

Aaron Esau

Ms. Latimer

IB Literature 12, HL

07 October 2019

Politics and Orwell's Essays

Nobody can help but write with bias; we must use our background and experience with language to write, and our backgrounds are unique to us. In the essays "Shooting an Elephant" and "You and the Atomic Bomb", Orwell demonstrates his belief that all writing has political bias but that good writing has political intent through tone and the use of pathos.

Writers have their own opinions that are reflected in their work. Orwell declares in his essay "Why I Write" that, as much as authors may try, it is impossible for writing to be "genuinely free from political bias" (3). The use of the unnecessary adjective *genuinely* suggests that even when authors intend for their writing to be free of bias, it is never; only the authors themselves have the background that they have, so only they can create the writing that they do. That is, authors subconsciously craft sentences in a way that pleases them and satisfies their bias. Although Orwell believes that all writing is political, he believes that it is important to understand that only writing with the intent of being political is good; he states that, while "looking back through [his] work, [he sees] that it is invariably where [he] lacked a political purpose that [he] wrote lifeless books ... [and] sentences without meaning" (6). Words have no meaning if they are not written with political intent.

To satisfy his requirement for well-written works to have political intent, Orwell wrote his essays with a clear political purpose in mind. For example, he often uses a negative tone in

his essay “Shooting an Elephant” to force the reader to feel and share his opinions of the Burmans. Orwell tells the reader that there was, “in an aimless, petty kind of way, [an] anti-European feeling [that] was very bitter ” (1) and uses the word *aimless* to suggest that there is no basis for the anti-European sentiment. However, there was, in fact, a purpose—the Burmans had been oppressed by the British for years after the Anglo-Burmese war. Then, Orwell describes their sentiment as *petty* even though it clearly has a large impact on him; throughout the essay, he continuously uses negative words to describe the Burmans. He politicizes his view of the Burmans by repeatedly forcing his diction and writing to oppose the Burmans. Additionally, he uses pathos in his essay “You and the Atomic Bomb” to ensure that the essay is political—and thereby considered good writing. He establishes himself as the authority when claiming that “we all are likely to be blown to pieces by it within the next five years” (1) by suggesting that it is an obvious or well-known fact that we will likely be destroyed—a claim that an average reader would probably not already know. It would likely cause a great deal of stress to not know and then be warned of one’s own imminent destruction. He also uses the dramatic phrase “blown to pieces” and creates urgency by declaring that the time frame of death is “within the next five years”, but leaves specific details about the date out of the sentence. He leaves suspense for the reader by using the ambiguous word “it”. To make one uncertain of the cause of their own destruction is to cause tension. Again, using pathos, Orwell sets up the essay to become an argument—or to become political.

All writing is political, but only that which has political intent is considered good by Orwell. He shows that he is politically motivated through his negative tone when describing Burmans in “Shooting an Elephant” and strong use of pathos in the introduction to “You and the

Atomic Bomb”. But it is important to understand that simply having political intent does not make writing good; it is just a qualifier.