

Shooting an Elephant and A Haunted House

Question no. 1 Theme of Colonialism in Shooting an Elephant. Fakiha Faryal, Roll no. 54

Colonialism is the practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country. It is fueled by the arrogance of superiority that could be adopted by any nation irrespective of its geographical location in the world. It corresponds with the belief that the cultural values of the colonizer are inherently superior to one's own. Colonialism was born in the West with the emergence of modern nation-state and the age of exploration and discovery. In the years since the World War II, territorial imperialism is no longer the prevailing mode. Rather than, being directly colonized by the imperial power, weaker countries have been granted the trappings of sovereignty, while western finance capital retains control of the lion's share of their profitable resources.

It is his political writings (*Burmese Days, Shooting an Elephant, A Hanging, Animal Farm*, 1984 etc.) that turned Orwell from a minor English figure into a world figure. Orwell himself goes on to say that, were it not for his strong political views, he might never have fulfilled himself as a writer. What is important about Orwell is that he served Indian imperial police in Burma for about five years (1922-1927). Therefore, his colonial writings must have contained intense implications on colony, colonizers and the colonized. The importance in shooting the elephant lies in how the incident depicts the different aspects of colonialism.

In this essay, *Shooting an Elephant*, the elephant and the British officer help to prove that colonialism is a double-edged sword. The shooting of the elephant is the incident that reveals that colonialism inflicts damage on both parties in imperialistic relationships. The British officer, Orwell displays many aspects of being the absurd puppet under the institution of colonialism. The elephant along with the two thousand Burmese plays an even more depressing role when compared to the police officer. The elephant represents the "stricken, shrunken; immensely old" countries that have been invaded and conquered by the colonizer, while the Burmese represent its helpless people. The once great and powerful elephant is reduced to "senility" by the bullets just as imperial countries with superior technology dominate the countries like India. The "great beast" meaning both the elephant the countries it represents, becomes "powerless to move and yet powerless to die" under the hands of the white man.

Orwell has been left with Hamlet's dilemma "to shoot or not to shoot" the Elephant. The "tiny incident" has provided Orwell "a better glimpse of the real nature of imperialism the real motives for which despotic governments act." When he killed the animal, he joined ranks with the imperialists as he was acting unnaturally to appease the natives. The fact of the Burmese deciding what the narrator, a white man must do, creates the irony of master becoming slave to fulfill his racial and imperial obligations. The British felt that they had control over the Burmans but rather the Burmans unwittingly had control over the British. This raises an important question- if a good man can be corrupted and destroyed by colonialism, then what could it do to others who are not so principled?

There are two Orwells in the story. Each Orwell has his own perspective of events. The young police officer who undertakes his own journey to meet and shoot the rampaging elephant sees things without the distance that the older author does. This older author Orwell recalls the event after years of pondering it, of being haunted by it. What the older Orwell is trying to do is to mend his own feelings of guilt by trying to create circumstances that will allow him to live with himself. But he fails.



As he looks back at the young Orwell and presents rather matter-of-fact circumstances of the day, he shot an elephant, he realizes so many things the young man could not have known, or could not have seen. He realizes larger issues. **Mainly, it sheds critical light on the complex issue of imperialism.**

Orwell's presentation of colonial Burma, the internal sufferings of a sensitive colonial officer and explicit and implicit hatred towards the natives by the colonizers are, in fact, the honest and authentic picture of Burma under colonialism. The plight of an imperial officer is pervasive throughout the story. Here Orwell has introduced that idea of humiliation, of how the colonialists, strive every day to avoid being laughed at. His whole life, Orwell, tells us, **"Every white man's life in the east was one long struggle not to be laughed at."** Orwell wants to convince himself. But he is hardly successful. He tries to justify the shooting of the elephant on the pretext that it had killed a coolie: **"and afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant."**

Orwell admits to enjoy the death of an innocent man. And that is monstrous. The elephant's long agonizing death is representative of how long the memory of his actions has lasted and the pain that he has had to endure because of his action. This evil deed, thus, symbolic in the way that **what the colonizer are inflicting on the natives would have longer effects.** And it is a guilt, which is large and difficult to kill.

