: Rubashov has finally received his vouchers to buy cigarettes, pens, and paper. Rubashov writes notes most days to pass the time, though he occasionally finds himself talking to himself. Rubashov also catches himself daydreaming quite often.

Chapter 4: Rubashov continues his conversations with No. 402. When Rubashov gets a new neighbor on the opposite side, he asks No. 402 about him. No. 402 tells Rubashov that the man in No. 406 was a teacher who had joined a commune during a revolution in his country shortly after the last war. The man was arrested and sentenced to death, but his sentence had been commuted. He has spent twenty years in jail with little to no contact with other people, leading to the nickname of Rip Van Winkle. Later, when the wardens take Rubashov to get a shave, he tries to see a name on No. 406, but he cannot.

Chapter 5: A month after his arrest, the wardens begin giving Rubashov liberties, such as taking him for a shave and allowing him to exercise outside. Rip Van Winkle is allowed to go with Rubashov and the other prisoners. They walk around the yard together. Rubashov thinks that Rip Van Winkle is trying to communicate with him, so on the third day he brings paper and a pen to the yard. Rip Van Winkle draws a map of the Country of the Revolution over and over again. It is clear that he has lost his mind in his solitude the last twenty years.

Chapter 6: Rubashov senses a change in the air on the evening before his second hearing. No. 402 tells Rubashov that one of the political prisoners is to be executed. Rubashov soon learns that the prisoner is Michael Bogrov, a former sailor accused of joining the revolution. The prisoners stand at their cell doors and drum as the prisoner is walked by. Rubashov hears the prisoner bellow his name as he is taken to his execution.

Chapter 7: Ivanov comes to Rubashov's cell and finds him sick from an infection in his mouth. Ivanov gives Rubashov some brandy. Rubashov accuses Ivanov of having Bogrov executed on purpose, but Ivanov claims it was Gletkin's idea. Ivanov continues



to defend himself by listing Bogrov's crimes. Finally, Ivanov says that what he allowed to happen to Bogrov was no worse than what Rubashov did to his beloved Arlova. They continue to discuss their differing sides of the situation, using literature and metaphor to explain them. Ivanov leaves Rubashov to rest and tells Gletkin that Rubashov will confess the following day.

Analysis

As Rubashov remains imprisoned, he finds himself wondering where he fits in with the Party that has changed so completely. Rubashov always believed he was a strong Party supporter, but he's not in agreement with some of the ways the Party has changed. It is a difficult time as Rubashov finds himself wondering if everything he has done in his life has been worth it.

Rubashov is given new liberties and he enjoys them. However, as Rubashov is allowed to socialize with some of the other prisoners, he discovers that some of them have been changed by their experiences in prison. It does not seem to matter if one is put to death or left to twenty years of solitary confinement. Neither one is ideal.

Another of the men in charge at the prison dislikes Rubashov and thinks that different methods should be used to force him to confess to his crimes. For this reason, a friend of Rubashov's is escorted in front of his cell to his death, making Rubashov deeply upset when he hears the doomed man call his name. Rubashov accuses Ivanov of doing this on purpose. Ivanov defends himself. He lets Rubashov know that the prisoner would have died anyway and that it was Rubashov that sent him there just as much as anyone else. So, another name is added to the list of people Rubashov has begun to regret hurting in the name of the Party.

Discussion Question 1

What new privileges does Rubashov get in this section? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Rip Van Winkle? Why does Rubashov befriend him? What does Rubashov learn about him?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Arlova? How does Rubashov remember her? What happened to her?

Vocabulary

Instructions, communication, documents, execution, remembered, idiocy, stubborn, visitor, cowardice, martyrdom, dreamless, memory, relieved, turret, depression, starvation, parasitic, humanitarians, objectively, harmful, tuberculosis, undernourishment, experiments, mankind, scrupulous, rampart, revolution.



The Third Hearing: Chapters 1-6

Summary

Chapter 1: This is a diary excerpt that discusses the maturity of the 'masses.'

Chapter 2: Rubashov writes a letter to Ivanov to let him know he plans to confess. When Rubashov goes for his daily exercise, Rip Van Winkle is gone and replaced by someone else. Rubashov returns to his cell and tells No. 402 his plan. No. 402 accuses Rubashov of lacking honor.

