Shooting an Elephant Study Guide

Shooting an Elephant by George Orwell

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Introduction

George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" first appeared in 1936. The British public already knew Orwell as the socially conscious author of *Down and Out in London and Paris* (1933), a nonfiction study of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and subsistence living on poorly-paying menial jobs, and *Burmese Days* (1934), a novel of British colonialism. "Shooting an Elephant" functions as an addendum to *Burmese Days.* The story and novel share the same setting, and draw on Orwell's experience as a colonial official in India and Burma, two regions of the British Empire, in the middle of the century between the two world wars. The story (which some critics consider an essay) concerns a colonial officer's obligation to shoot a rogue elephant. The narrator does not want to shoot the elephant, but feels compelled to by a crowd of indigenous residents, before whom he does not wish to appear indecisive or cowardly. The situation and events that Orwell describes underscores the hostility between the administrators of the British Empire and their "native" subjects. Both sides feel hatred, distrust, and resentment. The situation is universally degrading. The shooting itself involves enormous pathos conveyed economically in a few words.

"Shooting an Elephant" is a central text in modern British literature and has generated perhaps more criticism than any other comparable short piece. In the politicized atmosphere of contemporary criticism, commentators are especially drawn into debate about whether Orwell apologizes for or condemns imperialism. Left-wing critics see insufficient condemnation; conservative critics point out that it is the narrator, an agent of empire, who explicitly denounces the British presence as pervasively corrupting to both sides. The story is one of the most widely anthologized and studied items of the modern English-language canon.

Author Biography

George Orwell was born Eric Blair on June 25, 1903, in Motihari, Bengal, which was then a province of India under British rule. Richard Blair, Orwell's father, was a British government official. Sent back to England for his education, Orwell attended St. Cyprians, Wellington College, and then Eton. After graduating, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police, from which he resigned in 1927, having in the meantime settled on writing as a career.

Interested in the life of the lower classes and the poor, Orwell lived in working-class neighborhoods in Paris and London in 1928 and 1929, collecting material that he would eventually publish, after many rejections (including one from T. S. Eliot), as *Down and Out in Paris and London,* under the pen-name George Orwell, in 1933. In the interval, Blair wrote essays, poetry, and journalism, including the drafts of *Burmese Days,* which also appeared in 1933. A series of novels followed, all under his new pen-name, with which he increasingly identified himself. He published *A Clergyman's Daughter* in 1935, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* in 1936, *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937, and *Coming up for Air* in 1939, just before the outbreak of the war that the book predicted. Orwell fought in the Spanish Civil War on the Republican side. His motive was to fight against Fascism, represented by Franco's anti-Republican Falange Party. Orwell soon became disillusioned with the Republican side, however, seeing the hand of Stalin's KGB everywhere in its increasingly corrupt and ineffective policies. He published an account of his Spanish experience in the booklength essay *Homage to Catalonia* in 1938.

Orwell worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) during World War II while working on the two novels for which he remains best known, *Animal Farm* (1944), a satire of Stalinism and of coercive collectivism in general, and *1984,* published in 1949, a bleak depiction of a world entirely subjugated to a totalitarian regime. In addition, he wrote essays and journalistic and broadcast pieces, and was active throughout the war on behalf of the Allied military effort.

Orwell had contracted tuberculosis in the 1920s. Overwork during the war years exacerbated his condition, and he became ill shortly after completing the manuscript of *1984.* He married his second wife while in the hospital, and was planning a trip to Switzerland to recuperate when he died of pulmonary edema on January 26, 1950.

Plot Summary

"Shooting an Elephant" begins with a meditative prelude to the action in which the narrator, who may be presumed to be Orwell, comments on being a colonial policeman in British Burma in the middle of the twentieth century. "I was hated by large numbers of people, "he says, and "anti-European feeling was very bitter." A European woman crossing the market would likely be spat upon and a sub-divisional police officer made an even more inviting target. Once, at a soccer match, a Burmese player deliberately fouled the narrator while the Burmese umpire conveniently looked the other direction and the largely Burmese crowd "yelled with hideous laughter." The narrator understands such hatred and even thinks it justified, but he also confesses that his "greatest joy" at the time would have been to bayonet one of his tormenters.

The action of "Shooting an Elephant" begins when the narrator receives a telephone report of an elephant "ravaging the bazaar." He takes his inadequate hunting rifle and rides on horseback to the area where the animal allegedly lurks. The narrator remarks on the squalor and poverty of the neighborhood, with its palm-leaf thatch on the huts and unplanned scattering of houses over a hillside. The narrator asks about the elephant and receives a vague answer. Suddenly an old woman comes into view shooing away a group of children. She is trying to prevent them seeing a corpse, a Burmese man crushed by the elephant. With a death con-firmed, the situation has escalated. The narrator still hopes not to have to shoot the elephant. Nevertheless, he sends for an elephant rifle and five cartridges.

The narrator locates the now-calm elephant in a field. The crowd has followed him. He suddenly understands that, although the elephant no longer poses a threat, the crowd's expectation of the killing will force his to do it. Here Orwell suspends the narrative to insert a continuation of the story's opening meditation. The narrator speculates on the role-playing doom of the imperialist, who becomes so committed to his having to play the part of the colonial overlord that he also becomes a grotesque caricature of that role. He becomes the very thing that his critics claim him to be, a tyrant operating outside the normal code of ethics. He must kill the elephant because the crowd will otherwise laugh at him and the laughter of the "natives" is intolerable to the notion of empire.

"There was only one alternative," the narrator says. He loads the cartridges into the gun ("a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights") and pulls the trigger. A compressed paragraph describes the elephant's death. The animal, Orwell writes, suddenly looked terribly aged, as if transformed from a lively youth to an old sick man in a single second; the creature staggers pathetically as it collapses to its knees, and saliva pours from its mouth. The narrator shoots again. The animal staggers but attempts in an agony to rise. The narrator fires a third time, and now the animal is down to stay. Its crash shakes the ground under the narrator's feet. The three bullets have not killed the elephant, however, which continues to gasp in pain as it lies in the field. The narrator now takes up his small-calibre hunting rifle and fires into the animal's heart. Still it does not die. Too

shaken to remain, the narrator departs, adding that he afterwards learned that it took the elephant a half-hour to die.

The denouement concerns legalistic quibbling over the deed. The elephant had an owner, which might have complicated matters, but since it had killed a man, it qualified as a rogue and the law required that it be dispatched. These circumstances vindicate the narrator's action technically. "I was very glad," he says, "that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

George Orwell describes his awkward position as a sub-divisional police officer in Moulmein, Burma, back in the days of the British Empire, when Burma was one of its many disgruntled colonies. Orwell, who has already developed something of his famous social conscience, comments on how he is a target for the hatred of the native Burmans, who sneer at him and insult him, whenever the can. Although, in principle, he sides with Burmans, his position and their animosity vitiates his compassion, to some degree.

One day, he is told that an elephant is ravaging the bazaar and he is asked to take care of this potential menace. Although basically tame, an elephant may still rampage periodically owing to its biological rhythms. The elephant, regardless of its usual docility, had already destroyed a bamboo hut, attacked some fruit-stalls and devoured its inventory and upset the municipal rubbish van. En route to finding the elephant, Orwell comes across a dead Dravidian, who lay in the mud, after having been caught by the elephant and trampled into the ground.

It took awhile to find the elephant, but when Orwell did, he was now leading a gigantic crowd of eager spectators, who were waiting for one thing- for Orwell to kill the elephant. Although reluctant to shoot the elephant, which was privately owned and generally tame, a "huge and costly piece of machinery," Orwell realizes that the crowd, which is now over 2000, is making a demand that he cannot refuse. He will lose status in their eyes if he does not kill the elephant.

Therefore, the elephant dies a slow and lingering death, owing to Orwell's inability to shoot him effectively once or twice. As one of the Imperial oppressors of the Burmese people, he now becomes, what other Imperialists have found, that he is more a servant of the colonists themselves than he is of the powerful Empire he represents.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This essay gives a poignant look at the private agonies of a famous writer as a young man, already in the grips of a social conscience. Perhaps it gives some kind of a look at the basis of his immortal portrait of tyranny gone to its final extreme in the Big Brotherism of "1984." When we ourselves paint a dark picture, we now say it is "Orwellian," referring to the novel. It is clear from this essay that the roots of his social conscience began as he found himself an agent of the dying British Empire, attempting to deal with the subjected colonists on a day-to-day basis. You might say that Orwell begins to see the shoes on Colonial and Imperial feet and he doesn't really like much of either. This is a rather great commentary on Imperialism, using the torturous death of an

outlaw elephant as a kind of metaphor for the ambiguities generated by this form of tyranny, a tyranny that cuts in two directions at once.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

This is a gruesome little story about the hanging of a Hindu prisoner in a dank, Burmese jail. In this essay, Orwell describes how the condemned is removed from his small cell, with its pitiful plank bed and water pot and prepared for the gallows. They begin to march him towards his fate, when a stray dog intervenes. The creature makes its way to the prisoner, jumping up at him, trying to lick his face, a great distraction at a very delicate and somber moment.

Although at the end of his moments on Earth, the Indian walked with a kind of dignity to his death, even managing to avoid a puddle in his path. Orwell feels with great sensitivity the condemned's aliveness, his living, breathing vivacity- and the horror of the event that is about to unfold. As if to underscore that aliveness, the prisoner begins to loudly call out the holy name of Ram, chanting it over and over again in a litany of death.

The chant practically drove the spectators crazy, perhaps with guilt or just annoyance and they longed for his death, which happened very quickly. The police, jailors and magistrates all were very gay after his death and drunk together happily, not very far where the dead man's body began its slow process of decay.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This essay again presents Orwell at his dry, sardonic best. He is obviously filled with dismay at what is happening, but, for the most part, let's the story of the condemned man's treatment tell itself. At one point, he editorializes with concern for the idea of killing the living, but, in general, as in the last essay, he lets the death and its spectators speak for themselves. The lack of justice is at the core of both essays, but Orwell prefers to let the picture paint the realities, not his comments.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

This essay reverses the position of the last previous ones. In this essay, George Orwell has lost his princely position as Imperial oppressor and has become a victim of the Parisian hospital system. It is an excruciating commentary on a kind of welfare and medical system that, even for its time, was positively medieval and without comfort or compassion for its patience.

In Hospital X, as he calls it, located in Paris, a temperature-ridden Orwell, suffering from serious pneumonia, endures a lengthy questioning followed by a tepid bath. He is given ill-fitting bed clothes and sent outside, in the cold February air- to another building, where he lays down in a bed, surrounded by squalor and suffering.

There, he watches a strange procedure of using cups, turned into vacuums by inserting a flame in each cup before forcing them onto the skin of a patient. The "cupping" produces a powerful enough vacuum to force liquid out of huge yellow blister, created by the force of the procedure. After "cupping" was finished on one victim, Orwell is now subjected to the same procedure, without any sterilization. Later on, he endures a painful, mustard poultice, noting that it's a spectator sport in the ward because of the vocal agonies it extracts from its victims.

There is no mercy in Hospital X. Patients are used often as instruments of teaching, without notice of their persons or their suffering. Sometimes, there has to be substantial vocalization to summon even a passing doctor, whose general purpose is flutter from one designated target to the next, ignoring the suffering that surrounds them.

Death is the hospital is personified by a patient who finds urinating painful and difficult, crying out loud, "Je pisse!" once this feat is accomplished. He died, painfully anonymously like the rest. In Hospital X, it is common to see corpses lingering before they are carted away. This was a hospital where nurses sometimes barely could take a temperature, who left dirt and refuse everywhere, left beds unmade and patients neglected. As soon as he could, Orwell fled this Shangri-la of decay and destitution, before his time was up and without a medical discharge.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this case, Orwell is a spectator to his own suffering and neglect. His descriptions of the hospital and its staff are disheartening at best and grievously sickening at worst. The one thing you can say about this essay is that, for it's time, it puts the entire matter of this French hospital into sociological, medical and historical perspective. He paints a picture of an institution that looks at its patients as objects- to be studied and to be handled, but never to be treated as human.

Perhaps symbolic of the horrid mess was the cry of a cobbler, one of Orwell's neighbors, "Numero 57!" Upon hearing this, Orwell squinted through the dim light to see the dead body of another neighbor, the first dead European he had ever seen. This is indicative of Orwell's life as a privileged European who, in his police duties, had strutted through the bodies of countless Asiatics but had seen his own kind shielded from the ugly death he now saw around him.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Count Leo Tolstoy, a renowned Russian author, had the distinction of undergoing a remarkable transformation in his later life when he converted to a form of Christianity, marked by renunciation of personal property, titles and even sexuality. In one of his pamphlets, obviously developed as a form of propaganda on behalf of his new lifestyle, he attacks William Shakespeare- on charges ranging from engendering boredom in his readers and playgoers; on being representative of a corrupt humanistic worldview, the very antithesis of his own Christian perspective and because of his deficiencies as an author and playwright. Tolstoy is seventy-five and has just reread Shakespeare in its entirety. Tolstoy's main target in his exposition is *Lear.*

According to Tolstoy, as described by Orwell, the plot of *Lear* is "stupid, verbose, unnatural, unintelligible" and a lot of other things exemplifying Shakespeare's moral and aesthetic inaccuracies. According to Tolstoy, any reader, "unhypnotized" by Shakespeare's artificially created reputation would find nothing emotionally for him in Lear apart from "aversion and weariness." Shakespeare may have begin a halfway decent actor, but "he was not an artist." Worse, Tolstoy, drawing on the criticism of Gervinus and Brandes, two Shakespeare critics of the day, Shakespeare has a Machiavellian philosophy- "*the end justifies the means*." Tolstoy is horrified to find that, in Shakespeare, men can be too good for their own good.

According to Tolstoy, Shakespeare's reputation was really started by German professors during a period of great sterility in German writing. Their uncritical, unthought-out virus was then passed onto the English, who, caught in this hallucinatory pandemic, started to extol the virtues of one of their lesser lights.

Orwell dismisses Tolstoy's criticism of Tolstoy as a "bad writer" on the general notion that this kind of statement lacks any real power. You cannot "prove" a writer bad or good. The idea is too subjective. But as Orwell is appalled by Tolstoy's criticism of *Lear*, he tries to make a few specific points about Tolstoy's arguments.

