

Literary analysis over george orwell essay sample

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



George Orwell's short story "Shooting an Elephant" provides quite a good analysis of the actions of the man who is torn between conflicting feelings and has to make an important decision in front of a big amount of people. The main character of the story works in Burma as a police officer. What is important to know as a background here is the political situation in Burma in the beginning of the 20th century. In the previous century during 62 years Britain Empire did not cease its attempts to conquer Burma, finally making it a part of the Indian Empire that was controlled by Britain. During that period three Anglo-Burmese wars took place. Therefore it is not surprising, that the natives of Burma hated Europeans in general and Englishmen in particular. The main character of Orwell's short story experiences this hatred on himself, and with bitter irony tells the reader about constant attempts of natives to abuse him by every occasion. That is why sometimes he is so put out of temper that he feels anger and hatred towards natives in return. However, the complicacy of his situation lies in the fact that in his opinion British Empire was not doing the right thing in Burma. The narrator mentions that "Theoretically — and secretly, of course — I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British". (Orwell) He saw that native population suffered a lot from the tyrannical policy of British Empire and actually understood that the Burmese had good reasons for hating Europeans. To withstand this hatred was hard for him though. His situation was rather sad and hopeless: he disliked his job very much but had no opportunities to change something, as he did not have good education and therefore had no career prospects. His future was quite clear: he was to continue working as a police officer in Burma for a very long time. Of course

this brought little peace to his soul and in general the attitude of the narrator towards his life situation can be described as quite bitter, though not completely deprived of the sense of humor.

The main character of the story faces an unexpected challenge: he needs to figure out what to do with an elephant that was ravaging the bazaar. The animal was reported to be in his "must" and therefore was dangerous. When the main character finally traced where animal went, and saw the elephant, quite a significant crowd of people had already gathered to watch how the European would kill the elephant. The main character finds himself in a complicated situation. He neither promised anybody that he would kill the animal, nor did he intend to. In fact, shooting the elephant seemed to be rather an unwise decision. Problems with the owner were certain to arise, due to the fact that tamed healthy elephants cost a lot of money. Besides, the animal was not in the state of "must" when the narrator finally found him. The elephant's frenzy had subsided and when the young police officer and the crowd neared the animal, it was eating grass peacefully. There was no need to shoot it.

However, here lies the most interesting point of the story. The narrator decided to shoot the animal not because it was necessary, but because the crowd expected him to do so. Even though he understood, that the Burmese would not start to treat him with respect and admiration after he killed the animal, he could not ignore the wills of all the people from the crowd that gathered and waited for something to happen. He perceived that as a British officer he represented something like tyrannical authority for the natives. Tyrants are supposed to act decisively, cruelly and mercilessly, therefore if

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he had taken a rifle with him, he surely had decided to kill the creature. He did not have enough courage to disillusion the crowd, even though he considered most of the Burmese to be rather stupid people. And here the author introduces his main point: the situation in which the main character found himself was very like the situation in which the British Empire, as a mighty tyrannical force found itself. As the narrator says: " I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys". (Orwell)

The novel raises quite an interesting topic: the moral sufferings of a man who made a decision against his nature just to satisfy the expectations of others. This young police officer would prefer not to kill the animal, as he understood that that would be absolutely unreasonable. He shot from the rifle only because he did not want to lose his face in front of the crowd, thus acting against both: common sense and his nature. He did not want to kill the living thing, because it was cruel. The author dramatizes the final choice of the police officer by describing the sufferings of the animal that was agonizing for more than half an hour.

Works Cited

Orwell, George. Shooting an Elephant. 27 July 2004. Web. 14 Oct. 2012.

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