Chapter 3: Rubashov expects to be taken to Ivanov immediately, but he is not taken from his cell for several days. When Rubashov is finally taken out of his cell, it is two o'clock in the morning and his interviewer is not Ivanov, but Gletkin. Gletkin reads the charges against Rubashov. Rubashov, however, does not plead guilty. Rubashov instead claims that he had natural thoughts that went opposite to the Party, but he claims that he never did anything that overtly went against the Party. Gletkin then accuses Rubashov of having made confessions before that he now claims were untrue. Gletkin also tells Rubashov he was Arlova's chief witness for her defense, but he never came to her rescue. These things together suggest to Gletkin that Arlova was innocent, but Rubashov allowed her to be executed through his silence.

When Rubashov continues to refuse to confess to the crimes Gletkin has accused him of, Gletkin has Hare-lip brought into the room. Hare-lip claims that Rubashov told him to feed poison to No. 1. Gletkin, however, becomes annoyed, suggesting to Rubashov that it is all a set up. He remains quiet, however, as Hare-lip then claims to have met Rubashov awhile he was a member of the Trade Delegation. It is then that Rubashov recognizes Hare-lip as the son of a professor. Hare-lip describes his meeting with Rubashov and how he came to be asked to kill No. 1. Rubashov, however, pokes holes in Hare-lip's story. Rubashov signs a confession to all that Hare-lip says despite his protests against them.

Chapter 4: Rubashov is kept awake for two days straight, during which he is interrogated by Gletkin. During his interrogation, Rubashov is forced to remember a conversation years ago with a German known as Herr von Z. Rubashov insists it was a simple conversation, but Gletkin pushes the point. Gletkin tells Rubashov that Ivanov was arrested for being too nice to Rubashov. Later, Gletkin tells Rubashov that Ivanov was shot. As they continue on, Rubashov can see that the strenuousness of the interrogation is beginning to get to Gletkin, too. In fact, Gletkin drops one of the charges against Rubashov. Gletkin seems to be becoming more lenient, even giving Rubashov two hours to sleep.

Chapter 5: This chapter includes a diary excerpt that compares the current Party to Neanderthals.



Chapter 6: Five or six days into the interrogation, Rubashov passes out. Rubashov is allowed to go into the yard for a walk. The peasant who took Rip Van Winkle's place talks to him, but Rubashov barely hears him. Gletkin continues to push Rubashov in more sessions. Gletkin uses writings and speeches Rubashov made in the past against him. They argue about the direction the Party has taken since the revolution.

Analysis

Rubashov has decided to confess, but he is shocked to discover that Ivanov has been arrested and executed for his management of Rubashov's case. This added to the sleep deprivation and lack of food causes Rubashov to become weak. Eventually, he confesses to all except one of Gletkin's accusations. Gletkin agrees to drop that one. Rubashov realizes that the time of the old regime is over and the only honorable thing left is to die.

Rubashov is not tortured as he was by the Germans, but the sleep deprivation is a kind of torture that leads Rubashov to give up. It seems to the reader that Rubashov has always known that he would eventually be executed. All his friends have been and the charges against him, as made up as most of them are, are difficult to fight. Again, this section of the novel touches on the changes that have taken place in the Party, comparing the old to the new.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Rubashov not allowed to sleep? What does this accomplish?

Discussion Question 2

What are the charges against Rubashov? Are they all true?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rubashov constantly refer to Gletkin as a Neanderthal?

Vocabulary

Portrait, omnipresent, irony, recognized, committed, statement, sentimental, troubled, motives, background, archives, published, material, amenable, pressure, prospect, comrade, acquaintance, bargain, journal, contemptible, opposition, service, sympathy, pity, amongst, masses, criminals, repentance.



The Grammatical Fiction: Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1: News of Rubashov's trial spreads to his former followers. Porter Wassilij, the man who let the officials into Rubashov's house when he was arrested, is deeply saddened by the news, remembering the glory with which Rubashov was once showered. Wassilij tries to explain it all to his daughter, but she does not understand. Wassilij is frightened, however, that he will also be arrested, so he signs a petition against traitors like Rubashov. The paper reports that Rubashov is to be executed.