His first point is that Tolstoy distorts and colors the scenes he is presenting. For instance, he tries to make Lear's abdication of the throne pointless and arbitrary when, in fact, according to Orwell, Shakespeare very clearly states the reason for Lear's abdication- he is old and wishes to be freed of the responsibility of power. Not only does Tolstoy discolor the scenes he describes, but he inconsistent. On the one hand, he accuses Shakespeare of not be earnest or serious; on the other hand, he notes, with displeasure, that Shakespeare puts his own opinions in the mouths of his characters. Why would he do this if he were not earnest?

According to Orwell, Shakespeare ignores Shakespeare as a poet and therefore does not really understand the aesthetics of his type of drama. He does not understand the value of his "verbal music" and how that shapes his dramaturgy.

Orwell's most profound misgiving about Tolstoy is that in his conversion, he has perhaps only really "exchanged one form of egotism for another." Unfortunately for poor Tolstoy he has aimed his arrows at someone that Orwell, a deeply humanistic man, truly loves- the imperfect, but profoundly lyrical poet and dramatist, whose work is really worth its salt and whose reputation is truly justified by his corpus of great plays and poetry- the consummate artist and fellow humanist, William Shakespeare.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This essay, on one level, is comparable to defending one's lover from the insults of a man whose reputation and intentions are only barely respected. For it is clear, as Orwell progresses, that he loves Shakespeare, with all his "faults" and he basically hates the values and criticism of the great novelist/philosopher, Leo Tolstoy.

The very core of Orwell's criticism is that Tolstoy particularly hates *Lear*, the play, and unfairly decides to attack and destroy its reputation- because Tolstoy is so like the man, Lear, himself. In fact, if ever an attack was truly ad homonym (or, against the man himself as opposed to what he has said), Orwell's attack is truly of that character.

Tolstoy, according to Orwell, was very much like Lear. For one thing, they are both old men. They have both renounced something that utterly changed their lives. Lear renounced his kingship and Tolstoy renounced his nobility and tried to assume the life of a peasant. And both men, in their renunciation, failed to gain the relief they sought. Lear found himself without the power of commanding men, without the comfort of respect; Tolstoy found himself the object of contempt by his peers, who were themselves challenged by his renunciation of a role they either clearly cherished or wished for themselves. Lear was like Tolstoy, a bad judge of character and a man who could not gracefully and completely give up the rank he had discarded. Both men recoiled from sexuality. Even Tolstoy's death in isolation and in a far-off land was some kind of shadow of Lear's.

Orwell's attack on Tolstoy, his character and his hypocrisy, is poignant and profound. But one cannot help thinking it is motivated by the defense of someone whose work he truly loves and admires. And, in defense of his ideals, Orwell's tongue is as sharp as any man's.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Orwell begins this essay by speaking of the four-way split in Gulliver's character in the four parts of "Gulliver's Travels." In Part I, Gulliver is a forty-year old adventurer, with two children at home, a practical disposition and the incipient signs of aging, as reflected by his spectacles, which show up from time to time in the narrative. In Part II, Gulliver, according to Orwell, seems to show the same character, but from time to time launches into inexplicable rantings on behalf of his country's noble and great qualities, peppered with all types of injudicious disclosures about scandal-ridden England. In Part III, again, he is much the same but seems to be possessed by a higher social and cultural ranking, as evidenced by his consorting with men of education and position. In Part IV, there is a kind of transformation and he becomes possessed by an adulation of the Houyhnhnms, a race of horse-like creatures with human intelligence.

He remarks that this diversity of character amidst an essential unity is to provide some kind of contrast for a person whose physical presence changes in significance between beings of a remarkable diversity of size and shape. Orwell attributes this, in part, to Swift's possible identification with the character of Gulliver. He believes that Gulliver's precipitous attempts to put out a fire through by urinating on the palace of the tiny Empress and causing her immense offense is a satiric reference to his own Queen Anne's offense at his pamphlet, *A Tale of a Tub*, which criticizes dissenters from the Church of England. Apparently, instead of being grateful to Swift's gesture, Queen Anne also took offense.

Gulliver's conservatism extends also satirically to skepticism about science as in the Academy of Lagado, featured in Part III. He also attacks the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in his castigation of the Brobdingnagians. His ideal seems to be the Houyhnhmns, who solely use their "science" for the development of practical things, such as agriculture and live in oblivion of the outside world. He observes with displeasure, the interest of the mathematical philosophers of Laputa in the world of politics, suggesting a commonality with the scientists of England. Apparently, both these scientists audaciously and disturbingly share an interest in the affairs of State when, in fact, they belong in their laboratory and not dabbling in politics. Swift hates science and medicine and abstract learning in General. Swift is unreligious and despite a journey to the Island of Sorcerers, the affair is apparently just another opportunity to attack the human study of history and to remark uncritically on some of the great characters of the past.

In general, Orwell sees Swift as attacking totalitarianism, an activity with, as a prominent anti-totalitarian author, he probably empathizes with. As such, Swift satirically describes the Kingdom of Tribnia, which is obsessed with plots and conspiracies. But as much as Swift rails against tyrants- and lords and bishops and kings- Swift also rails against the tyranny of the common people as reflected in his comments on the caste system of the

Houyhnhmns and the educational system of the Lilliputians, which forbids the poorer classes a formal education.

Orwell, who is highly critical of Swift and the view of life developed in *Gulliver's Travels,* still has a high respect for these strange books, which he re-reads with relish and with which he holds in the highest esteem. He sees in it a "terrible intensity of vision" which, in barely passing the "test of sanity," finds redemption in its finally focused ability to expose hidden truths with satirical genius and unrestrained exuberance.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this biting and profound look at Gulliver's travels, Orwell is out to laud some of the book's intriguing character and its satiric insight while at the same time demonstrating his concern for Swift's backward-looking philosophy and politics. It is clear that he loves the book for all his criticism and professes to have reread it many times.

Orwell speculates that Swift was driven into a "perverse Toryism" by the antics of the Whig Party and that the whole of *Gulliver's Travels* can be seen as a kind of attack on the England of his day, particularly in the area of "colonization and foreign conquest." Is Gulliver ranting against the armies of the Duke of Marlborough? He cites the acronym of "Langdon" of Part III, a word one letter short of the word, "England." He speculates that Gulliver uses satire as an antidote for his feeling of powerlessness.

Orwell, in this critical essay, returns to the subject of Tolstoy to whom he compares Swift. Both are disbelievers in happiness, hostile to science, only finding their favorites subjects worthy of interest and having a horror of sexuality. Whereas Tolstoy looked to the predominance of the other world, Swift has created his own Paradises in a strange literary similitude of Planet Earth. He uses the Yahoos, satiric portraits of humankind, as objects of his disgust.

Now, in his former discussion of "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," which we have previously summarized, he suggests that Tolstoy is upset with Lear because Lear's character is so much like Lear's. We would speculate that Orwell, the great commentator/satirist on totalitarianism (a theme highly developed in *1984* and in these essays) perhaps is so vituperative in this essay because he himself in many ways shares a sort of mission with Swift. Like Swift, he is also a fierce enemy of totalitarianism, but he is disappointed with Swift's alternatives. Swift, to Orwell, is an imbalanced anachronism who is anti-learning, anti-science and anti-democracy.

No matter what one might think of either, both Orwell and Gulliver wrote at least one very great book which cast a dark light on human nature and the cruel potential for the state dominating and controlling the lives of its citizens.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Although Orwell, with its critics, shares the belief that the English language is in a "bad way," it is also his belief that the malady is reversible. In order to have a role in this "cure," Orwell has decided to inject some clear thinking into the process and thereby alert his readers of fundamental things they can do that, perhaps, can help halt the decline.

To this end, he presents five different examples of poor English. All of these examples share a "staleness of imagery" and "a lack of precision." With these flaws, language's hopeful concreteness melts into a vague abstractness thereby obviating the natural clarity inherent in good exposition. With this unfortunate vagueness, prose passages are formed of blocks of poorly thought-out phrases instead of carefully chosen words. The results are bound together like "a prefabricate hen-house."

Having indicated this route to language obfuscation, Orwell addresses some of the specific ways that this decline is implemented. First, there is the use of "dying metaphors," where words are strung together with worn-out phrases like "no axe to grind" or "swan song." Then there is the problem of "operators or verbal false limbs" by which Orwell means the indiscriminate over-kill of turning a plain word into a phrase such as using "making contact with" instead of "contacting" or "with respect of" instead of "respecting." Another problem is the use of words such as "constitute" or "phenomenon" in a manner that "dresses up" that could be dealt with more simply. Then, there is the problem of meaningless words used in dishonest expositions that create effects with fluffy words like "romantic" or "vitality" but really speak of nothing with any designated meaning, a trick of people like art critics.

According to Orwell, the problem doesn't have to do with archaic language or correct grammar or preferring a Saxon word to a Latin-derived word, but rather to the lack of clarity in exposition. It has to do with using clichéd metaphors, long words instead of short, extra, unnecessary words and a passive instead of an active tense. Orwell warns against using unnecessary foreign phrases or scientific words instead of common phrases.

Orwell's intention is not to produce a higher standard of literary exposition but rather to introduce common sense, reason and a simple aesthetics of language based on straightforward communication. He is interested in language that sharpens thought, as a valuable instrument of expression rather than for the purpose of concealing or obscuring one's true intention.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Despite Orwell's apparent intention to clarify language and to improve it, one is doubtful that he really believes that his little essay or other efforts will really have an effect on the culture of writers contemporary with his essay. That said, I believe that Orwell is making a very important cultural statement about language that later becomes crystallized in his amazing presentation of "doublespeak" in *1984*. Orwell understands how the wrong application of language can dull thinking and be an instrument for political control.

Some of the worse type of writing, according to Orwell, is political writing, which is filled with banal phrases like "bloodstained tyranny" and "bestial atrocities," whose original impact has been diluted with over use. Political language is filled with words like pacification (meaning subduing peasants with bombs and machine guns) or rectification of frontiers, meaning forcible removal of people from their homes. Worse, political writers use a kind of moralistic jargon when speaking of immoral actions against citizens involving the curtailing of their freedom of speech or assembly.

As a student of language and politics, Orwell understands what strange bedfellows they can be when the wrong use of language becomes a common convention and an instrument of destruction even greater than the original wielder of the language might have intended. Such would be the mechanical momentum of imperfect language in a culture that does not take pride in self-examination and the importance of precise self-expression.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Orwell begins his meditations on Gandhi by asking some fundamental questions. Was Gandhi essentially moved by vanity? After all, despite his unpretentious lifestyle, he did have the power to "move empires." Did he compromise his own ideals by entering the muddled world of politics? Was his so-called saintly purity muddled by the very start?

Orwell states he was impressed by his autobiography at a time when he was particularly unimpressed by the man and his "medievalist" solutions to the problems of a backwards country. Still, he is enthralled by Gandhi's candor about his early life. Further, Orwell can see in later years how Gandhi exhibited great physical courage and high moral intentions in his refusal to judge people by class or courage. He even sees some value in Gandhi's willingness to look at people in a better light and see his enemies as approachable.

Still, Orwell believes there are grave limitations to his non-violent methods, one that are unsuitable for the modern world.

Orwell concludes by stating his appreciation for Gandhi in some ways, despite the fact that he had never really liked him. And despite the grim limitations of his social methodology, Orwell clearly comments that, of all politicians of his time, it was remarkable what a "clean smell" he left behind.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Commenting on Gandhi's "sins" of Gandhi's youth, Orwell comments on the small weight of the whole package: a few brothel visits, a little bit of meat, an angry outburst, etc. Still, in commenting on his saintliness, Orwell notes his vegetarianism and his celibacy with some skepticism, pointing out that his objectives find a foundation in otherworldly thinking; i. e., in the belief in God and that the world is an illusion. Gandhi is not just a pragmatic social reformer. Gandhi's weapon against social injustice is an expression of his otherworldliness. He called it Satyagraha, "firmness in truth." With it, he forged a powerful weapon based on strikes and other forms of civil disobedience, including passively accepting blows from the police and mobs.

Still, although believing in Satyagraha for himself, Gandhi had some appreciation of its limitations- as in the problems of the Jews in Nazi Germany or the Russian masses, both of who would confront in their resistance an enemy unmoved by the physical pain of their hated or scorned victims. Gandhi's solutions for the Jews, Orwell says, quoting Fischer's *Gandhi or Stalin*, was to commit mass suicide.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Orwell, despite some misgivings, admired Gandhi and may have "liked" him more than he would admit, even to himself.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Orwell begins this essay in a meeting of the P.E.N. club which is being held on the three hundredth anniversary of a little pamphlet by John Milton called "Areopagitica," a pamphlet created to defend freedom of the press. In summarizing the meeting, Orwell relates the substance of four speakers- one said that freedom of the Press was a good thing- in India; the second that liberty was "a good thing," but spoke in a very general way. The third attacked laws that challenged obscenity in literary products. The fourth defended the Russian purges.

There were other speeches, which defended freedom, but not in terms of political liberty. Orwell affirms his belief that liberty of the press means "the freedom to criticize and oppose." The meeting, in general, ignored the "Aeropagitica" and its intentions as well as the suppression of certain books in the United States and England. In fact, the meeting was a kind of celebration of censorship.

He sums up the attacks on freedom of the press with two main arguments: 1) "freedom is undesirable" 2) "intellectual honesty is a form of anti-social selfishness." The use of these arguments, Orwell says, hides the important question of "truth versus untruth." He contrasts the Catholic and the Communist ideologues and find them similar in so far as they will do anything but admit the honesty and intellectual capability of their opponents. Although he lauds the communist concept of the classless society, he laughs at those who would buy the communist claims that such a thing was actually taking place within the Soviet Union. He rails against the ideological power of the small English communist party. Totalitarianism uses such rhetoric as an integral part of its plan to suppress the supporters of liberty. It demands a "continuous alteration of the past" to consolidate its power, which is often through violence and suppression.

