
Racism And Imperialism In Shooting An Elephant By George Orwell And How The Other Half Lives By Jacob Riis

Travel writing has been a powerful way of directing the audience to new places; some pieces of work will take you on an emotional roller coaster through the eyes of the writers, to explore and experience new things, to get a deeper understanding of different cultures and become a part of that community. Travel writers such as George Orwell and Jacob Riis both express their point of observation towards the other races in their works *Shooting An Elephant* and *How the Other Half Lives*. While Travel writing is a way to gain some appreciation for other cultures, it further provided evidence of white privilege through casual racism towards the “exotic”, denoting them as barbaric and dangerous.

In George Orwell’s story “*Shooting An Elephant*”, he tells the readers about his hardship as a police officer in Burma and having to shoot an elephant to avoid looking like a fool. The elephant in the story illustrates the enormous size of the empire and its power over the Burmese locals. Throughout the story, Orwell focuses on the impact of the British Imperialism, on both the empire and locals’ behalf. As the empire holds power over the other countries, the locals do not appreciate it, they often give the white people glances with a sense of hatred. Even though Orwell wants to join the community, it is hard for him, “every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at”. However, the death of a local man gave him a reason to shoot the elephant. In *Shooting An Elephant* he describes the act of shooting and the death of the elephant in excruciating detail, this is to show how much that he is affected by the local people and want to prove himself, to be able to assert dominance and gain respect from them, as a British colonist. The opinions on his actions were divided, some Europeans think that the elephant’s life is worth more than a coolie’s and he should not have killed it; others think that he did the right thing for the town and saved face. In that instance, Orwell chooses to go against his own will, to be a part of that local community. He is aware that “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.” Although he shot the elephant simply to avoid looking like a fool, he enacted changes to the way that people look at him, and exposed the conflict between the moral conscience and written law. After all, he is a part of the stronger force, it is his duty as a police man, to show authority and military supremacy.

As Orwell gets treated like an outsider in Asia, Rii on the other hand is carrying a strong sense of privilege and pride as he travels around Chinatown in New York. Here Rii judges the Chinese for having their own culture and traditions rather than assimilating to the American standards. Throughout the story, Rii uses a tone of revulsion and highly visual narrative to paint a vivid picture for us to see what the lifestyles were in Chinatown; he describes the “Chinatown as a

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spectacle is disappointing". In his beliefs, the colour red and yellow, the two bright colours of China is not very welcoming for outsiders, "rather, they seem to descend to the level of the general dullness, and glower at you from doors and windows". Rii also compares of the "tidiness" of Chinatown with some other neighborhood, as positive as the word "tidiness" may sound, he turns this into a suspicion that the Chinese is trying to trick the authority into believing there's no under aged girl working in their opium factory. Rii warns the locals about the "cruel cunning" traits of the Chinese and the danger of opium. The spread of opium was a hazard to him, he insinuates on the poisonous effects of the Chinese would have on the rest of the society. Ironically, in the end of the story he still encourages the Chinese to come, but to bring their wives or to marry a woman of his own race, thus not having an effect on white women and set up a clear boundary between the drugs and Americans.

Following Rii's steps into Jewtown, he still holds his own stereotypical beliefs on the foreigners and furthers his "muckraking" journalism. He makes a definite contrast between the cleanness of the Chinese and the dirtiness of the Jewish, the dirty hallways contains "fifty-eight babies and thirty-eight children that were over five years of age". He associates the Jew's materialism and greed with the attitude of the bottom class, he sees that some of the "Polish or Russian Jews deliberately starving themselves to the point of physical exhaustion, while working night and day at a tremendous pressure to save a little money". As Rii comes to the topic of Christianity, the Jewish have the same attitude as the Chinese, their stubbornness allows them to only except their own traditions and culture.

As seen from the essay, both writers depicted a world that is full of discrimination towards the foreigners. While Orwell himself, as a colonist should have acted with more authority, he finds it difficult because people do not like the fact that he has the "white privilege" over them, as his feelings were affected by the locals and stands with them to show to justice, and was able to show the readers the struggle he faces while trying to be a part of that community. On the other side, Rii uses the "Muckraking" style of writing to expose the inside lives of the Chinese and Jewish, he focuses on the stereotypes of the races. He does not understand why the other cultures immigrated to his country just to have their own circle and not joining the American norm, he tries to suggest ways of changing their lifestyle. Travel writing is a good way to enact change on the audience, especially when they have not been to that place. It provides people with knowledge to survive in that country as well as opening up a path to inspire more audience.

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