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## The Impact of Rediscovery in Shooting an Elephant, an essay by George Orwell

**“Rediscovery can be confronting, painful and at times, empowering.”**

How have your prescribed text and at least ONE other related text of your own choosing presented the impact of rediscovery?

An emotionally confronting and provocative discovery serves as a catalyst for an individual to rediscover. This catalyst can lead an individual to be introspective, which leads to the re-evaluation of lost or forgotten memories and experiences. Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' explores the way the protagonist Prospero rekindles his desire for vengeance when talking of his past, and leads him on a journey of discovery towards the values of compassion and reconciliation (virtuous). George Orwell's 'Shooting an Elephant' represents the ways new perspectives about the familiar shape one's identity even when faced by conflicting and controlling cultural forces.

A discovery of new ways of thinking about politics, morality and society reflects the importance of values such as inquiry, humility, compassion and reconciliation. Shakespeare was writing in a period of new discoveries and uncertainties: challenges to traditional ways of thinking through the rediscovery of the Ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy and fascination with the human body and mind. He also connects authentically to the age of exploration and Montaigne's 'noble savage', through the sea voyage and Caliban respectively. Shakespeare extols the humanist virtue of 'philanthropia' – love of humanity. His villains are always individualists, motivated primarily by egotism. This is also seen through Prospero as he epitomises Renaissance Christian Humanist thought: 'Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury do I take.' This influences the discoveries made in the play by most of them happening in a way that is transformative for every character. The Tempest is a hybrid mix of revenge tragedy, comedy and romance, which reflects the complexity of the human condition, and the five acts are subverted into rediscovery (I), new and provocative discoveries from different perspectives (II), challenging discoveries (III), journey to self-discovery (IV), self-discovery and transformation (V). However, there is no closure as Prospero admits that he needs to remind himself not to succumb to his passions, Antonio is unrepentant and Caliban is questionably chastened and contrite - 'I'll be wise hereafter/and seek for grace.'

The experience of a sudden or unexpected event can lead to a process of discovery. This process acts as a catalyst for an evaluation of the impact of change, leading to new discoveries.

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'Shooting an Elephant' by George Orwell explores the concept of rediscovery by having the persona experience a cataclysmic experience. The discovery made is confronting and is a direct reflection of the writers past. Shooting an Elephant was published in 1936, but was influenced through the period Orwell lived as a policeman in Burma. Since Orwell lived and worked in Burma the text can be viewed as a direct representation of what his interpretation is on Burmese society. Significant discoveries are made in this text through the persona undergoing an internal deliberation, which Orwell has represented this discovery through visual imagery. "The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued".

When confronted with an emotionally provocative issue it ascribes a form of discovery. Shakespeare explores this in *The Tempest*, through Prospero's rediscovery of humanity. This rediscovery is initiated after "Prospero observ [es]" in Act 5 and confronts the individuals he was extracting upon frozen in time. This confrontation forces Prospero to introspect, which Shakespeare illustrates through a soliloquy. Through the soliloquy Shakespeare expressively exposes Prospero's emotions and process of introspection to the audience as evident by "This thing of darkness I acknowledge as mine." By conveying Prospero's acceptance of his actions, Shakespeare illustrates a change in Prospero's character, from being vindictive to virtuous. This is further highlighted through, "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance." Through the alliteration of "v" and the juxtaposition of "virtue" & "vengeance" Shakespeare promulgates the change in Prospero, as being the same man, but having changed. Thus, through Prospero Shakespeare illustrates how due to the provocative and spontaneous nature of confronting circumstances, individuals are forced to introspect and consequently are able to rediscover a lost or concealed emotional connection.

Similarly, George Orwell, in his essay, *Shooting an Elephant*, further exemplifies how the process of rediscovery is often initiated through confronting circumstances. In the essay the persona discovers that he has no discretionary choice in the matter of killing the elephant. However through this the persona rediscovers the futility of English rule. The persona initially in the essay has already acknowledged this "I was hated by large numbers of people". Nevertheless the persona slowly rediscovers the ineffectuality of ruling over the Burmese people. This is evident through the recurring motif of the white men pretending to be superior. "Seemingly the leading actor of the piece" "Only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind". Orwell has the persona make the rediscovery at a time where he has no other choice but to shoot the Elephant, which can be seen as the trigger. "I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all".

Through having the characters/persona introspect, the writers represent rediscovery as being confronting, painful and empowering. Both characters discover the underlying truth, which then leads to a transformation of their identity and thought process, facilitating a new set of

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values/rediscovery of values and new understandings.

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