Freedom of the journalist and freedom of the "non-political" writer go hand in hand. And, although "non-political," the imaginative writer is still bringing his personal views to the public in a powerful way that embodies the essence of personal and literary freedom. Democracy fosters great literature, according to Orwell. Totalitarianism is its enemy. At one point, before the war, it was popular to rail against the Nazis. But, for twenty months, after Chamberlain's overtures to Germany, it was popular to look at the poor Germans as victims of the aftermath of World War I. But, when the war was declared, they were enemies again. The English political writers were told what to write by the monopolistically controlled newspapers, reflecting the political views of their owners.

Orwell is afraid of the "mechanizing process" he sees in media as in the creation of newspaper, radio and other media products. He envisions the State shaping the guidelines for the creation of literature. He fears for the decline of literature and certain media. Orwell's disdain for literary repression and dilution of individuality even extends to Disney as he comments on "the factory process" used to create films.

But although he sees fearful prospects for literature in the West, he still sees a largely liberal view protecting much literary freedom. But, in the Soviet Union, he sees that it has largely vanished and, although the Soviets protect their scientific intelligentsia, they actively persecute their writers. He states, "Liberty is doomed if liberty of thought perishes" as in totalitarianism. But there is another problem, the buying and inevitable spoiling of the writer. Imagination cannot be bred in captivity, either by the Soviets or by the ruthlessness of private ownership of media by the irresponsible partisans of censorship.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Of all the essays in this book, this strikes me as the one that is most of contemporary interest and value. It analyzes, in essence, the suppression of literary freedom in a way that rings true and resounds for decades after Orwell wrote it.

To Orwell, liberty of the press is under attack by the totalitarian apologists and the beaureaucrats that protect the owners, a "few rich men" of radio and films. Further causes of this are due to the lack of money spent on books forcing serious writers to do side work to survive. Some government agencies that support writers also serve the purpose of turning writers into "government officials."

Owing to its nature, poetry, according to Orwell, has a much greater chance in surviving in a totalitarian regime, which basically despises the literary form and its purveyor. Also, the form of poetry somewhat disguises its content. But prose is a different matter. Orwell cites the disappearance of literature during the reign of the Nazi and the Italian fascist governments as well in post-communist Russia.

Whatever his prejudices or virtues, it is clear that Orwell is an advocate of freedom of speech and feels it as an obligation to criticize the censorship and political oppression that could affect the creation of real literature.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

In critiquing the thought of James, Orwell examines some of his writings, including *The Managerial Revolution,*" which created a ripple of interest in the U.S. and Great Britain. The essence of Burnham's argument in that popular book was that capitalism is dying, but is not being replaced by Socialism, but by a new breed of managers, whether called business executives or technicians, who essentially control the means of production. The result will be a new type of social pyramid with the managers at the top and a mass of semi-slaves on the bottom.

In his next book, *The Machiavellians,* Burnham takes the argument a step farther, basically representing the new class of managers as inevitable players in the next stage of history. As a modern Machiavellian, Burnham is influenced by the original Machiavelli, author of *The Prince*, and his disciples, like Mosca and Pareto. He evangelizes about how the new world will be founded on power, but perhaps a more honest and basic approach than the ones built into the deceptions of capitalism and socialism and the various Utopian dreams of people ranging from the Bolsheviks to the English Puritans.

Since the managers no longer have to fall back on an inherited aristocracy or the favoritism of a dissembling oligarchy like the Communist Party or the nepotism of capitalist societies, ability will be the chief driver of upward managerial mobility. Essentially, Orwell sees Burnham's managerial revolution as a kind of guided strategy to the new and inevitable direction towards managerial totalitarianism. Although Orwell sees elements of this direction, for good or for ill, in some countries, he does not believe it has greatly influenced the United States.

Writing before the end of the war, Burnham predicted German victory, which was wrong; the survival of Germany and Japan as great states, which was right, but only after a remake of their totalitarianism; that Germany would not attack Russia until the defeat of Britain, which was wrong on both counts and the defeat of the USSR, which came later, in a sense, but certainly not from Germany.

Burnham claims that, unlike other writers to the contrary, Stalin is a logical and necessary continuation from Lenin. In a passage cited by Orwell, which Orwell admits might be "tinged" with irony, Burnham depicts the great manner of Stalin's despotism, who fearlessly and open light starves the masses, unjustly frames thousands, throw thousands more into concentration camps, is so shocking that society is inclined to accept his explanations. How could one man dare to exercise such brutal tyranny without a reason? Orwell suspects that there is something in Burnham that worships power for its own sake.

He sees these tendencies in Burnham's predictions, which are always based on current trends, like the time he predicts that defeat of Russia in 1941 when the Germans had

always reached Russia. But in 1944, when the Russians were advancing in Europe, Burnham did not mind predicting Russian world conquest. This type of prophesying, to Orwell, is a sign of mental imbalance, cowardice and Burnham's power-worship, which compels him to take the side of an anticipated victor. .

Orwell does not appreciate Burnham's neo-Machiavellianism and its acceptance of the current trends in world conquest or, at any rate, its tendencies. Orwell thinks of these views as a consequence of Burnham's semi-conscious power-worship of the ascending Communist and Fascist orders. Burnham's prophecies rise and fall with the waxing and waning of power and are a cowardly capitulation to tyranny of the worse kind.

Orwell quotes Burnham's statement that whoever comes to power governs the "manners and morals" of the times. To an older social order, the Nazis may be monsters. But to the new one, they are perfectly all right. Orwell begs to differ. And that goes for the Russians and Italians of that era and all other totalitarianism. Burnham, in his appreciation of Nazism, has lost touch with reality. His defense of the "managerial revolution" is a cowardly sham.

Chapter 9 Analysis

It is uncanny how contemporary and relevant many of these essays are, written decades ago by a writer whose one long-remembered work has been dated by its title, *1984*. Yet that work and these essays show his sharp insight into the workings of men who have capitulated to the power of others and have lost their reason.

Burnham's neo-Machiavellianism has been reborn again and again in the world of modern politics. We find one kind of elite in London and another kind in Washington. Whatever the ideology, oligarchy of a sort rules everywhere. And it is also true that a non-aristocratic, non-nepotistic elite has often developed which has some similarities to his "managerial" elite. It does appear to be a tendency. But is it inevitable and is it ever right? For Burnham, who would have been admirer of the likes of Sadam Hussein, the Iraqi administration and its Republican Guard would have been just another enviable managerial elite.

It is interesting that at the end of his essay, Orwell makes his own prophesy about Russia. He says- it will either "democratize itself, or it will perish." Of course, Orwell was right. He knew that totalitarianism was not inevitable and he knew it could not last. But it is people like Burnham, who lost in their worship and envy of power, that cannot see the flimsy unreality that such things are built on. Orwell, as usual, has a deep insight into the mind of his contemporaries and he sees right through Burnham.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In this essay, Orwell shares his secret heart-felt belief that the phenomenon of sport is not, in fact, a means of amicable bonding as the world thinks. Rather it is a seed of "ill-will," as he calls it, between sides. Orwell purports amazement at ever hearing that sport creates goodwill as he feels it only serves to enflame hostility. He mentions the fact that newspapers and the like have not been able to conceal such national competitive enmity, citing coverage of the riotous frenzies of the 1936 Olympic Games.

Orwell concedes that, in the absence of nationalist feelings, as in local friendly games, it would be possible to play for fun and recreation. Otherwise, competitive attitudes preempt games with ideals of prestige to be kept and disgrace to be avoided at all costs. Team players, in their minds, emulate soldiers in combat, spurred on by their loyal supporters shouting excitedly in the stands. As in war, the team's mission is to overthrow the enemy. That's what Orwell thinks of sport.

Enraged by strong feelings of discrimination based on class, race or nationality, players may break the rules to affect a victory. In their excitement, they forget that winning through cheating is without honor or meaning.

Orwell feels that the idea of wholesome rivalry to bring peoples or nations together is a bunch of hooey and calls modern sport a "cult." Games make national relations worse as they are compounded by politics, generating group enmity, and causing the defeated to "lose face."

Chapter 10 Analysis

Sports have further degenerated since Orwell's time. British papers report of "soccer hooliganism" going back to the 1960's; acts of vandalism and violence transpire immediately big college football games in America; there are websites celebrating classic ice hockey fights. All of this shows that the violence which Orwell has seen inherent in the sports attitudes of fans and players decades ago has surfaced uncomfortably into a more conspicuous reality.

Still, there is another factor that may mitigate Orwell's theories. In 1972, with the massacre of eleven Israeli contestants in the Munich Olympics, another facet of violence in sports began. In a way, this represented the terrorists versus the world community, embodied by the Olympics. Since that time, many nations of the world have co-operated together to provide better security so the Olympics can continue. Although this added security and attention has, in some ways, negative connotations for the Games, it does show the concern that nations have for preserving a place where friendly camaraderie and rivalry serve as a safer outlet for the world than the fields of war.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In essence, Orwell bemoans the absence of really interesting and intriguing contemporary murder literature. This, he postulates, is due to the fact that the prevalent type of crime is changing from what he feels are "perfect" murders to more mundane and non-memorable homicides. He mentions nine well-loved murder cases made into a plethora of literary renderings, novels to Sunday newspapers, from Jack the Ripper to Joseph Smith, and contrasts them with details of more recent lackluster accounts.

For a *News of the World* reader, Orwell describes the warmth and domestic comfort of a British Sunday afternoon, replete with fireplace and gastronome pleasures, brought to the height of well-being only by the reading of a good murder. A conceivable Orwellian outline of a compelling murder scenario might involve both a pitiable murderer and victim alike: a regarded local professional, seduced by lust or power who, after deliberating with his own conscience, poisons his innocent victim, often husband or wife, to avert the disgrace or scandal of an extracurricular activity.

In Britain's former "Elizabethan period" of great murders, according to Orwell, carnage was highly renowned and unforgettable resulting in good reading. But he feels that the current problem is mediocre murders that fail to follow Orwell's "old domestic poisoning dramas."

Chapter 11 Analysis

With all Orwell's political and social concerns for democracy and liberty and his brilliant analysis of literature, it is sometimes comforting to see him as a kind of ordinary person with an appreciation for ordinary things, even if that devolves to a fondness for the subject of homicide as a form of reading pleasure. .

Naturally, as erudite as he is, Orwell's analysis does bring to the table hundreds of years of great murders and great literature. And so, as cozy as this essay is, it does provide the panoramic vision of an extraordinary writer who had deemed to address himself to the simple pleasures of a fireside reading of a decent murder story.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

This essay begins with a brilliant, but humorous description of the life of a toad. Orwell at first describes the hibernation of a toad, which generally draws to an end in time for the Spring mating season. However, Orwell remarks, occasionally he has dug up a toad in summer, who has somehow missed the trigger of awakening, whether it is the quaking of the earth or a change in temperature. He then proceeds to describe the mating of toads, who have difficulty from distinguishing another toad from a plain stick and, in the acting of mating, male from female- until, of course, they have taken some time to commingle with their object of choice and, in some way, identified their gender and either stayed or passed on to another.

Orwell tells us that Spring is not a popular subject in his essays. People, offended by the topic, tell him that either his dwelling on Spring is remiss because it he is not properly focused on righting social wrongs or because he does not recognize that those who work close to the outdoors, like farmers or fisherman, could care less about Nature. Orwell refuses the former argument by affirming the value of Nature as a constant good in one's life that should never be ignored and that makes life meaningful, whether under a regime of tyranny or comparative freedom. Secondly, he remarks that there is ample evidence, whether in medieval ballads or cross-cultural, as in Chinese or Japanese art, that demonstrates that those who labor in the fields or with Nature have a remarkable love of their surroundings and an appreciation for the emergence of Spring.

Orwell, not matter what atom bombs are being made in factories or what police are roaming the cities or what lies are being propagandized to the masses, refuses not to take pleasure in Spring and its abundant overflowing into cities and countryside alike.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Orwell is at his significant best in this amazing little post-industrial tribute to spring, although I believe he may have had a twinge of sadness in the thought of writing it.

One of the main characteristics of Orwell is that he combines a humanistic social philosophy with a genuine appreciation for life. I think this essay, above all others, shows that he has not lost himself as a person in either his erudition or in the seductive qualities of an age of technology.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The Vicar of Bray was a colorful, but somewhat disreputable character, who has as a legacy a somewhat comic song celebrating his ability to accommodate to several generations of reigning royalty and a "magnificent yew tree." Another colorful character, Thibaw, the drunken and homicidal King of Burma, left a somewhat bloodly reputation but a beautiful bounty of tamarind trees that flourished on the streets of Mandalay until the Japanese bombing destroyed them in the 1940's.

The point of all this is that Orwell notes that you don't have to be a good person to plant a good tree. He suggests, lightheartedly, that, if you commit some kind of a sin, it might be a good idea to go ahead and plant a tree in contrition. And, if you don't have a place of your own, he suggests a vacant lot might be good. After all, he's talking about war-torn England where much damage was done to their local trees. He gives an example of a successful planting of some ramblers and polyantha roses, some bush roses and some gooseberry bushes with for a total sum of twelve and sixpence. And with only a couple of deaths in this family of plants, a small sum yielded a small forest of pleasure for its heirs.

So, even if you're a rather bad person, planting a good tree may salvage some of your reputation.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Like "Some Thoughts on the Common Toad," this essay is full of insight and sharp wit regarding the value of nature and, in particular, trees. There is a clear line of witty commentary focusing on the evil men do and their possibility of arboreal repentance. One can also see in this a lot Orwell's clarity about the value of trees- to provide fruit and shade and opportunities for courting or slumber. He also gives a pitch for planting long- term trees like walnuts, which he remarks no one ever plants anymore.

He suggests that perhaps one should keep a diary. And for every bad deed, stick an acorn in the ground. "Private re-afforestation" may not be the answer to all social problems, but it is the start of some kind of positive legacy, after all.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

This essay opens with a hilarious portrait of a rumpled, jaded book reviewer, working at home amidst the rubble of his life. The man has ripped apart a packet of five substantial, totally disconnected, volumes, of such ennui-producing content that he has fallen into the stagnation of moral paralysis, even though the clock is ticking.

He will approach the hideous of analyzing half-read and half-digested like this for over a hundred times a year, many times having to invent unfelt reactions to compendiums of undistilled, badly-written and boring information he can barely stand reading, much less reviewing. Once in a while, he stumbles on one or two he actually likes writing about.

Orwell suggests that, in an ideal world, the number of books reviewed be greatly restricted. These would be handled by long reviews, over a 1000 words. Most of the rest would be handled by a few lines.