The Europeans are the ruling class in Burma. They consider themselves to be superior in every way simply because they are Europeans, educated and are in charge of running the Empire. The dialogue at the end of the essay is the most telling about them. Among the ruling class, there is a difference in opinion between whether the death of a coolie was worth the price of an elephant. The people of colonized country show that imperialism has taken from them the confidence to defend their country. Instead of organizing to drive out imperialists, these people **"spit betel juice"** on white women to release their anger, and instead of saving an elephant that a fellow Burmese owned, they have decided to take its meat. The people who are suppressed by imperialism become hateful and selfish in their struggle to survive. Together with the officer; the Burmese and the elephant portray an institution that is only capable of harm. The shooting of the elephant is wrong just as imposing the act of colonialism is wrong. People know that imperialism is destructive, just as Orwell knows he **"ought not to shoot"** the elephant. The flaws in imperialism begin to emerge when the elephant dies for the selfish reason.

Orwell endured overwhelming bitterness and hatred of the natives because of his British heritage **"the meeting faces of young man that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me got badly on my nerves."** Orwell sums up his feelings of guilt coupled with his reaction against being hated **"all I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the Empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible."** Although part of him saw the British Raj as tyrannical **"with another part I thought the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts."**

Orwell rationalizes his feelings saying, **"Feelings like these are the normal byproducts of imperialism."** The continuation of British rule was the surest way of maintaining the liberty of colonial subject. In other words, the established regime was viewed, as a great deal better than those that would supplant it. Definitely Orwell recognizes the superiority of the imperial forces. Eventually, the natives appear to be inferiors who need to be colonized and ruled. So, Orwell could not overcome the limitations of his political context accepting the natives as equal human beings. The critics have



reasons to believe that Orwell's resignation from the British Imperial Police in Burma was the result of his hatred of British imperialism in India: *"I was in the Indian police for five years, and by the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving...I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience."*

Orwell spent five years from 1922 to 1927 as a police officer in the Indian Imperial Police force in Burma. The region under British control was known as **British Burma**. British rule in Burma lasted from 1824 to 1948, from the successive three Anglo-Burmese wars through the creation of Burma as a Province of British India to the establishment of an independently administered colony, and finally independence. Colonialism remained an issue that confronted many regions of the world. Those countries that try to make a break are subjected to punishing economic and military treatment, by one or other major power.

Question no. 2 Symbolism and Imagery in *Shooting an Elephant*. Roll no. 30

George Orwell, in his essay, **"Shooting an Elephant"**, describes his experiences as a policeman in Moulmein, Burma during European Imperialism. Orwell conveys the ideal that **what is right and what is accepted don't always align**. He adopts a **remorseful tone** in order to convey to the reader the weight of his actions. Imagery and figurative language, **portrays** his strongly conflicting opinions on Imperialism. Orwell describes the event of shooting the elephant and compares it to the **hostility** reigning between the British Empire and the administrators, as well as the natives.

As a police-officer, **Orwell's** presence holds symbolic power within Burmese society. He explains this in clear terms in the essay: the Burmese people at once **despise** him, **ridicule** him and expect him to **perform on behalf of the empire** that he symbolizes. When he goes to shoot the elephant, he does so as a police officer representing **British colonial authority**. The people expect him to demonstrate this authority. If he fails, the British imperial project will be shown to fail. The policeman, in this way, upholds the **image of the authority** that it represents.

"Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality, I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind."

Orwell displays many aspects of being the **"absurd puppet"** under the institution of imperialism. *"He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy — shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant."* He is the evidence that **"every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at."** His experience with the natives conveys how imperialism harms the imperialistic countries as well as their colonies.

The **elephant** is the **central symbol** of the story. The rampaging **elephant** represents the **Burmese society: unwieldy, untethered** and ultimately impossible to subdue. Orwell also uses it to represent the **effect of colonialism** on both the colonizer and the colonized. The elephant, like a colonized populace, has its **liberty restricted**, and it becomes aggressively rebellious only as a response to being shackled. Orwell, a colonizer, feels a similar ambivalence towards the elephant as he does towards the Burmese locals. Orwell shows the Burmese people as having a particular power over their colonizers that expresses itself in the form of ridicule. In the way that the elephant runs berserk, and is impossible to contain without violence, the **Burmese defiance of British rule** is a constant, making itself known by jeers and humiliation. In the way that "the white man" or British officers in Burma must rely on force, and specifically on torture, to have the upper hand of the



Burmese people, so Orwell must fall back on an unnatural use of force to demonstrate his power over the elephant. When he shoots the elephant, the same demonstration of force the British imperialists use over the Burmese people is evident.

