
Review of Shooting an Elephant, a Biography by George Orwell

George Orwell's autobiography "Shooting an Elephant" addresses the many perspectives on the dehumanizing effects of British imperialism. Many people have turned into animals because of society has devoured the humanity of the colonizers and helps to devoid the dignity understood through the actions of the Burmese people. A first, Orwell doesn't want to shoot the elephant he followed. However, the he doesn't want to make a fool of himself so powerless and controlled by the Burma peoples' expectations, he shoots an elephant that is also "powerless to move." Orwell uses symbolism, diction, and imagery to discuss how the evil of imperialism dehumanizes people of society.

Orwell uses symbolism to represent the slow downfall of the British empire who must live up to the expectations of the Burmese people. paragraph 7, Orwell states, "Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed crowd - seemingly the leading actor of the piece: but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind." Orwell, the narrator and a British officer, is playing a role of the person who is expected to kill the now innocent elephant. The natives expect him to kill the elephant as they watch him draw closer to it. Orwell's conscience is telling him that he shouldn't do kill the elephant for it would be "murder" if he did. However, Orwell is controlled by the natives as he has become "an absurd puppet." In order to appease the natives, Orwell "wears a mask" and "his face grows to fit it" when he makes the decision to shoot the elephant. Orwell's dilemma exemplifies the decision the British empire have to make in whether they are controlling the Burmese or the Burmese is controlling the British. Orwell's decision shows that the British empire is merely controlled by the people of Burma and that imperialism is only there to fulfill the expectations of the Burmese people. He kills the elephant to avoid looking like a fool, however, he reveals himself a fool. His lack of authority reveals that he only acts because he feels compelled to act, not because of his inner conviction. This lack of authority is what makes the British empire slowly fall and weaken. In paragraph 11, Orwell says, "At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs and head drooping." The elephant itself represents the imperialistic British empire and the people it has conquered. His death at Orwell's hands shows that the downfall of the weakened British empire at the hands of its own officials. As the elephant "climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright" the British empire also was weakened but desperately climbed back on its "feet" to attempt to keep its imperialistic ways. The imperialistic ideology has been outdated as the Burmese people are the ones controlling and the British empire is trying to control the Burmese. The British empire's influence didn't come quickly, but was the result of

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various outbursts made by its people throughout the empire.

Orwell uses imagery to illustrate the animals the Burmese people have become due to the imperialistic ways of the British. He describes the plight of the "wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts..." Prisoners in Burma were confined in jail cells. They were treated as animals, controlled by the British imperial officers of Burma. Animals are usually confined to a specific area and these prisoners were confined to their jail cells. Controlled by the British officers, these prisoners have been confined to their "stinking cages" as the officers treat them like animals ultimately dehumanizing them. The prisoners have "cowed faces" because it's just another day in their cages, serving the time for the crime they committed. These prisoners are dehumanized because they are being controlled. To dehumanize someone, one must strip the human qualities away from a person which includes individuality. Individuality is what makes a person human and when these prisoners are controlled and confined, they don't have human qualities, they have nothing. This process makes the prisoners into animals, emotionless with only "cowed faces." Orwell also goes on to say that many Burmese people are "evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible." Orwell dehumanizes the Burma people when he calls them "evil-spirited beasts." Beasts are dangerous large four foot animals. According to Orwell, the Burmese aren't people, but rather dangerous animals "who tried to make" his job "impossible." The danger of these "beasts" is that they target British officers as bait, waiting for the right moment to mess with them whether it be trip them up a football field or mock them which makes the officers' job merely impossible. In order to tame these "beasts" the British must conquer the Burmese, so they put them into "stinking cages" because mocking actions are a crime to the British. Ironically, these taming methods do not work because the "evil-spirited beasts" control the British officers. As Orwell is struggling to decide if he shoot the elephant or not, the "beasts" are expecting him to do it. Pressured, he shoots at the elephant or rather the British empire. This makes the elephant/British empire slowly fall as Orwell hears "devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd." When the British empire is controlled, it is then stripped away of its own authority and what makes it empire, ultimately turning the British empire into an "animal."

Through diction Orwell illustrates just how animalistic in nature the Burmese have become. In the opening paragraph, Orwell states, "As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so." Usually, animals hunt and target its bait that it will eat. Predators go after its prey when they feel that the time is right or "whenever it seemed safe to do so." Predators sneak up on its bait, waiting for the right time to strike. The Burmese people target British officers like Orwell because they don't like them, in fact, they hate the British. The Burmese people have turned into animals, hunting down British imperial officers as bait. When the Burmese found Orwell as their target, "the insults hooted after me" as if they were chasing Orwell as the catch. Owls normally hoot to communicate with one another or declare its territory. The Burmese are communicating with one another that their prey is Orwell and that they're

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declaring him as their prey. According to Orwell, the Burmese have essentially turned into owl-like creatures, who communicate with one another by hooting insults at him. When these owls declared Orwell as their prey, "a nimble man tripped me up on the football field." Nimble creatures are swift in their vast movements. Humans are usually not faster than nimble creatures such as cheetahs or lions. Prey don't realize the creature's actions until they have been acted upon and it's too late. The Burmese are animals and exemplify animalistic traits that no humans necessarily have.

The evil of imperialism is when a government controls the people it has conquered, which deprives them of their human qualities. Depriving one of their human qualities is to dehumanize them, stripping away their individuality. In modern societies, many people are being stripped away of their individuality because of the expectations others have of them such as how to dress, how to act in public, and just how to present themselves to others. This controls a person, making them less of a human and more of an animal. Humans are not controlled but animals are. Society today, is filled with animals trying to control one another.

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