Chapter 14 Analysis

One tends to feel very sorry for poor George Orwell after this sad look at the life of a book reviewer and what his profession reduces him, too. But at least a book reviewer has someone who he can look down on.

In his final comments, he compares the book reviewer to the film critic, who cannot work at home and must "sell his honor for a glass of inferior sherry." Of course, Orwell is writing before home videos and DVD-players. He can do his work at home, too, and, now, can take on the disheveled, rumpled appearance of his brother-in-arms, the book reviewer.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

In order to summarize this chapter without resorting to antiquated prices in English currency, it is safe to say that Orwell has discovered a year's consumption of alcohol and cigarettes would allow one to buy a rather decent of collection of books. In order to prove his point, Orwell painstakingly counts his book, his cigarette and his alcohol purchases and winds up with the sanguine conclusion that books are affordable.

The core of his point is that the price of a book, for him, is the cost of an expensive seat in the cinema. It is the least expensive of media pleasures, next to radio. And, to make matters even better, if you can do with second-hand books, you will have a stronger collection for the same amount of expenditure.

Orwell suspects, however, that all he is really doing is proving that the expense of books is not the reason that people don't read. The real reason people don't read is that they would rather go to movies, to pubs or to watch dog racing. And knowing the wonderful world he has found in books, Orwell can only lament at this poor choice of prioritization.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Of all the essays in this collection, this one is the most tedious and outworn, specifically because of the antiquated currency figures. Nowadays, alcohol and cigarettes are still more important, but infinitely more stigmatized than in Orwell's day. And television, the Internet and home computers have entirely changed the complexion and excuse for not reading. In some ways, the sale of books may be flourishing because of the ease of purchase- as in amazon.com- but there is also the possibility of a new illiteracy, owing to the way children use the Internet to access information easily, but without necessarily absorbing the depth of material available through books.

But Orwell is right about people finding all kinds of other ways to spend their money instead of on books. And since books are rapidly becoming a somewhat secondary source of information for many, there is a genuine continuity here between his world and ours. But there are also differences and these date his essay.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

"Good Bad Books" is about books that survive the passage of time, but are not necessarily great books. The list of works that contain books that have survived, but are dated, include works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of *Sherlock Holmes*, Booth Tarkington, the *Penrod* children's series, Bram Stoker of *Dracula* and Harriet Beecher Stowe of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that many will recognize. There are also a great many whose authors have faded from collective recognition by now, except by a few connoisseurs, perhaps. I doubt whether names like Leonard Merrick, C. Nesbit, George Birmingham or Barrie Pain would be among the authors in the retinue of the reader of this summary.

Helen's Babies (the title and subject of the last essay in his book), *Dracula*, *Sherlock Holmes, Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *King Solomon's Mines* (by H. Ryder Haggard) are books that are certain to be remembered, but which, at their core, contain a kind of absurdity, either as to their professed realism or to their actual stylistic execution. For one reason or another, according to Orwell, these are examples of great light literature.

In closing, he says that the works of Virginia Woolf and George Moore, although still remembered authors at the time of writing, will probably not outlast a work like *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* as melodramatic and childish as it is in some of its passages.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Like "Books Vs Cigarettes," this essay is also dated, but perhaps more profoundly. However, there are a chunk of books here that everyone will recognize.

My problem is with the series of works based on Sherlock Holmes. I just cannot conceive that these are good bad books. They are just too enjoyable, too profound and too successful to fit into Orwell's category. In all these essays, this is my most profound disagreement with Orwell.

I think today, perhaps due to Edward Albee, most people would at least know Virginia Woolf's name, but perhaps George Moore has not really survived as a well-remembered novelist by now. And it still a good bet that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will survive them both.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

This was a concise little essay about poems that mean very little, but are generally fun- or at least funny. An example of the latter is probably the work Orwell cites called Solomon Grundy, who is "born on Monday," "Christened on Tuesday"… and by the end of the week is buried. "And that was the end of Solomon Grundy."

Edward Lear is known for his nonsense rhymes that are set in made-up countries with peculiar, nonsensical characters. His most famous is probably "The Owl and the Pussycat." In Lear's limericks, the first and last lines have the same rhyme, giving them a peculiar charm. Still, Orwell thinks that, although fun, there is not much of a great intent here. In fact, he doesn't see much of a purpose in "nonsense poetry" at all.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Orwell is somewhat ambivalent about the works of Lear. Although he does appear to admire the works of Lewis Carroll, he is afraid much of the current direction of children's books, which he believes was essentially the fault of Edward Lear. One wonders how he would feel about Doctor Seuss, who is probably nearer to this genre than many.

Orwell manages to retain his sense of humor throughout even this little nugget of criticism. And whatever his feelings for Lear, I believe he enjoyed quoting "The Courtship of Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo" at great length.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The subjects of this essay are children's books, beginning with *Helen's Babies*, a fabulously successful book in its day.

Orwell comments that children's books give one a kind of "false map" of the world, particularly focusing on the influence of America, in this regard. He thinks of images of a boy, with braces and patches, sitting in the corner of a schoolhouse and a tall man, spitting tobacco while reciting aphorisms while whittling. These are images taken from books like *Tom Sawyer* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* He recalls a song from a Scottish songbook, with a reference to an American "riding down from Bangor" on an Eastern train, his skin "bronzed with weeks of hunting in Maine.

Helen's Babies is a broad farce about a young bachelor in New York whose sister gives him her children to baby-sit while she and her husband go on a vacation. The children thoroughly torture the brother but also help consolidate an engagement to a "charming girl." Still, they characterized the world quite differently from the wilder world of Mark Twain, a portrait of a wilder, more anarchic America. Orwell prefers these types of books, derived from America, than the newer ones. He focuses on Superman as an example of a new form of children's literature with its lack of realism and unchecked evil as compared to the more value-laden American literature of yesterday.

Chapter 18 Analysis

As a child, I was also exposed to images in books like *Little Women* and *Tom Sawyer*, but if I had to guess about children growing up in these last few generations with these classics and Superman, I would imagine most would choose Superman as the preferred image. The wholesome atmosphere that Orwell reveres, as depicted in old books and movies, are not very appealing to young people of today. I think Orwell would say that this is largely due to the hold that media has on our children and on our imaginations. He would have seen that his predictions about the assembly-line creation of media products has extended to a very deep place in our culture and there has been a loss of truth, replaced by cheap exploitation of our lower instincts and tendencies. Orwell has continued to be a prophet for our time.

Characters

The Crowd

The crowd makes itself known through "hideous laughter," the cackling that accompanies the petty acts of revenge which the Burmese inflict on their foreign rulers. This same laughter coercively implies a choice which the narrator cannot escape—the choice between becoming the object of the mob's disappointment and ire, or shooting the elephant, a creature which he knows ought to be left alone. The crowd is not a "Burmese crowd," or even vaguely an "Asian" as opposed to a "Europe-an crowd"; it is a generic crowd, behaving as all crowds do, with less and less reason the larger it grows and with an increasing taste for for venting its collective resentment against some arbitrary victim, here either the narrator himself, conspicuous because of his office, or the elephant, a convenient substitute and safer because, as a non-human, its victimage entails less possibility of reprisal.

The Elephant

The elephant acquires a character during the course of Orwell's narrative, so that even though he is not human, he deserves to be mentioned. The narrator describes him as a rogue who has escaped his mahout (driver). Indian, Burmese, and Thai elephants are working animals, used for lifting and hauling. The elephant therefore has something analogous to a social station— he is a "worker" — and resembles, in his servant-to-master relation the native Burmese, who have been enrolled without veto into the service of the British Empire. In its final moments, the elephant very much resembles a human victim, which is no doubt what drives the narrator to flee before the agonized animal has died.

The Narrator

The anonymous narrator of "Shooting an Elephant," shares biographical details with Orwell himself. A British police official in Burma, the narrator is a questioning colonialist. He perfectly understands the Burmese resentment of the British, while at the same time he hates the petty harassments that the natives inflict on him and his compatriots. As an ostensible agent of control, he understands that the will of the crowd demands the death of the elephant despite his unwillingness to shoot the animal.

Themes

Conscience

The narrator's mental division points to conscience as one of the underlying themes of "Shooting an Elephant." The narrator must do his duty as a colonial policeman. He despises the native Burmese for loathing and tormenting him as their foreign oppressor; yet he also perfectly well understands their loathing and tormenting; he even takes their side privately. His official position, rather than his moral disposition, compels the narrator to act in the way that he does, so as to uphold his office precisely

by keeping the native Burmese in their subordinate and dependent place. As a colonial official, the narrator must not let himself become a spectacle before the native crowds. Not shooting the elephant would make him seem like a coward, so he shoots the elephant. The narrator's moral conscience appears in the moment when the corpse of the Burmese crushed by the elephant comes to his attention; the narrator says that the man lay sprawled in a "crucified" posture, invoking all of the poignant and rich symbolism that the term "crucified" offers. The elephant, too, especially in its pain-wracked death, evokes in the narrator feelings of terrible pity, not soothed by his knowledge that he acted within the law. Law, indeed, opposes conscience in "Shooting an Elephant." The brute fact of Empire, thoroughly institutionalized, is irreconcilable with the individual's moral analysis of the situation.

Culture Clash

The obvious culture clash in "Shooting an Elephant" is that between the colonizers and the colonized, the British and the Burmese. The British represent the industrial West with its notions of civic administration and its technological excellence; the Burmese represent a powerless pre-industrial society set upon by an industrial superpower looking beyond its own borders for a field of action.

The Burmese despise the British; the British condescend to the Burmese. Less obvious, but far more important, are two other culture clashes. The first is the ethical difference setting the narrator, as a representative of the West, apart from the native Burmese, who belong to the local village-culture and live in a pre-industrial world from which the West itself has long since emerged. The narrator does not want to kill the elephant; the crowd does. The narrator personifies the animal and feels the pathos of its painful death at his own hands; the crowd strip it bare of its flesh within a few hours of its having fallen to the ground. The dead Burmese seems far more important to the narrator than to the crowd who is following him around. The mob's thirst for violence is very different from the narrator's hope of avoiding it. The second less obvious culture clash takes place within the narrator himself. Here the personal culture of an ethical Western individual is at odds with his institutional culture; the narrator's personal values— his sense that the

dead Burmese has been, in some manner, crucified, and that the elephant is a victim pure and simple—clash with his duty as a colonial policeman.

Order and Disorder

Order prevails when the mahout (elephant handler) ties up the elephant and keeps him under control; disorder prevails when the elephant slips his keeper and ravages the bazaar. A policeman, too, is a keeper of order, which is why Orwell's narrator cannot avoid the unpleasant duty of shooting the elephant. Not to do so would be to condone disorder and provoke it even further, by appearing to be unwilling to carry out official violence against the disruption of daily affairs. Disorder is a type of violence within the daily round, dissolving the habitual peace. Disorder-as-violence can only be halted by a supplementary administration of violence, and even the narrator admits that this supplement is morally dubious, no matter how practical or necessary it might be. Disorder-as-violence appears on many occasions directed against the British, as when random Burmese spit betel juice on passing European women, as when Buddhist priests laugh spitefully at the narrator, as when the umpire on the playing field looks conveniently the other way while a Burmese player fouls the very same narrator. But this disorder also quells a possibly greater disorder, that of general rebellion against the British. Order, it appears, calls for a strange and paradoxical use of disorder to satisfy rebellious urges which would otherwise grow strong and run amok like a rogue elephant.

Prejudice and Tolerance

The narrator explains how one falls into prejudice, a state of mind in which expediency suppresses conscience: One finds oneself in a role, like that of a colonial policeman; one's personal judgments, which run to sympathy with the native people, necessarily must give way to duty towards the job, towards the empire, and this in turn requires treating the locals as inferiors. Organizationally and technically, the locals are inferior, in the purely Darwinian sense that their society cannot prevail over the society that has colonized them; thus, out of habit, they concede the role of overlord to the colonists, and this too conspires to make the agent of empire act out of prejudgment in a type of imposed role. All acts, by everyone, in this context, are prejudged and stereotyped. On the other hand, both sides tolerate each other, in the neutral rather than in the morally exemplary sense, conceding to each other their complementary roles and biding their time.

Style

Point of View

In "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell employs a casually assumed first-person point of view; what readers know of the event described in the story, they know primarily from the narrator's direct and apparently candid divulgence. Couching the tale in the first person enables Orwell to engage in the rhythm of meditation and action without it seeming forced; because the narrator is reminiscing about the event, which occurred some time in the past, his interweaving of essayistic reflections with the main action strikes the reader as quite natural. The use of reminiscence has a further consequence, that of the splitting off of the narrator as narrator from the narrator as agent of an action. The narrator not only directly reports the impressions and thoughts that he experienced at the time of the elephant episode; he also imposes his present, removed, retrospective analysis on the impressions and thoughts of that time. (This is one of the ways in which readers know that the narrator is a man of conscience.) Despite the first-person point of view, the perspectives of others— the Burmese— also come through, since the narrators reports them frankly.

Setting

The setting is colonial Burma, part of the British Empire, sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s; specifically, Orwell sets the story in a district town called Moulmein. Few British are present compared to the numerous local people, yet the British rule, and the narrator, as sub-divisional police officer, is an agent of that rule. This paradox, that a few succeed in governing a great mass, is part of the setting, as is the local resentment against the British presence. As the narrator says, the local people hate him, and manifest this hatred by subterfuge rather than directly. Burma is a remote outpost of the Empire, and Moulmein is very poor, with its palm-thatched huts and rice paddys. In the rice-farming economy, an elephant corresponds to heavy capital, and only the comparatively wealthy own one. The elephant is a working animal in the Burmese context, performing heavy labor. Readers may glean some sense of the poverty of the people from the fact that they stand ready to strip the dead elephant of its flesh and indeed do so as soon as the narrator has used up his ammunition and departed.