Chapter 2: Rubashov spends his final days alone in his cell, thinking about the past. Rubashov's thoughts are more melancholy than they were before. Rubashov is lonely. He begins to wonder about the lies he feels the Party fed to him. He was led to believe that he could act as an individual when he was never allowed to do so.

Chapter 3: No. 402 tells Rubashov that they are coming for Hare-lip. As before, the prisoners drum on the doors as the prisoner is walked by. Afterward, No. 402 comments on how well Hare-lip handled his execution. No. 402 gives Rubashov advice before he is also walked out to his own execution. No. 402, who still has eighteen years on his sentence, wishes he were going to his execution as well. Rubashov is walked out of the prison and executed by gunfire.

Analysis

Rubashov has been convicted and sentenced to death. His sentence does not set well with many of his followers, many of the older Party members who once followed his leadership. However, nothing has changed as even some of his most stringent followers are afraid of being arrested themselves. The people live in fear, the old afraid of being arrested for not agreeing with the new.

Before his death, Rubashov finds himself wondering if it was all for nothing, if the hope they had at the beginning will ever come to fruition. Rubashov had so much hope for the new socialist utopia, but he never saw it come true.

Discussion Question 1

How does Wassilij respond to reports of Rubashov's trial? Why?



Discussion Question 2

What are the differences between the way Wassilij responds to Rubashov's trial and the way in which his daughter responds to it? Why does Wassilij not try harder to make his daughter see his side of things?

Discussion Question 3

What is Rubashov thinking of as he is led to his death? How does this reflect on Rubashov's arrest and trial?

Vocabulary

Unawares, darkness, nocturnal, allowed, imaginary, promises, corridor, uniform, detached, hesitatingly, remained, document, twisting, civilian, excellent, prospects, fellow, permit, inhabited, spirit, remember, grateful, traitor, obediently, salvation, distance, vanished, rhythmically, mounting.



Characters

Rubashov

Rubashov has been a member of the Communist Party for several decades. During the revolution, Rubashov was a respected leader. However, Rubashov has recently embraced oppositional opinions. These opinions have gotten Rubashov in trouble with the Party. Rubashov is arrested and a number of charges are brought against him, many of which are false. Some are based on speeches and writings he has released.

Rubashov thinks of the past as he sits in his jail cell. Rubashov cannot help but remember people in his past that he harmed in one way or another. Rubashov also begins to wonder about the original goals of the Party and whether they will ever really come true. In the end, Rubashov confesses to most of the charges against him and is sentenced to death.

Ivanov

Ivanov is an examining magistrate. Ivanov and Rubashov were once friends. In fact, Ivanov and Rubashov served together in the war. Rubashov had convinced Ivanov not to commit suicide after he lost his leg. Ivanov is sympathetic to Rubashov, trying to convince him to confess so that the court will go easier on him. However, Rubashov refuses. Ivanov continues to try to help Rubashov, even insisting to Gletkin that Rubashov will confess only because it is the logical thing to do. Ivanov is arrested and executed for being too easy on Rubashov.

Gletkin

Gletkin is another examining magistrate. Gletkin thinks that the best way to make someone confess is to make them physically uncomfortable and make them face the reality of execution by seeing someone they know being executed. Gletkin believes these methods should be used on Rubashov rather than the gentle methods Ivanov is using. For this reason, Gletkin has Bogrov executed where Rubashov will see. Then Gletkin takes over Rubashov's interrogation and deprives him of sleep. In the end, Gletkin gets the confessions he wanted from Rubashov.

No. 402

No. 402 is the man in the cell next to Rubashov. They begin to communicate by knocking on their cells' walls. At first, No. 402 is only interested in Rubashov's sex life. However, over time they become friends and speak about a variety of things. When Bogrov is executed, the word first comes from No. 402. Later, it is No. 402 who gives advice to Rubashov before his execution.



