

# A constant fight with the society in shooting an elephant essay

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



## **Fighting for Respect**

Throughout history people in places of power have struggled to gain respect from those they rule over. Some leaders resort to gaining this respect through fear while others have found that this method results in an unhealthy relationship between a leader and his subjects. George Orwell wrote a first hand experience about his own struggle for respect amongst the Burmans in his short narrative Shooting an Elephant. He tells a story about his time as a police officer in Lower Burma. Orwell was appointed to this position by the British Empire who had taken control of the small asian country through an act of Imperialism. In this small community he has been given power over the Burmans and the responsibility of controlling their actions. When faced with the undertaking of calming a mad elephant his jurisdiction is challenged. He attempts to maintain his dignity while attempting to please the society. People like Orwell who have a self-imposed guise of authority tend to act against their own will to maintain their position.

Orwell struggles to find respect in a community that oppresses him. The Burmans resented British rule and from their perspective Orwell's position of power over them meant nothing. They felt as though his presence was unnecessary and therefore there was a great sense of disrespect between the two cultures. The British has disrespected the country of Burma by thrusting their control over it, as if to say that they could rule it better than its own people. Burmans retaliated in the only way they could, they were vile to any Englishman they came across. This was the only way the could express their frustration. Orwell finds himself at a crossroads. He wants to

please the Empire he serves but he also feeling sympathetic for the Burmans he was in charge of because of what imperialism has done to them. He expresses these feelings early on in the story " I was stuck between my hatred of the Empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts" (Orwell 1). Their hatred for the British empire all comes out upon Orwell and he is jeered at wherever he goes. This kind of disrespect is seen in many relationships. In high school for example the juniors have no real authority over the grades below them. Yet they belittle the freshmen and sophomores simply because they believe that they have power over them. The grades below return the banter and create a very hostile environment because no one really has power. They are just competing for it in a match that neither can win. Just like the Burmans they see it as a foolish attempt to rule over them. Orwell represents imperialism for them because he is what they can see. Knowing nothing of the higher power above him, all their frustrations are put upon Orwell. Orwell is conflicted by this because he truly is on the Burmans side. He hates imperialism as much as they do but finds it hard to respect those who do not return it. The Burmans have grown to hate him which causes Orwell to put up a facade of strength to try and force them to respect him. This proves nothing to them and their actions of distaste towards Orwell continue.

He begins to search for approval by allowing others to influence his decisions. His sympathetic nature he has for the people he has been placed over allows them to manipulate him psychologically. Subconsciously he has become a crowd pleaser and allows the Burmans, that he has tried so hard

to earn respect from, push him their way. As much as Orwell may believe he has power deep down he admits that “[he] was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of [the] yellow faces behind” (Orwell 2). While marching with the elephant rifle in his hands, the crowd eagerly followed him expecting Orwell to shoot the Elephant. Orwell was aware that the expectations of the crowd were high and he wants to please them to earn their approval. In this case he is displaying what can be related to peer pressure in today's society. Teenagers today will do anything to fit in whether it goes along with their morals or not. It becomes a problem when an individual begins to carry out actions simply to please others because they lose their own will. They become a hollow mold that is filled with what society deems to be cool and their opinion means nothing. He is being controlled by those around him who are influencing his decisions. Orwell describes this occurrence by saying “ I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys” (Orwell 2). The freedom that he is describing is the freedom of his own will. He is supposed to be a cruel and oppressive ruler so because of this a tyrant will try to impress those that he rules. This adds to the loss of free will, when one is constantly trying to impress another they cease to have their own opinion. They instinctively conform to what the majority prefers. This phenomenon has had great effect on Orwell as he is pitted against himself and the people. Ultimately Orwell makes a poor choice, because his motives became superficial and shallow. His wish was to gain approval from the Burmans that were watching his every move. He stated that if he did not shoot the

elephant “ the crowd would laugh at [him]. And [his] whole life, every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at” (Orwell, 3). Shooting the Elephant was a shabby attempt at gaining respect from the community he ruled over. Even though the Burmans hated all white men Orwell thought for maybe a moment they would relate with him. If he killed the elephant for them he thought maybe he could reverse their thinking and show them that he was on their side. From a moral standpoint, he was right in killing the Elephant. The beast had taken the life of a human which is far more valuable than that of an animals. So in that sense he was correct in his termination of the elephant because if any animal kills a human it is right to put that animal down without question. Unfortunately his only reason for killing the beast was to appease an audience. He gave in to the outside influence and made a rash decision.

Many people today could relate to Orwells struggle with the society he was living in. Individuals have been pressured to do things throughout history. Instead of shooting an elephant, today young adults may be pressured into drugs or alcohol. Being swayed by the crowd can be an easy thing to give into as Orwell has shown in his short narrative. After you do something against your conscience to please others you will always try to compensate your decision. You know what you did was wrong but you try to rationalize with yourself much like Orwell did. Slowly as one continues to make choices against his or her own will it becomes easier. The voice telling you something isn’t right gets quieter. Until your whole life feels as if it is run by an outside source. Even if you continue to do things to please others it will almost never

actually gain you their respect. Orwell found this out the hard way by continuing to try and please the Burmans only to realize that they are filled with too much hate towards him. Orwell came to the realization that he had no real authority and his actions were completely led by those he supposedly ruled over.