Structure

The narrative, while broken up by the narrator's reflections on the events he is recalling, is essentially straightforward and makes use of two motifs, inevitability and augmentation. As soon as the narrator receives the telephone report of the rogue elephant, it becomes inevitable that he will have to kill the animal; merely going out to see what is happening insures this, as does the discovery of the trampled Burmese man, and the narrator's sending for the elephant gun and cartridges. The increasingly

agitated crowd (augmentation) also militates against sparing the animal. The increasing size and unanimity of the crowd thus also functions as part of the story, the mob itself becoming something ever more enormous and dangerous, like a rogue elephant, whose danger the narrator avert only through offering it what it wants, namely the death of the creature (and the subsequent boon of its flesh). The story exhibits a certain rhythm, already remarked, that of meditation and action; it starts with reflection, tells part of the story, reflects further, offers its climax, and then ends with a final reflection.

Symbols and Imagery

The narrator himself is a symbol for the people over whom, as a colonial policeman, he holds authority: He is, for them, an image of foreign and arbitrary rule and the object of their resentment and hatred. Signs of his having been reduced by them to a symbol include his being mocked by the young Buddhists and being tripped on the soccer field by a Burmese to the sound of the crowd's laughter. What of the elephant itself? A captive laborer who, in his animal fashion, resents his subjugation, he breaks loose, exercises his freedom, tramples one of his tormentors, and finally parks himself peacefully enough in a field. Yet rebellion requires chastisement and he must die. The narrator personifies the elephant, whose death-agonies take on extraordinary pathos. The personified elephant becomes a walking symbol of human nature put upon and deformed and finally sacrificed for something inhuman, but also sacrificed for the sake of the mob's anger and appetite, so that he becomes the innocent victim of all parties, not merely of the colonial "oppressors."

Historical Context

The British Empire and Nationalism

"The City of London," writes Paul Johnson in *Modern Times,* "was incapable of planning anything, let alone a world-wide conspiracy; it simply followed what it imagined (often wrongly) to be its short-term interests, on a day-to-day basis." Johnson refers to the British Empire, with its far-flung dominions, and to the widespread contemporary idea that the age of imperialism resulted from the malicious foresight of evil powers. Johnson argues instead the great empires of Britain, France, and the Netherlands expanded through a series of unplanned acquisitions, burdening the home country with moral guilt and monetary debt, and dissolving as spontaneously as they formed. Something of Johnson's analysis seems to inform "Shooting an Elephant," with its air of absurdity and directionlessness. If anyone knew about the tedious minutiae of imperial administration, it was George Orwell, who had been born in India and who served in Burma (1922-27) as a colonial policeman.

Orwell arrived at a time when Burmese native interests began to assert themselves against British rule (the British had been in Burma since 1824, when they defeated a Burmese warlord, Maha Bandula, who aggressively opposed British interests in Bengal). Strikes organized by the Young Buddhists paralyzed the administrative center of Rangoon; the antimodern Sayan San movement gained strength in the countryside (and would foment a full-scale rebellion in 1932, a few years after Orwell's departure). Indeed, one of the chief consequences of Western imperial expansion in Asia (as in Africa) was that it brought industrialized and non-industrialized societies forcibly together in a world made ever smaller by technological progress and so provoked resentment between the "haves" and "have-nots." The resentment persisted, moreover, even where the colonized society benefited materially from the imperial presence. Burma was one of the few arms of the British Empire that actually produced a profit, through rice exports, in the period between the two world wars. Nationalism is the political expression of the spontaneous resentment against the foreigners recorded by Orwell in his story.

Western Self-Doubt after World War One

"Shooting an Elephant" takes place in an exotic setting, but it is a Britisher's story and tells us at least as much about Europe between the wars as it does about colonial Burma in the same period. The story's narrator above all doubts his own legitimacy, and this self-doubt characterizes much of Euro-pean life in the aftermath of World War I. That war shattered the confidence of the proverbial Good European; it seemed to prove that civilization was a kind of delusion always ready to collapse into the fraternal violence of international conflict. World War One vindicated the West's pursuit of technological excellence: aviation and broadcasting, for example— features of modern life— emerged from the war; but Western nations came to question their moral

capacities after participation in the bloodbath of the war. One response to the horror of the war was the escapist enthusiasm of "the Roaring Twenties," but, for intellectuals, this offered little consolation, precisely because it was so obviously escapist. Much thoughtful literature of the 1920s is full of bewilderment and pessimism, with works like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Franz Kafka's *The Trial* suggesting the intellectual temper of the times.

The American stock-market crash in 1929, and subsequent worldwide economic depression, provoked an even greater depth of crisis. European nations, not yet fully recovered economically from the war, plunged into catastrophic non-production, inflation, and unemployment.

The response to crisis is often to look for scapegoats. The 1930s, the decade when "Shooting an Elephant" appeared, was already the decade of persecution in the service of nationalism. The Hitler regime had ascended to power on its anti-semitic platform in 1933, and Stalin had been persecuting (and murdering) so-called counter-revolutionaries in Soviet Russia for ten years. Spain erupted into a ferociously recriminating civil war in 1936, in which Orwell fought on the Republican side, but with decreasing commitment to any politicized cause.

Critical Overview

At the very beginning of "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell notes that during his tenure as a colonial policeman in Burma many people hated him. Furthermore, as a writer of nonpartisan political criticism (paying equal attention to the strengths and weaknesses of all sides), Orwell attracted, and still attracts, his share of personal attacks. As Paul Johnson notes in *Intellectuals* (1988), "Orwell had always put experience before theory," and when experience showed that the political Left, with which he had previously identified himself, was just as capable of error as the Right, he said so. Thus the critical tradition concerning Orwell's work generally and his politically charged writings, including "Shooting an Elephant," is controversial.

Readers can glean a sense of how those who favor Orwell tend to treat him from Paul Johnson's remark that, for Orwell, "human beings mattered more than abstract ideas." The general position of those who denounce Orwell shows up in Terry Eagleton's pronouncement about *Burmese Days:* that it "is less a considered critique of imperialism than an exploration of private guilt," an offense in Eagleton's eyes. If the reader accepts Eagleton's premise that political concerns should outweigh personal ones, then the final sentence of the story: "I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool" is unacceptable. In a recent article in the journal *Academic Questions,* Steve Kogan has tallied recent criticism of Orwell and finds it to be overwhelmingly in the Eagletonian vein.

An interesting aspect of commentary on "Shooting an Elephant" is whether it is a story or an autobiographical essay. In favor of the latter, Peter Davison points out, in his *George Orwell* (1996), Orwell indeed shot an elephant while serving on police duty in Burma: "He shot the creature but then was in considerable trouble because the elephant, which was valuable, belonged to one of the influential European timber companies." Accepting that the piece stems from experience— as is so often the case with Orwell— and remembering that the action ceases on a number of occasions so as to permit discussion of the events, the designation of "essay" seems plausible. On the other hand, Or-well made many alterations to the actual case on which the finished item was based, effectively rendering "Shooting an Elephant" fictional. Of course, the problem is merely technical and by no means irresolvable, and the mixture of genres even amounts to an added strength. Orwell himself classified the piece as an essay, including it in a collection of his essays as late as 1949.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Bertonneau holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from UCLA and is the author of nearly forty scholarly articles exploring the anthropological aspects of American, European, and Classical poetry and prose. In the following essay, he tries to understand "Shooting an Elephant" in an anthropological and non-political way.

The proper question to pose regarding George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" is not: what does it tell us about the British Empire or the politics of imperialism? (That, in any case, is always a rhetorical question.) The question is, rather, what does Orwell's compact masterpiece tell us about human nature, and therefore about the universal morality which grows from an awareness of that nature? In answering this question, the critic might well stumble on some replies to the other, the usual, and by implication the misleading, question. For it is possible that the most important phenomenon of empire is simply the most important phenomenon of humanity, the one around which every ethical system effectively or ineffectively revolves: Resentment, that invidious sense of difference as an intolerable contrast, and the violence that it always and everywhere portends.

Resentment of various types pervades "Shooting an Elephant," from the beginning to the end. As a conspicuous agent of the foreign presence, a stranger-master, the narrator finds himself, "for the only time in [his] life," automatically "hated by large numbers of people." This hatred takes the form, in its non-crisis mode, of "an aimless, petty . . . anti-European feeling . . . very bitter," expressed in opportunistic acts like spitting betel juice on the dress of a European woman crossing the bazaar, or deliberately fouling a European player during a British-Burmese soccer-match, while the referee (a Burman) conveniently turns his back. The fouled player is the narrator himself, whose misfortune on the playing-field occasions what he calls the "hideous laughter" of the crowd. This laughter recurs at important junctures of the narrative. Note that such laughter constitutes the unanimous vocalization of a crowd polarized around a unique, if momentary, victim, who serves as an individual, actual, and arbitrary, token of the foreign power in the abstract. The structure of this laughter is unanimity-minus-one. (The "British Empire" is never present in and of itself, because it is an abstraction, a system; it only appears through its agents.) Resentment being a mimetic, or imitative, phenomenon (you punch me, I punch you back), the narrator naturally experiences a gut-level response of his own. Despite that fact that he regards the Empire that he serves as "evil" and proposes to throw off his job as soon as the first chance offers, the narrator would nevertheless fondly like to "drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts" on account of the fact "the young Buddhist priests were the worst of all . . . none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans." Spitting, laughing, hooting and jeering are, in this context, related gestures. They designate a convenient scapegoat for the expression of pent-up and dangerous resentment. (Too severe a provocation will entail a punitive response, so the practical spite must be held in check at the level of annoyance.)

Enter the elephant. Orwell as author, his protagonist as narrator, and indeed the crowd all anthropomorphize, attribute human characteristics, to the elephant. But the elephant, of course, is well-known for its high level of intelligence, a fact which raises it out of the merely animal category; and the social structure of Burmese society under the Brit-ish tends to underscore such quasi-human status. The animal is a working animal and to do work is to engage in a recognizably social activity; the animal belongs, as Orwell later discloses, to an Indian, a person below the British in the local hierarchy but above the Burmese, a person of some wealth, for the elephant is the equivalent of "a huge and costly piece of machinery" in the local economy. The elephant, like the human overlords of the place, can therefore function as an object of resentment, a safer one (in fact) than any actual person, because offending him entails little chance of official reprisal. Moreover, the elephant has "destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow, and raided some fruit-stalls," and he has trampled to death "a black, Dravidian coolie." The quasi-human animal has committed a quasi-criminal act, one involving deadly violence, which places him in jeopardy of a quasi-legal and fully lethal response. The ambiant resentment of Moulmein, the town where the action occurs, suddenly possesses a center around which it can safely polarize, around which a fierce unanimity-minus-one can abruptly form and find satisfaction for its hitherto blocked resentment.

Orwell carefully recounts the coalescence of the crowd's Dionysiac passion; at the same time, he gives us a sharp-eyed description of generic crowd-behavior, which is inevitably persecutorial, focused on a victim. As the narrator brandishes his elephant gun, "practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses" to follow him. Previously, they showed only a lethargic interest in the career of the rogue animal, but now, with an execution in the offing, everyone sharpens his appetite for the event. The narrator too, despite his conscience, will be swept into the lethal consensus: "I had no intention of shooting the elephant," he says; "I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him"; "I did not in the least want to shoot him." Yet "it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you," for the crowd, in its collective presence, exerts a coercive influence. After all, the narrator knows that the crowd expects him to kill the elephant, and that the people have suspended their usual annoyance against him only because the elephant has transiently assumed his place as the object of their invidious animation. Disappointing the crowd would cancel the suspension of its ire against him, with the potential result of a lynching. (In the midst of a mob, with no hostile witnesses, the urge to gain revenge on one of the foreign masters would be hard to restrain.) When the narrator sees the "sea of yellow faces" concentrating on him and feels "two thousand wills pressing [him] forward," he understands that he will "have to shoot the elephant."

This scene resembles certain other scenes central to the Western tradition, specifically to the Judaeo-Christian strain of that tradition, which Orwell has earlier evoked by describing the trampled Dravidian as "crucified." Pilate does not want to execute Jesus, but the crowd does, and Pilate bows to the will of the crowd. Captain Vere, in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd,* does not want to execute Billy, but must bow to the imagined pressure of British naval law and carry out the death sentence which the situation technically, if not morally, demands. Human beings are imitative creatures— this is their glory and their damnation—who follow the examples set, often quite accidentally, by

others, or by tradition accepted without criticism. Orwell's narrator can no more resist the crowd than Pilate can; he can no more resist the tradition of lynching than Captain Vere can. "A sahib has got to act like a sahib." But the narrator knows that, in this case, he is not a "sahib," a foreign overlord; he is, rather, "an absurd puppet" assimilated to the crowd against his will, imitating its convergent desire— that the elephant should die — without the power to resist. To spare the creature would be "impossible," as "the crowd would laugh at me." Orwell has already exhibited the sinister conjunction of mocking laughter and scapegoating violence. It is no coincidence, then, that *hooting* and *shooting* should turn out to be stages in the same escalation, like *laughter* and *slaughter..*

Should he merely test the elephant to confirm his sense that it has passed its "must" and is now in a peaceable mood, and should the elephant against his expectation charge him, "those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill." Whereupon he, too, would be humiliated and crucified.

The narrator now becomes the designated executioner on behalf of the crowd. When he pulls the trigger, the crowd's vocal approval, earlier a mere "aimless" *Schadenfreude,* now becomes a single "devilish roar of glee." A parallel incident from the literary tradition might be the cry of *"Hic est nostri contemptor!"* or "There is the one who mocks us!" uttered by the Bacchantes just before they converge on, murder, and dismember Orpheus, who has trespassed into their territory. The "devilish roar of glee" is the lynching cry. As for the victim of this paradigmatic victimary scene, the poor elephant, in death he becomes more human than ever: "He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old . . . he sagged flabbily to his knees . . . You could see the agony of it jolt his body." Not yet dead —"he was dying very slowly and in great agony" —the elephant lies in a panting mound, his breath "very rhythmical with long rattling gasps." The narrator tries to end the creature's suffering with his sport rifle (having used all of his elephant cartridges), but to no avail. "I could not stand it any longer and went away."

To complete the sacrificial ritual which this crowd-scene comprises, the narrator records how the crowd were closing in on the moribund beast "bringing dahs and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon." As in the murder of Orpheus, the scene concludes with a *sparagmos,* the frenzied dismemberment and consumption of the victim.