Arlova

Arlova is a secretary who works for Rubashov when he is with the Trade Delegation. They have an affair and Rubashov feels comfortable enough to tease her during dictation. However, during the purge Arlova becomes a librarian and is instructed to stock opposition books. This causes Arlova to lose her job. When she is interrogated and put on trial, Arlova claims that Rubashov could prove her innocence, but he refuses to testify. Arlova is executed.

Rip Van Winkle

Rip Van Winkle is what the prisoner in cell 406 is called. Rubashov tries to talk to Rip Van Winkle by knocking on the cell's walls, but Rip Van Winkle only responds with a single phrase. Later, when Rubashov is allowed to go out into the yard, he is allowed to walk beside Rip Van Winkle. Rubashov thinks that Rip Van Winkle is trying to communicate with him, so he brings a pen and paper to the yard. All Rip Van Winkle will write, however, are drawings of the Country of Revolution. It appears to Rubashov that all those years alone have damaged Rip Van Winkle's sanity.

Hare-lip

Hare-lip is another of the prisoners in Rubashov's cell block. Hare-lip sends his greetings to Rubashov when Rubashov first begins to speak with No. 402, but Rubashov does not know who he is. However, when Rubashov is being interrogated the third time, Hare-lip is brought into the room. Rubashov finally realizes that he is the son of a professor with whom Rubashov was friends. Hare-lip claims that Rubashov asked him to use his position in a job to feed poison to the political leader. Rubashov pokes holes in Hare-lip's story; but, he ends up signing a confession related to it anyway. Hare-lip is executed shortly before Rubashov.

Michael Bogrov

Michael Bogrov is a sailor who was a friend of Rubashov during the war. Before Rubashov's second interrogation, Bogrov is executed. Gletkin makes a special effort to parade Bogrov in front of Rubashov's cell before his execution. Before Bogrov is shot, he calls out Rubashov's name. The following day, Rubashov blames Ivanov for this event until Ivanov explains what really happened.

Porter Wassilij

Porter Wassilij is the porter at the apartment house where Rubashov lived before his arrest. Wassilij is a supporter of Rubashov, and he is very disappointed in Rubashov's



fall. However, Wassilij is also frightened that he will face Rubashov's same fate. So, he signs a petition against men like Rubashov.

Arresting Officials

At the beginning of the novel, Rubashov is arrested by two officials of the People's Commissariat of the Interior. One of the officials is young. This man is angry and violent, fiddling with his pistol much of the time he is waiting for Rubashov to get ready to go. In the car, Rubashov gently suggests to this young man that he should read more about the Party and its original intentions. The older official, however, is respectful and gentle with Rubashov.



Symbols and Symbolism

Paper and Pen

Rubashov requests paper and pen after his arrest. Rubashov must buy his own. He uses the paper and pen to write a diary.

Cigarettes

Rubashov smokes. When he first comes to the prison, he does not have any cigarettes. They make him wait until he has vouchers for the prison store to buy more, which forces Rubashov to go through a short withdrawal.

Portrait

There is a portrait of No. 1 in most homes throughout Russia, including Rubashov's bedroom.

Pince-Nez

Pince-nez are eye glasses without arms that sit on the nose. Rubashov wears a pair of pince-nez.

Fountain Pen

Gletkin gives Rubashov a fountain pen when it is time for him to sign a confession. Rubashov is put off by the warmth of the pen from Gletkin's pocket.

Newspaper

Wissilij reads the account of Rubashov's trial in the newspaper. Wissilij is deeply frightened and disturbed by what he reads.

Petition

Wissilij signs a petition against traitors like Rubashov to save himself from arrest, not because he really believes in it.



Pistol

The young official who comes to arrest Rubashov fiddles with his pistol while waiting for Rubashov to get ready. This makes Rubashov nervous because he was hit by a pistol the first time he was arrested.

Rag

The wardens throw a rag into Rubashov's cell when he complains of having no supplies to clean his cell.

Gletkin's Uniform

Gletkin starches and irons his uniform to such a sharp crease that it makes noise when he moves.

