

The Silent Voice

Tuesday, September 6, 2011

George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant"

Subject

The subject of George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" is that pressure to conform to social norms in order to fit in with a society can cause one to make decisions that he or she may severely regret later. This pressure to conform is illustrated by the fact that the narrator shot the elephant simply because he wished to conform to the social norm of the country he was in rather than be laughed at. This supports the subject because the narrator had regretted shooting the elephant when he heard the heavy breathing of what he considered to simply be a gentle giant.

Occasion

"Shooting an Elephant" was written during 1936. The essay's time of creation is illustrated through the name that the narrator gives the Indians: yellow people. During that time period, there was quite a bit of prejudice against people in and from Asia in general, and that prejudice is evident in the essay. An example of this prejudice is when the narrator stated that he wished to drive a bayonet through a Buddhist priest's stomach (which, I must say, I found rather appalling).

Audience

George Orwell's specific audience for "Shooting an Elephant" is those that may suffer from similar experiences. The author's target audience is identified by the narrator repeatedly mentioning his fear of being laughed at by the Indian population. Reader's with similar experiences could relate to the narrator's own experience as well as understand what he means when he says that he wished to avoid being laughed at. The author's general audience for the essay is those that may suffer from social pressures in general. The author's general audience is communicated by the narrator sharing his own thoughts about having to conform to a society that he does not particularly agree with. However, the author portrays such conformity in a negative light rather than a positive one. This gives the general audience a reason to stop conforming, something that the author detests.

Purpose

George Orwell's purpose in "Shooting an Elephant" is to warn people to not blindly conform to social norms. The narrator enforces the message of thinking for oneself rather than blindly following others by stating, "It seemed dreadful to see the great beast Lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him," after killing the elephant. This shows that because of his willingness to conform, he ended up with a terrible outcome that he severely regretted (in this case, having to witness a peaceful beast suffering). In addition, despite having to make that sacrifice that he seriously regretted, he notes that no one probably realized that he was simply not trying to be laughed at. This indicates that even if you follow the social norms, you're likely to not garner any respect, and you have simply sacrificed something for nothing.

Speaker

George Orwell, an English author, has an intense opposition to totalitarianism. This value is illustrated by the fact that he was practically forced to shoot the elephant. Because he had no freedom of choice in the matter, George Orwell depicts the situation in a very negative light. The author's expressed value influences the essay's purpose because it shows that the pressures to conform to social norms can take away part of an individual's freedom. George Orwell, an English journalist, also believes in free society. This value is illustrated by how he detests being made to conform to the wishes of the majority of the population. Since he believes in free society, he would much rather have a true choice over whether or not he would have shot the elephant, but since he essentially did not, he was made to conform to the Indian population. This value influences the essay's purpose as he wishes to convey the idea of not conforming to others' wills.

Tone

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George Orwell exhibits a somber and somewhat irritated attitude about how he was forced to conform to the wishes of the general Indian population in "Shooting an Elephant." These attitudes are expressed by how he describes the shouts of the natives as the elephant fell to the ground as "devilish" and how he found it "dreadful" to see the great beast helpless to live but also helpless to die. These words paint the image that he finds the natives attitude absolutely repulsive, and he finds the fact that the elephant was killed for almost no reason to be depressing. The author's tone shows that he is very annoyed with the state of the things in the country and the fact that he was essentially made to conform to their ways or be ostracized. He constantly chastises the natives for their collectivist attitude and frequently wishes harm upon them. This depicts his absolute intolerance for a conformist society.

Posted by [Jacob Ward](#) at 7:10 PM



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