"Shooting an Elephant" depicts a cycle of resentment and violence, in part obvious, in part subtle. Obvious is the fact that, in oppressing the Burmese, the British incur their righteous wrath. Orwell spares little in his picture of the imperial order. A colonial policeman sees "the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who have been flogged with bamboos." The Empire has "clamped down . . . upon the will of prostrate peoples." A humiliated people understandably hates its *contemptor* and seeks the means to return the disfavor of conquest; absent a direct means, indirect means must suffice, as when the anger that the crowd feels towards the narrator as an agent of empire gets deflected to the

elephant. But is Orwell condoning the crowd's behavior, or his own, pressured by the crowd?

No, no more than he condones the British Empire's behavior in its Asian dominions, or his own behavior in the service of the Empire. If the British presence, enforcing itself by violence against the Burmese, is unjust, violating the intuitive rules of universal humanity, then the Burmese persecution of individual Europeans is no less unjust according to the same criterion. The most that one can say in mitigation of Burmese cruelty is that it is a response to British cruelty, but cruelty is never, under any circumstances, just. Justice consists in the opposite of imitative violence: It consists in restraint, consideration, compassion, and tolerance, none of which is exhibited by either side in the British-Burmese conflict.

The key to the moral content of "Shooting an Elephant" lies in a chain of identifications made by the narrator, beginning with his identification of the trampled Dravidian with the victim of the crucifix-ion. The dead man is truly an innocent victim whom the elephant, in his rogue career, has charged and trampled; he has humiliated the man in the root-sense of the word by grinding him into the *humus* or mud. It is a senseless, undeserved death. When the narrator pulls the trigger, the elephant collapses into the mud, making the image of him congruent with the image of the dead Dravidian. Overcome by the wounded animal's suffering, the narrator identifies, empathizes, with it, and having authored the creature's misery, he tries to end it. All of these identifications (Dravidian with Jesus, elephant with Dravidian, narrator with elephant) come together with an earlier image, that of the humiliated Burmese in the Imperial jail, the "prostrate peoples" victimized by Empire. Readers should not forget that the narrator, too, has been humiliated, tripped up on the soccer-field and made the focus of cackling scorn. No group in "Shooting an Elephant" holds the monopoly on victimhood; every group is capable of persecution.

This is to say that all groups are human and prove their humanity by displaying the same propensity to focus their "aimless" resentment by imitating such actions of others as tend (perhaps quite accidentally, perhaps by a prior meditation) to designate a victim, whereupon, unconstrained by effective (i.e., moral) order, they converge on the victim and immolate him. The narrator's disgust is thus not simply with an unjust British Empire, but with "the younger empires that are going to supplant it," a calculatedly ambiguous phrase which suggests that humanity will remain perennially liable to its own basest motives, empire succeeding empire, world without end. The only exit from this eternal cycle of resentment and violence, followed by counter-resentment and counter-violence, is a type of consciousness which can turn its back on the fascination of such things and assimilate the knowledge about what human beings are, at base, and how their worst proclivities might be curbed. Signifi-cantly, in introducing his story, the narrator says that, before he killed the elephant, he "could get nothing into perspective." Afterwards, he understands that his own vanity caused his assimilation to the crowd and made him the instrument of its blood-lust. "I had done it," he says, "solely to avoid looking a fool." He has crossed from the unconsciousness of being the puppet of a spontaneous collective killing to the consciousness of his own vulnerability to senseless

imitation and participation mystique. One does not achieve such consciousness without an accompanying guilt.

Source: Thomas Bertonneau, for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Marks discusses Or-well's literary reputation and discusses "Shooting an Elephant" as an example of "eye-witness" literature, in which Orwell, as narrator and witness, should be considered unreliable.

The resilient myth of George Orwell as a blunt, contentious, but fundamentally honest writer draws much of its force from Orwell's position as an eyewitness to crucial events or significant situations. Whether as down-and-outer in London, imperial policeman in Burma, militia man in Spain, or investigative reporter in northern England, Orwell had seen for himself many of the things he would later describe. This fact, coupled with a spare prose style— a style too readily accepted as guileless—gave to much of Orwell's writing the quality of reality, faithfully captured. Modern critical debate, however, has called into question the capacity of the author to depict reality, objectively or otherwise; the terms themselves— 'author', 'depiction', 'reality' and 'objectivity', are viewed with varying degrees of scepticism. The role and status of the eyewitness, the 'I' in literature, are under scrutiny.

This has always been true in the proper arena for the eye-witness, the court of law. In court, the eyewitness is not to be trusted. Or, at very least, not to be trusted completely, or immediately. Although the claim to have seen an event, to be in possession of evidence, suggests a grasp of reality, the inherent subjectivity of the first-hand account is manifest. In a court of law the eye-witness is liable to rigorous questioning. Both the bona fides, the 'character', of the eye-witness, and the validity of the account itself must be established. And there is always the threat of other evidence, other eye-witnesses.

In literature the situation is different. Since the narrator, the 'I' of the work, exists only as words on paper, the establishing of the 'character' of the eyewitness must itself be confined to the text. More importantly, all the 'evidence' presented has been selected and arranged by the author with a particular verdict in mind. The trial, it would seem, is rigged. Yet, in terms of the courtroom analogy, the reader operates as a jury, weighing evidence, accepting and rejecting as seems fit. Literature fundamentally differs from law in that, potentially, there are as many verdicts as there are readers.

The role and status of the eye-witness have a particular relevance for Orwell criticism. A recurring element in analyses of his work is the conflation of the writer and his writings. Bernard Crick has noted 'astonishing agreement . . . that [Orwell's] work can only be understood by characterizing the man'. The confusion of writer and writings is heightened in those works purporting to give first-hand accounts of events or situations. Is the narrator of such pieces, the 'I' from whose viewpoint the narrative unfolds, to be taken as Orwell? If so, what effect might this have on any interpretation of the 'evidence' put forward? This problem is especially important in Orwell's case, for he is one of those intriguing writers able to draw vilification or praise from either political wing. To compound these difficulties, before the publication of *Animal Farm* in 1945, only five years before his death, Orwell was a well-considered but relatively minor writer. The received Orwell is a multifaceted, and in many ways posthumous, creation.

Nevertheless, the problem of disentangling Orwell from his work remains; the writer may be 'dead', in Barthes' terms, but is still capable of haunting the text. Examining two short, early pieces by Orwell allows for the consideration of these questions and problems.

'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant' occupy the ambiguous space at the intersection of fiction and non-fiction. Both can operate successfully as fictional short stories. Nevertheless, in the index to *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell,* both are categorized as 'non-literary' events in Orwell's life; 'shoots an elephant' and 'participates in hanging' are given equivalent status with 'street fighting in Barcelona' and the rather less momentous 'buys chessmen and mends a fuse'. There is no corroborating evidence that these events occurred, the respective index references pointing solely to these works. Clearly, the editors of the collection accept Orwell's role in these events, and consequently consider 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant' to be first-hand accounts. Analysis of each piece questions this simplistic assumption. Orwell uses the perspective and persona of the eyewitness, the 'I', as a rhetorical device, both for structural and ideological purposes. . . .

If the narrator in 'A Hanging' is primarily a spectator, that of 'Shooting an Elephant' is the focal point. Though, again, a middle-ranking imperial official, the narrator of the second piece is a far more complex character and central to the situation he describes. 'Shooting an Elephant' begins: 'In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people— the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me'. He is the target of physical and verbal abuse for the native population. A pivotal opposition, between individual and group, is established immediately, one that will reverberate through the narrative. The narrator's position is complicated by the fact that he is antagonistic to the system he ostensibly represents: 'Theoretically— and secretly, of course— I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British'. Further oppositions are established, between British and Burmese, colonizer and colonized, the powerful and the powerless. Yet while the narrator's relationship to the group, the large numbers who hate him, is clear, he stands in an ambiguous position as regards the other divisions; he is an anti-British Briton, an anti-Empire imperialist, and a figure of power put upon by those he has nominal power over.

The complexity of both situation and character is heightened by the fact that the narrator's condemnation of imperialism is equivocal. He states that he 'did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it'. The confused sense of time is important. The narrator confesses not to have known of something happening at the time of writing (that the British Empire *is* dying) or of something that will happen in the future (that the empires *that are going* to supplant it will be worse). In the latter case he has no logical way of knowing how the (unspecified) younger empires will operate. This confusion nevertheless strongly suggests that while all empires are evil, some are more evil than others.

The narrator's apparent inconsistencies threaten his role as a credible eye-witness. His 'character' is in doubt. This problem is overcome in paradoxical fashion by the self-

revelation of racist and sadistic leanings. The narrator portrays the native population as laughing 'hideously', of possessing 'sneering little yellow faces', of being 'evil-spirited little beasts'. With one part of his mind he recognizes the British Raj as a tyranny, but with another part the narrator confesses 'that the greatest joy in the world would be normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you catch him off duty'. This shocking revelation functions in two ways. Acknowledgement of the brutalizing effect of imperialism on its own functionaries reinforces the attack on the system. More subtly, however, the narrator is shown to be acutely self-aware and disarmingly honest about his prejudices. The reader's trust in the 'character' of the narrator, with the consequent willingness to accept the perspective presented, is achieved by the revelation of alarming tendencies.

The construction of a self-revelatory narrator is a preamble to the central narrative, the shooting itself. Called upon as the local representative of imperial power, to put down what supposedly is a rampaging elephant, the narrator, on sighting the animal, recognizes that in the interim it has become harmless. Yet the huge crowd of Burmese that have followed him force the narrator to a moment of crisis:

I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had to do it . . . I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys... .

The narrator's function as the personification of imperialism is seen clearly in the revelatory claim that 'when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys'. This appears to indict imperialism, to provide an index of its dehumanizing impact. The stunningly myopic statement in fact blatantly ignores the effect of imperialism on the local population. Emphasis on, and a consequent empathy with, the white man's loss of freedom leaves that of the Burmese unconsidered. This one sidedness is founded on the opposition of individual and group. The narrator, the solitary, vulnerable individual, is exposed as essentially powerless. In contrast, the Burmese are viewed as a largely undifferentiated, depersonalized, mass. Their very amorphousness suggests an ability to resist imposed pressures, to survive the impact of imperialism. The concentration on the narrator's individual crisis undermines a thorough-going critique of imperialism.

The eye-witness perspective would seem to imply an exploration of the self by the narrator, and to an extent this occurs in both 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant'. In neither case, however, is self-definition or self-examination of prime importance. Instead, what analysis of both pieces foregrounds is the ideological and structural functions of the eye-witness, and the degree to which these two elements interact. The narrator, by defining and validating certain groups in 'A Hanging', and by remaining largely ill-defined, universalizes the attack upon capital punishment. Yet, consequently, this diverts attention from the realities of imperialism. In 'Shooting an Elephant', the juxtaposition of impotent individual and powerful, amorphous mass, functions to the same purpose. . . .

Orwell's use of the persona of the eye-witness, then, has importance both in terms of the narrative and ideology. At the same time it seems clear that it is unnecessary to situate Orwell within either piece to validate interpretation. An understanding of the symbolic importance of the dog, and its role in the construction of the narrative of 'A Hanging', leads to the reconsideration of the narrator as himself a narrative component, rather than a narrative constructor. The invocation of Orwell as narrator is superfluous to an understanding of that tale. The same is true in 'Shooting an Elephant'. In terms of an eye-witness account it suffers from the fact that it was written at least eight years after Orwell had left Burma. His 'evidence' would hardly be credible in a court of law, nor can it be more so in a purported eye-witness prose work. Orwell considered writing the piece only after a request for contributions to John Lehmann's periodical, *New Writing.* Without this prompt it might never have been written. Despite Orwell's avowed hatred of imperialism, it is an ideological position complicated by the fact that 'Orwell' — as a narrative construct— does not speak with the vehemence of the recent exposure to events that characterize and invigorate *The Road To Wigan Pier* or *Homage To Catalonia,* which were to appear within two years of the publication of 'Shooting an Elephant'.

Mention of these later works invites a parting shot at the Orwell myth. Orwell is far too readily accepted in holistic terms, as a unified and consistent writer. His prose style is partly to blame, suggesting by its apparent simplicity a clear, coherent vision. And the various hagiographic characterizations of the man tend to draw attention away from his writings. These, in turn, are often read 'backwards', interpretations of Orwell's later and more famous works, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* being taken as keys to all Orwell's work. The examination of texts like 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant', however, suggests a more complex picture of a writer sometimes sure-footed, sometimes stumbling in his efforts to accommodate the demands of politics and literature. Moreover, by allowing the 'eye-witness' to recoil upon itself as a textual component, the boundaries between language and reference, fiction and auto-biography, become problematic. This is especially true of those early works like 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant',, written before Orwell (or even Blair) had become what we now accept as 'Orwell'.

Source: Peter Marks, "The Ideological Eye-witness: An Examination of the Eye-witness in Two Works by George Orwell," in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day,* edited by Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell, Pinter Publishers, 1991, pp. 85-92.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Stewart compares Orwell to another Indian-born English writer, Rudyard Kipling. Both wrote essays on killing elephants, though Kipling used more humor in his account. In contrast, Orwell often took himself too seriously, according to Stewart, and thereby jeopardized his credibility.

Malcolm Muggeridge called attention to the affinity between Orwell and Kipling: "When I used sometimes to say to Orwell that he and Kipling had a great deal in common, he would laugh that curious rusty laugh of his and change the subject. When Kipling died in 1936, Orwell wanted to offer some kind of tribute— a salute of guns, if such a thing were available— to the story teller who was so important in my youth."

Similarities and differences are so numerous that one requires a specific point of departure to avoid bare catalogues. My point of departure is a coincidence: both Kipling and Orwell described the shooting of an elephant. Kipling's story, "The Killing of *Hatim Tai,*" is a trifle. He wrote it for *The Civil and Military Gazette,* Lahore (May 12, 1888), and signed it "Din," perhaps signaling that it was not his own but borrowed from a story printed sixty years earlier in Hone's *Every-Day Book* (March 9, 1826). It is interesting first because of the accidental connection with Orwell, and second because it is always printed (certainly in any edition that Orwell possibly read) immediately after a series of six brief stories about one Smith Sahib, whose management of his household compound symbolizes British rule of India. All of the stories are humorous, but they relate a sequence of misadventures analogous to the one monumental misadventure of Orwell's story....