Settings

Prison

Most of the novel takes place at the prison where Rubashov is taken after his arrest. Rubashov is given a small cell like most of the others. Rubashov is pleased that the cell is much cleaner and in better condition than the cell he was put into when he was arrested in Germany. Rubashov spends most of his time in the cell, but he is occasionally allowed out to walk in the yard or to have a shave. Rubashov uses a knocking code to speak to the prisoners on either side of him.

Germany

Rubashov was once sent to Germany to confront a Party member who had changed the wording of a Party pamphlet without permission. Rubashov was forced to kick the man named Richard out of the Party, leaving the young man devastated on the street.

Belgium

Rubashov was sent to Belgium years before his arrest to ask a group of Party dock workers to go against a mandate by the Party to boycott shipments from a specific country. The dock workers refused to follow Rubashov's orders and were kicked out of the party. One of the men committed suicide.



Themes and Motifs

The Old Versus the New

The author uses several techniques to show the difference between the old Communist Party, the one that existed before the war when Rubashov first joined the Party, and the new. In the first section of the book, the author has Rubashov arrested by two officials. One is old, a respectful man who treats Rubashov with respect. The other is a young man who is borderline cruel to Rubashov, playing with his gun like he would enjoy using it.

As the novel continues, the reader can see the characters beginning to line up on sides. On one side are the young people who believe in the new ways of the Party. On the other side are those who agree with Rubashov's opinions even as they remain afraid to make their opinions public and risk Rubashov's fate.

People grow and change; but, the author implies that what had happened in this case was that some had come together with one solid idea. Then, one person took over the leadership and changed everything. Some embraced the new ways, but others held on to the old. Those who held on to the old are being eliminated in this novel by the new. This is similar to Rubashov's comparison of the Neanderthals. However, instead of evolving into a higher life form, they are moving backward.

Fear

Fear is a constant in the lives of many of the characters in this novel. Rubashov knew for a long time that he would likely be arrested for political crimes. For this reason, Rubashov lived abroad, but he grew tired of running from his home and finally went back.

For Wissilij, fear is also an overwhelming emotion. Wissilij supported Rubashov during the war and continued to support most of his views as time went on and things began to shift in the Communist Party. Therefore, when Rubashov is arrested, Wissilij finds himself hiding his sympathies for Rubashov so that he will not be arrested. This continues when Wissilij reads of Rubashov's trial in the newspaper and tries to convince his daughter of his views, even as he signs a petition against people like Rubashov.

Socialist Utopia

A socialist utopia is an ideal society that is run by the people. For Rubashov, the Communist Party and the Revolution were supposed to be about creating a socialist utopia. As time went on, however, Rubashov became a little less enthusiastic about this idea as changes in the Party made it appear as though the reality of a utopia was growing farther and farther away.



Rubashov is a leader, a man who believed so completely in what he was doing that he did what he was told without questioning it. Rubashov hurt people in his quest to do what he thought was proper, what he thought would help the Party. Now that Rubashov is in jail for thinking in a way that went against the Party, he finds himself thinking about the people he hurt and wondering if it was really the right thing to do. These thoughts grow even darker as Rubashov is escorted to his execution.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written from the third person point of view. The author uses Rubashov as his main character through the majority of the novel. The author tells the majority of the story with Rubashov's internal monologue, showing his mental struggles as he attempts to accept his fate.

The point of view works well because it allows the writer to use internal monologue and self-inspection to weave his own political ideas through the thread of the plot. The point of view also allows the author to use other characters briefly as narrators in order to show a side to the plot of which Rubashov has no knowledge. In this way, the author is able to tell a well-rounded story.

Language and Meaning

The novel was originally written in German, but it was translated into English before being published. The language is a sophisticated English that uses proper grammar and sentence structure to which modern readers might not be accustomed. The novel was written in the 1940s, so some of the language may be unfamiliar, as are some of the words. However, the language of the novel is not complicated. It is appropriate for mature readers.

The language of this novel works well with the plot. Sophisticated words are used that fit the education level of the characters.

Structure

The novel is divided into four sections. Each section has its own set of numbered chapters. The novel is told in a linear time line, but it has frequent flashbacks. The author uses a great deal of internal dialogue to tell his story because his main character is a prisoner locked alone in a cell. However, there is some dialogue in the novel as well.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the imprisonment and interrogations of the political prisoner, Rubashov. One subplot follows the relationship Rubashov has with his fellow prisoners. Another subplot follows the attempts to force Rubashov to confess to his alleged crimes. All of the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

So far everything was in order.