"The Killing of *Hatim Tai"* tells of an elephant in *musth* (rut) who has killed his *mahout* and misbehaved generally. Awkward to execute because of his size, he is turned over to three doctors who give him arsenic, strychnine, opium and then an assortment of other lethal concoctions. In pain, he struggles against his fetters but finally seems unfazed. At day's end, a young subaltern, contemptuous of the bungling doctors, kills him with one perfectly placed shot.

There is no evidence that Kipling witnessed such a killing, but he knew William Hone's account of a caged elephant's destruction at Exeter Change, London, in March, 1826. When arsenic failed and the animal threatened to smash his pen, keepers fired over 120 rifle rounds at a range of twelve feet and stabbed him with spears and a sword before he died. It is a gruesome story, the more so because Hone expresses little sympathy for the animal but great concern for endangered property; and he concludes that within a day "the menagerie was destitute of offensive smell, and, in every respect, preserved its usual appearance of order and cleanliness."

It is unclear from Bernard Crick's biography whether Orwell personally shot or witnessed the shooting of an elephant. His account of the incident is stunning both because of his style and because it occurs within the intensely moral context of its narrator's quest for virtue. The story radiates the moral earnestness that is thought to be an indispensable

ingredient in serious English writing. Explicit as he is about the divided loyalties and moral ambiguities of his position, the narrator establishes an unwarranted personal superiority— unwarranted because it depends on paranoid assumptions that all "natives" loathe white men and that all white men are (or should be) guilt-stricken for imperial sin. Like other white men managing an empire, "he wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it"; but unlike other whites, the narrator sees behind both mask and face and is sickened by the aggression he finds there.

The major difference between Orwell's and Kipling's stories is that Orwell is humorless. He seems to say, "one dare not laugh about such dirty business." But Kipling does laugh. His narrator, perhaps semi-autobiographical, is amusing. The pomposity and arrogance that the mask imposes and that Orwell deplores become comical in Kipling. Smith's opening statement reveals this fully:

How does a King feel when he has kept peace in his borders by skillfully playing off people, sect against sect, and kin against kin? Does he go out into the back verandah, take off his teraicrown, and rub his hands softly, chuckling the while— as I do now? Does he pat himself on the back and hum merry little tunes as he walks up and down his garden? A man who takes no delight in ruling men— dozens of them— is no man. Behold! India has been squabbling over the Great Cow Question any time these four hundred years, to the certain knowledge of history and successive governments. I, Smith, have settled it. That is all!

He is a silly fellow, the epitome of Orwell's masked white. Does he deserve to be laughed at by the natives? He does indeed. They laugh at him, and so does the reader. But Orwell's poor narrator, as full of rectitude and outrage as a young missionary from Indiana, cannot abide the thought of being laughed at because he cannot imagine laughing at himself.

If it is true that "Shooting an Elephant" was written or drafted while Orwell worked on *Burmese Days* (1934), perhaps even as an episode in the novel, then the lack of authorial detachment is easily explained. The novel's hero, Flory, with a large blue birthmark blemishing half his face, kills himself in part because he and Orwell refuse to laugh at a world populated by stereotypes. Kipling, on the other hand, often saw life as a Punch and Judy show full of clownish administrators, shrewd women and cocky subalterns, all dancing their way to oblivion but accomplishing more good than evil insofar as they behaved responsibly toward other people.

Orwell shared with Hone a certain righteous detachment which enables them to tell stories of incompetence complacently. To be sure, Hone's concern is the commercial interest of the menagerie owner, while Orwell sympathizes with colonial "natives" and condones his schlemiel narrator. Kipling never spares incompetence. He scorns it because it is a fault that hard work, intelligence and discipline can correct. Stupidity can be pitied. Incompetence cannot. At times, Kipling became enamored of a Wellsian "technological elite," the kind of managerial class that Shaw pilloried in *Man and Superman,* but often the poet and humorist in him countered this mistake. Thirty-eight years his junior, Orwell knew better than to trust engineers, especially engineers of the

soul. But then he slips in the opposite direction, embracing the contumacious boy from St. Cyprian's and Eton— the Eric Blair whom George Orwell never entirely overcame.

By 1942 when he wrote an article on Kipling, Orwell had partially outgrown his lopsided vision, and the article contains a remark that sheds light on both authors. He says we derive a "shameful pleasure" from Kipling because we have the "sense of being seduced by something spurious." If this is true of Kipling, it is no less true of Orwell because he deliberately misrepresents and falsifies his own experience. *Homage to Catalonia* (1937) may be an exception, but in his "documentary tales" about his school days, experiences in Burma, or vagabonding in the slums, his preoccupation with "higher" political and ideological truth often betrays him. When he sets up as a "civilized" person looking down on vulgar Kipling (as well as "the pansy Left"); when he uses the word "civilized" five times in a brief essay, always to Kipling's disadvantage, one may conclude that he protests too much—and that he violates his own injunctions in "Politics and the English Language" (1946).

Orwell seems not to have learned at Eton what Kipling learned at Westward Ho! where the headmaster, Cormell Price, "always told us that there was not much justice in the world, and that we had better accustom ourselves to the lack of it early" ("An English School," 1893).

Orwell accepted the grand twentieth-century delusion that capitalist imperialism and class conflict produce injustice, when in fact they are only modern expressions of an eternal problem. Kipling would no doubt have accepted Plato's idea that justice is the product of temperance, courage and wisdom, which occur together randomly, rarely and briefly — on occasion even in the Raj, as Kipling witnessed or imagined it. Smith's administration, however clumsy and ludicrous, is just— which may explain why India and Burma have retained British administrative forms.

Possibly one needs to have bungled killing a large animal to appreciate Orwell's perfect description of the elephant at the moment of the bullet's impact, "suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old." He might have added the grisly detail of the dust cloud that accompanies a bullet's impact. What Orwell does not explain is the wave of guilt that comes with bad shooting, the sense of inflicting pain through incompetence. His narrator had the right tools but did not know how to use them. This is partly what caused his discomfiture, in addition to his awareness of playing a marginal role in imperial administration.

His efforts to befriend the "common man" notwithstanding, Orwell identified with the intelligentsia. It is improbable that he understood the article of Kipling's creed that unites him permanently with people outside the intelligentsia: a writer "must recognize the gulf that separates even the least of those who do things worthy to be written about from even the best of those who have written things worthy of being talked about" ("Literature," 1906). That opinion sets Kipling apart from post-Romantic idolators of artists and intellectuals generally, but it puts him in the company of bards since Homer. It also led him to respect expert craftsmen of any trade or profession. He knew that everything in the world breaks sooner or later and that expert repairmen keep things

running better than amateurs do. It vexed him that societies, the human equivalent to nature's order, are usually managed by amateurs whose competence rarely matches their responsibilities. The incongruity creates humor as well as grief, and Kipling registers both while Orwell misses the fun. Together with most English writers of the twentieth century, he could have learned more from Kipling than he did.

Like cattle breaking down the fence into a green pasture, people have a lark when they break out of history's routine and go conquesting. The brave ones are willing to pay a high price for it— as both Kipling and Orwell learned, but Kipling at a younger age. Perhaps everyone dreams of crusading

with Alexander the Great, fewer with Napoleon or Lenin or Hitler. Some marched for Franco; some against him. Whether for fraud, as Orwell believed, or glory, as Kipling hoped, the British empire was one of the most successful larks in history. On balance, it provided more pleasure and less pain to more people than any comparable adventure— even in the Raj. Certainly, as Orwell claimed, the British empire was a "great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it."

Might we infer that Kipling's lighthearted portraits of the vain administrator and decisive subaltern provide more serviceable models for decent behavior than Orwell's solemn portraits of "civilized" reformers? Say what we will, it is the dutiful expert who manages and repairs everything, whatever the ruling political or ideological form.

It is not necessary to conclude, on the basis of a comparison between the two men, that one is praiseworthy, the other not. Their respect for the integrity of their calling as writers finally makes them equal and enables both to transcend the limits of politics, to perfect styles of writing comparably succinct and vivid, and to create visions of modernity that are complementary. Nor may we dismiss this as a case of overlapping between ultra-Right and -Left. Theirs is the voice of free individuals sounding the alarm at the advent of the Massman, the Group-Thinker, the apotheosized Liar. By 1947, a mature Orwell said emphatically in "Why I Write" that the novel "is a product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual"; it is written "by people who are *not frightened.*" Kipling insisted that only the "masterless man" could convert deeds into words that "became alive and walked up and down in the hearts of all his hearers." Both writers knew that the magic is in the words, not the man. This is why they agree that the writer, as Orwell put it, "struggles constantly to efface one's own personality," so that the "demon" that drives him can find expression. Kipling had to "drift, wait, obey" when his "Daemon" possessed him.

The voice of the "demon" is a bond that unites people of good will throughout history because it is the voice of each person proclaiming a unique identity within the social mass, however defined. Republic— empire; socialist— capitalist; despotic— democratic: whatever the name for mass-life, all forms threaten "the masterless man with the magic words." Because they assented to this, Kip-ling's and Orwell's political differences finally seem unimportant. To be sure, fanatics of the Right and Left will conclude that the two men are "unreliable," perhaps traitors to the Cause with which each identified. A wiser interpretation suggests that art, even in our partisan times,

reaches beyond the relativity of each moment and invites judgment by the eternal standard of good sense.

Source: D. H. Stewart, "Shooting Elephants Right," in *The Southern Review,* Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter, 1986, pp. 86-92.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Keskinen examines Or-well's style and structure in "Shooting an Elephant," which he states is an exemplary and effective essay.

As teachers of writing, we are concerned with teaching our students how to communicate thoughts and feelings clearly, effectively, and responsibly. Naturally we feel most comfortable and competent in teaching expository writing in which such matters as organization and paragraph development seem to be most apparent, and therefore most teachable. Furthermore, we find our best teaching models in expository essays that have a recognizable structure and a discernible progression of ideas. But we ask more than easy-to-outline mechanical exposition in our models; we want more than physics reports or journalism. We want the vivifying touch of the creative writer whose imagination is at work in matters of selection and structure, of style, and tone.

George Orwell is such a writer. His essays are such models, worth study and imitation. Not only is he a competent and creative writer, but he is, as well, a man who has much to say about the world around him— our world. Specifically, I should like to consider in this paper one of the better essays of our time, "Shooting an Elephant." It is perhaps Orwell's finest essay. For those readers, unfamiliar with Orwell, or only familiar with *1984* or *Animal Farm,* it should serve as an introduction to his other essays. Indeed, all the writings of Orwell deserve the thoughtful attention of the modern reader. . . .

Orwell's essay defies any easy classification. Is it an essay? If so, what "type"? We agree, first of all, that it fits the definition of an essay: it is the conscious attempt of a writer to share his thoughts, feelings, and impressions with his reader on a subject that can be satisfactorily considered in a limited space. What type? We try to distinguish— too often and too mechanically perhaps— between types of writing: the expository, the argumentative, the descriptive, the narrative, and the impressionistic. Which of these types of writing is "Shooting an Elephant" ? It is all of these. Basically, it is an expository essay— an essay to explain. But, as are most essays, either explicitly or implicitly, it is an "argumentative" essay. After all, Orwell wants to persuade us of something; he wants us to adopt his point of view, accept his conclusions. It is a descriptive essay insofar as descriptive detail supports the argument. It is narrative, for it recounts an incident. It is impressionistic, for Orwell's creative mind is at work with the selection and presentation of vivid detail— those images that will have a powerful effect on the feelings of the reader. This essay, then, is no mechanical type— or combination of types—but a dynamically developed relationship between idea and feeling and words. . . .

In structure, tone, selection . . . word choice—all those matters we unfortunately tend to lump under the one word *style*— in all these the essay reveals a powerful talent combined with imagination and insight.

Let us consider now, in some detail, the entire essay, from the "details out" — from the use of words to the structure of the sentences and paragraphs and of the essay as a

whole, ending with a brief look at the essay as a relevant and significant statement of our time. . . .

We are struck immediately by the urgent, even emotional tone of the opening of the essay. The emotionally charged words reflect the intensity of Orwell's feelings, such expressions as "sneering" and "hideous laughter." In the second paragraph he uses "guilt," "hatred," and "evil-spirited little beasts." These words, along with his use of the personal pronouns, make us aware that here is a writer who is personally and deeply concerned, a writer whose concern gives immediacy and power to his account. This is evident from the very first sentence in which he states that ". . .I was hated by large numbers of people. . . ." Indeed, most of Orwell's essays begin with such compelling sentences; consider the following opening sentences from several other essays:

From "Such, Such Were the Joys . . . ."

Soon after I arrived at Crossgates (not immediately, but after a week or two, just when I seemed to be settling into the routine of school life) I began wetting my bed.

From "Marrakech"

As the corpse went past the flies left the restaurant table in a cloud and rushed after it, but they came back a few minutes later.

From "England Your England"

As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.

The intensely personal responses and attitudes, however, are not the rantings of an overwrought author. They are given substance and support— and proof— by the descriptive details, the images that prove that the writer is someone "who was there," who saw and heard and felt.

A useful device to show the effective use of images is to re-write any one of the many vivid and concrete sentences in more abstract terms. For example, sentence three of paragraph one might be rewritten thus: "No one had the courage to cause trouble, but if a European woman went out alone, she would probably be insulted." Compare it to the original:

No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress.

For those of us teachers whose perennial plea to students is "Support your generalizations," Or-well's essay is an admirable example of how it should be done. Orwell knows the power of descriptive detail, the observable evidence that gives his account its validity. Consider these sentences from later paragraphs:

The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long.

He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

When the straight, factual description cannot adequately convey the impression, Orwell looks for an effective comparison. The figure of speech for Orwell, as it should be for all writers, is not merely decorative or clever— it serves a vital descriptive function.

The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit.

I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have.

His mouth was open— I could see down into caverns of pale pink throat.

The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet.

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats.

Through the comparisons we have clearer pictures. However, the figures of speech also convey other feelings and suggest other relationships. Through the first four examples above, we sense Orwell's own sensitivity— in contrast to that of the Burmese— toward the killing of the elephant. It is no dumb beast; it is made not only human, but regal. The last example gives us the expectant quality of the theater— strengthening the irony in the essay, the irony of circumstance in which the white "leader" must "play a part," and must soon become a "puppet," a "hollow, posing dummy."