-- Rubashov (The First Hearing: Chapter 1)

Importance: Rubashov takes a look around his cell when he first arrives and is satisfied with the condition.

Above his bed also hung a portrait of No. 1, and next to it a photograph of Rubashov as Partisan commander. If that photograph were found, he would probably also be taken away.

-- Wissilij (The First Hearing: Chapter 3)

Importance: This quote shows the fear that many of the older Party members have because of what is happening to Rubashov and his friends.

If I succeed in believing that I am dreaming, then it will really be a dream, he thought.

-- Rubashov (The First Hearing: Chapter 5)

Importance: This is Rubashov's thoughts as he wakes in his cell on the first morning. Although Rubashov has been calm thus far, this thought clearly shows that he is hoping that this has all been a nightmare.

Conspired against law and order: whether for money or on principle makes no difference.

-- Rubashov (The First Hearing: Chapter 8)

Importance: This is what Rubashov assumes the guards think of him.

Really bad was only the unknown, which gave one no chance to foresee one's reactions and no scale to calculate one's capacity of resistance.

-- Rubashov (The First Hearing: Chapter 10)

Importance: Rubashov is talking about the unknown when it comes to torture here. However, the reader suspects that there are other things he is thinking about as well, such as his own fate.

But he is still as logical as ever. So he will capitulate.

-- Ivanov (The Second Hearing: Chapter 2)

Importance: Ivanov is defending his treatment of Rubashov with this statement. Gletkin thinks Ivanov is being too easy on Rubashov because of their past relationship and is trying to convince him to be more cruel.

He could only hold his thoughts by writing them down; but writing exhausted him so much that he could at the most force himself to it for an hour or two a day. The rest of



the time his brain worked on its own accord.
-- Rubashov (The Second Hearing: Chapter 3)

Importance: Rubashov is concerned about his continuous daydreaming, so he writes to try to keep his mind under control. Unfortunately, Rubashov can only do this a certain amount of time a day. Not being allowed to do things that keep him busy adds to his frustration as a prisoner.

Out of sympathy and politeness, Rubashov occasionally tapped out a loud HA-HA! with his pince-nez as a laughter substitute. Then there would be no holding No. 402; he imitated an outburst of merriment, by drumming against the wall with fists and boots: HA-HA! HA-HA! and making occasional pauses, to make sure Rubashov was joining in.
-- Rubashov (The Second Hearing: Chapter 4)

Importance: This describes the growing relationship between Rubashov and his neighbor in the cell next to his. The man in cell No. 402 is incredibly lonely and happy to finally have found someone he can speak to, even if it is with a series of knocks.

You knew of my friendship with Bogrov. Therefore you take care that Bogrov -- or what was left of him -- is taken past my cell on his last journey, as a reminder.
-- Rubashov (The Second Hearing: Chapter 7)

Importance: In a fit of anger, Rubashov says this to Ivanov the day after Bogrov's execution. This tells the reader that Rubashov knows that Bogrov was executed in part because of their relationship and he resents what has happened.

Now the old guard was used up; the logic of history ordained that the more stable the regime became, the more rigid it had to become, in order to prevent the enormous dynamic forces which the Revolution had released from turning inwards and blowing the Revolution itself into the air.
-- Rubashov (The Third Hearing: Chapter 3)

Importance: This quote refers to Rubashov's idea that the Party he was a part of has changed. It has become something different.

There are things which only that older generation, the Ivanovs, the Rubashovs, and Kieffers have understood. That is over now.
-- Rubashov (The Third Hearing: Chapter 6)

Importance: These are Rubashov's last words to Gletkin after signing the confession. This again shows that Rubashov understands that the current Party is no longer the one he joined.

A dull blow struck the back of his head. He had long expected it and yet it took him unawares.
-- Rubashov (The Grammatical Fiction: Chapter 3)

Importance: This is the moment that Rubashov faces his execution.