Some of the purists among us would find objection, in some instances, to Orwell's use of words. There are such phrases as "pack of lies," "had the guts," "got on my nerves," and "took to his heels." Indeed, were we to find them on student papers, we would put "tr" in the margin and ask the student to find a "fresh original image" for the trite one. Similarly, some of us might question Orwell's use of colloquialisms, such as "guts," "chucked up," and "dirty work." However, in the sweep of Orwell's narrative, they go unnoticed, for they are consistent with the direct, personal tone that gives the essay its immediacy. Here is a man who has something to say, writing directly and vividly, concerned more with communication than with English teachers with red pencils.

The use of words, then, is unpretentious, yet powerful. The simplicity of language makes for forceful, immediate communication of thoughts and feelings. The simple but effective vocabulary is reinforced with figures of speech that give us — who find such

Burmese experiences remote — a means to experience Orwell's sensations through images familiar to us.

It might be useful to present Orwell's own "rules" on the use of words as presented in his essay, "Politics and the English Language":

(i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

(ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.

(iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

(iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.

(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday Eng-lish equivalent.

(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Like his choice of words, the structure of Or-well's sentences is natural and vigorous, reflecting a writer whose thoughts and feelings find their expression in the rhythms of the English language. The sentences vary in length and complexity. The sentences are from three to 52 words long, but most sentences are between 20 and 30 words long. Short sentences reflect the rapid movement of the narrative or the crisp quality of Orwell's thinking. A few examples will illustrate: "I had halted on the road." "But I did not want to shoot the elephant." "I got up." "All this was perplexing and upsetting." Longer sentences develop or contrast ideas. When a sentence is complex, it is so because the clear working out of the relationship of ideas requires that it be.

Structure and rhythm also reinforce the effectiveness of many sentences. Consider, for example, this sentence from paragraph 11, showing the impact of the first shot on the elephant: "He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down." The comma pauses after the predicate adjectives are not simply conventions of the mechanics of writing; they reflect the physical condition of the elephant —the physiological jerks of a being that senses its mortal agony, a being that then slowly begins to feel the vitality slipping away; and this "slipping away" is suggested by the run-on quality of the concluding dependent clause of the sentence. Here, as in the entire essay, sentence structure— or perhaps we should say sentence rhythm— enhances meaning and feeling.

Paragraph 11, from which the quoted sentence is taken, follows now in its entirety, to illustrate the relationship between sentence structure and rhythm of meaning.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick— one never does when a shot goes home— but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In

that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time— it might have been five seconds, I dare say —he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skywards like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

The paragraph is narrative, and it recounts the shooting and falling of the elephant. In the opening sentence we read that the first shot is fired. The collapse of the beast is described in the last sentence. In between, we have the description of the slow, ponderous, terrible dying of a magnificent beast. The beast— like an empire (and we must never forget this essential metaphor)— is slow to die. The paragraph has its own climax; the tension is developed and heightened as we wait for the elephant to die; we feel the terribleness of his death. The action, deliberate and detailed, is dramatically interrupted with short sentences: "I fired again in the same spot." "I fired a third time."

Just as the sentences and paragraphs have their own appropriate structure and rhythm, so too the essay as a whole has a natural and logical structure. In studying the structure of an essay, we often talk of the "order of support," with facts supporting an assertion which, in turn, supports a more abstract statement which, in its turn, helps substantiate the general thesis of the paper. This "order" we perceive most often in argumentative essays. We talk too of the "order of climax" in narrative writing in which the tension of the essential conflict is heightened until it is resolved at the climax of the action....

The paragraphs are in themselves well-structured, organized "units" in the larger narrative. Each paragraph has a well-supported topic sentence, and each topic sentence clearly advances the narrative. A useful device here, in giving students an idea of the overall structure, is to ask them to find and write down all topic sentences. It is not a difficult task. Furthermore, they will see that the entire narrative can be effectively summarized in 17 sentences from the text. Thirteen of them can be clearly labeled "topic sentences," and 12 of them are opening sentences in paragraphs.

In the beginning, as we have seen, Orwell uses action and detail to get and maintain interest. After two introductory paragraphs, the action of the narrative begins; and from this point, the essay is sustained narrative with relevant descriptive detail with only one significant break in the "rising action." This break occurs just before the climax, just before the actual shooting of the elephant when the reader's attention is securely held. At this point, about two-thirds of the way through the narrative, the narrator's inner conflict and its resolution bring about his most meaningful reflection on the position of

the white man in the East, and of an individual man trying to maintain his dignity. After this reflection, the actual shooting of the elephant has even more significance; and the reader returns to the narrative not only for the "story," but with the full realization of what the shooting "means," both for Orwell and for all men who are concerned with the conflicts between man and man and between man and himself. It is indeed a significant reflection, and it comes at precisely the right moment in the essay.

In a sense, there are really two "conflicts" in the essay that develop their tensions simultaneously. One is Orwell's inner conflict, of which we are aware from the essay's opening sentence. The other is the outer conflict represented in the action which we become aware of when the wild elephant is reported. Both conflicts can be stated as questions: for the inner conflict it is, "Why must I shoot the elephant?" For the outer, it is, "When will Orwell shoot the elephant and what will happen when he does?" Through the inner conflict we experience Orwell's dilemma as our own. With the outer conflict, however, we are removed, watching the action. The elements of catharsis— terror and pity, empathy and aloofness— are here. The resolution of the inner conflict, of course, leads inevitably to the resolution of the action. The shooting that follows is simply the manifestation of Orwell's state of mind. The internal conflict, in other words, brings on his "epiphany," which is, after all, the important matter. Structurally, the important thing to note is that the climaxes occur where they should— near the end of the story.

The elephant is shot. The dead beast is stripped of its hide and flesh. Other British officials and Indians have a bit to say "afterwards." But the tension has been released, and the narrative must end quickly, as it does. The essay, then, is a skillful creative interweaving of commentary and interesting detail, of developing tensions and releases, and of swift-moving narrative. The structure of the essay reveals the hand and mind of a master storyteller and teacher.

What, after all, does the essay say? We have seen that it is the work of an intelligent and honest man who comments on his experiences with unpretentious candor. He is, to be sure, a worthy model for all writers. We can also try to look at our world as clearly and directly as Orwell does, and, in writing about it, we can let our words serve their primary function— to communicate our thoughts and feelings as exactly and simply as possible. We have seen that this essay is an example of organized, vivid, and effective communication. But what does it "communicate"?

We are aware today of the political and human dilemmas that confront man everywhere, from Africa and Viet Nam to Mississippi. Colonialism, like the great elephant with its royal blood, "like velvet," is dying. Trusteeships are created. Individuals seize power. Political structures are made, altered, replaced. The nature of the world situation indeed demands consideration of man as a political being, for through political activity he can find the means to self-expression; there are natural and civil rights to be achieved. However, it is not simply that the British, the Belgian, the Yankee should "go home;" but those who help and lead, those who are helped and led, must recognize the individual human being, with feelings and dignity, as well as the political being seeking civil rights. What can happen to the human being in the structured society is important to Orwell, whether the society is benevolent imperialism, a republic, a democracy, or the tight

caste system of an English public school. Orwell's own abhorrence of the "unfree" society that does not let the individual be his human "off-duty" self is present in "Shooting an Elephant." It is an abhorrence that would lead to his denunciation of communism in his best-known works, *1984* and *Animal Farm.* Orwell seems always to be asking basic questions: How free can man be? What are the masks— in the name of progress, of tradition, of duty, of civilization, or of the *status quo* □ that men try to wear as they deal with other men? Ultimately, Orwell decries the wearing of any mask that keeps us from recognizing that there are human needs, human strengths, human failings and feelings that we all share "off duty" in a world where the white and colored, the Negro, the African, and the Burmese are not political entities but human beings.

Source: Kenneth Keskinen, "'Shooting an Elephant' — An Essay to Teach," in *English Journal,* Vol. 55, No. 6, September, 1966, pp. 669-75

Topics for Further Study

The theme of sacrifice in "Shooting an Elephant" is also evident in Orwell's essay "A Hanging." Read "A Hanging" and compare it with "Shooting an Elephant." What elements do the two pieces have in common? What fundamental human traits do they explore?

The narrator of "Shooting an Elephant" is an agent of the British Empire and is thus implicated in the "dirty business" of British imperial affairs. He is also a man of conscience. Discuss the narrator's guilt. To what extent should he be condemned for participating in the shooting of the elephant? To what extent should he be vindicated for identifying the intricacies of the situation?

Despite being an agent of the British Empire, the narrator of "Shooting an Elephant" deplores his role in the business of imperial colonization. Contrast this attitude with that of the character of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* Is it possibly to theorize about the respective attitudes of the two authors toward colonization from their literary works?

"Shooting an Elephant" concerns mob behavior. Think of some other instances of mob behavior, either from real-life stories or works of fiction. Are the actions of the mob similar to those in Orwell's account? Discuss the human tendency for people to resent the differences of others. How does this resentment lead to conflict and violence?

Compare and Contrast

1930s: High-water mark of the British Empire. Burma is one of the Empire's most productive colonies. Also an important decade for incipient independence movements, like those of Nehru's Congress Party in India and the various anti-British movements in Burma itself.

1990s: Burma achieved independence in 1948 and almost immediately fell into a succession of internal rebellions. In the 1990s the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma is ruled by a repressive military dictatorship.

1930s: Spain breaks out in civil war in 1936 (Orwell fights); Germany and Austria very nearly go to war in the same year. Japan continues its campaign in China, where it invaded, with the aim of establishing colonies, in 1931. Show-trials begin in the Soviet Union.

1990s: The disappearance of European empires, all of them dissolved in the decade after World War Two, neither leads to prosperity in former colonies nor insures against the oppression of ethnic or other minorities, as the continuing plight of the Third World demonstrates. Ethnic disputes abound in all regions of the world in the last decade of the twentieth century.

1930s: British writer Rudyard Kipling, known for his poems and stories of colonial India and Burma, dies. Kipling's stories in many ways defined the "conservative" attitude toward empire, that the overseas colonies were Britain's obligatory burden and that they constituted a civilizing mission. Orwell wrote an obituary essay on the occasion of Kipling's death. While critical of Kipling's jingoism, Orwell defends him against the charge of "fascism," saying that Kipling's denouncers tend far more toward totalitarianism than Kipling ever did.

1990s: It a critical commonplace to denounce Kipling as both a fascist and a racist, and Orwell is regularly described as an apologist for the British Empire and a racist. The tendency to politicize letters, which Orwell diagnosed and strove to quell, results in Orwell himself becoming a target and makes him a still-relevant analyst of the intellectual scene.

What Do I Read Next?

The essay "Such, Such were the Joys . . ." is an autobiographical account of Orwell's years in the bleak and unsympathetic environment of an English boarding school. This essay is included in *George Orwell: A Collection of Essays,* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981.

Orwell's essay "England Your England," written during the Blitz (the German saturation bombing campaign of London in 1941), is an assessment of British character in its moment of greatest trial. See *George Orwell: A Collection of Essays,*

New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981.

In 1939, Orwell wrote an essay called "Boy's Weeklies," which devotes itself with gusto and approval to the slew of pulp magazines which, in the first half of the twentieth century, especially catered to an audience of literate adolescent males. Orwell had himself been a reader of the weeklies. See *George Orwell: A Collection of Essays,* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981.

In *"Reflections on Gandhi"* (1949), another essay, Orwell returns to the topic of the British Empire, which he earlier treated in "Shooting an Elephant," to which the meditation on Gandhi is therefore an important companion piece. See *George Orwell: A Collection of Essays,* New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981.

Michael Shelden's *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* is an extremely well researched and lively account of Orwell's life and career. Shelden devotes much interesting discussion to the India-Burma period. New York: Harper Collins. 1991.

A Passage to India (1924) by E. M. Forster is often considered the preeminent novel of English colonialism in India. It is commended for a greater degree of insight into Indian culture than is usually attained by English writers.

The 1975 novel *Heat and Dust,* by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, also deals with the experiences of the English in India. In the first part of this narrative, the lonely wife of an English colonial officer enters into an affair with a wealthy Indian man. Two generations later, her granddaughter travels to India and retraces her ancestor's steps.

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," by Ernest Hemingway. This 1936 short story is set in Africa and deals with a wealthy couple on safari. Francis Macomber panics during a lion hunt, and his contemptuous wife spends the night with their paid guide. The next day Macomber stands his ground while shooting at a charging buffalo, but is shot and killed by his wife.

Further Study

Hitchens, Christopher, and Norman Podhoretz. "An Exchange on Orwell." *Harper's* Vol. 266, No 1593, February 1983, pp. 56-8.

Hitchens responds to an earlier essay by Podhoretz (see below) speculating that had he lived, Orwell would have become a political neoconservative. Hitchens questions several of Podhoretz's contentions regarding Orwell's political attitudes. He especially attacks Podhoretz's contention that Owell maintained a Leftist stance primarily to give weight to his criticism of left-wing politics. Podhoretz responds with selected quotations from Orwell's works to support his contentions.

Hunter, Lynette. *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice.*

Stony Stratford, England: Open University Press, 1984, 242 p.

An examination of Orwell's narrative voice in all of his major works.

Meyers, Jeffrey. *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell.* Lon-don: Thames and Hudson, 1975, 192 p.

Concise and accessible, yet thorough and scholarly, introduction to Orwell's works.

Podhoretz, Norman. "If Orwell were Alive Today." *Harper's* Vol. 266, No. 1592, January 1983, pp. 30-2, 34-7.

Speculates that had he lived into the 1980s, Orwell's political views would have shifted from democratic socialism to neo conservatism.

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Eagleton, Terry. "Orwell and the Lower Middle Class Novel." In Bernard Oldsey and Joseph Browne, editors, *Critical Essays on George Orwell.* Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986.

Johnson, Paul. *Intellectuals.* New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

Johnson, Paul. *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Eighties (Revised Edition).* New York: Harper & Row, 1991. 153, 154-55.

Kogan, Steve. "In Celebration of George Orwell." *Academic Questions.* Vol. 10, No. 1. 13-30.

Muggeridge, Malcolm. *Burmese Days.* In Harold Bloom, editor, *George Orwell: Modern Critical Views,* New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 23.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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