The elephant **is the symbol of** the "stricken, shrunken, immensely old" countries that have been stormed and conquered by imperialism, while the Burmese play its "helpless" people. The once great and powerful elephant is reduced to "senility" by the bullets, just as countries like India are crushed by the modern technology of the imperial countries. The "great beast," meaning both the elephant and the countries that it represents, becomes "powerless to move and yet powerless to die" under the hands of the white man. The British officer, the executioner, acts as a symbol of the imperial country, while the elephant symbolizes the victim of imperialism. Together, the soldier and the elephant turns this tragic anecdote into an attack on the institution of imperialism.

The **dead coolie** represents the **maltreated Burmese**, trampled by the British Empire. This image has a symbolic function that resonates through the essay. Described as "*lying on his belly with arms crucified*", there is a clear allusion to the crucifixion of Jesus. The coolie is sacrificed in order to justify Orwell's actions. The **beaten flesh** of the Burmese prisoner represents the power structure at play in the broader essay. The **British police hold the whip; the Burmese people submit**. This symbolizes how the people killed in colonies were "sacrificed" in order to justify rebellions and wars against the Imperialist countries.

The **chaining the elephant** (British Empire) is also symbolic. It symbolizes how the British must live up to the expectation of its colonies.

"When the white man turns tyrant, it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib."

The **elephant gun** represents the power of the British Empire. At first, the gun is used to control the colonists, but when Orwell uses it to kill the elephant in order to appease the colonists, the power of the British Empire is turned against itself.

Orwell draws his readers into his story through the use of detailed imagery. The "sneering yellow faces" of the men of Burma that constantly insulted him paints an image for the reader and allows the reader to picture the menacing faces of these men. The imagery brings the story to life and allows the reader to feel like he/she is experiencing Burma alongside Orwell. Orwell discusses a **dead man's body "sprawling in the mud"**. This vivid image of a dead man causes the reader to feel some sort of emotion, whether it be sympathetic or disgusted; pathos adds to the effectiveness of Orwell's story.

There is also an image of the Empire's dirty work highlighted by Orwell. "*The stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt*". This is an important image, revealing the dirty work of the British Empire. By working as a police officer, Orwell encounters the brutalities of the empire up close. He also pinpoints a detailed image of the Burmese life. "*A labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside*". He gives the living conditions of the Burmese people. This is an important reference for the reader to understand how the Burmese people live.

Through the image of **shooting the elephant**, we encounter Orwell's feelings in the face of the elephant. "*I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that pre-occupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him.*" The language here reveals the grandeur of the elephant's existence. It also reveals Orwell's sense of



creaturely connection with the elephant. Indeed, to kill it would feel like murder. Moreover, it conveys the depth of feeling and inner instinct that Orwell must deny and oppose in order to perform on behalf of the empire.

"But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him, he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree"

This image of **killing of the elephant** marks a vital scene in the essay. As we see the elephant rising up before it falls, we witness the drama of the climactic moment in which a grand creature is sacrificed for the sake of imperial pride.

In short, the whole story is symbolic because it describes the **consequences** and **eventual fall** of imperialism. The elephant symbolizes the imperialistic British Empire. His death at the hands of Orwell shows the fall of British Empire at the hands of his own officials. Orwell represents the generic British official working in a British colony. Orwell's dilemma, exemplifies the decision British officials have to make in whether their allegiance belongs to their state or to the people they serve.

Question no. 03 Trace poetic images in "A Haunted House" by Virginia Woolf. Roll no. 40

Virginia Woolf's "**A Haunted House**" is a very short piece of writing which **oneirically** depicts **two couples** sharing the same **centenary house**: the **alive** one trying to sleep while listening to the eerie other who keeps wandering from room to room to seek "*their hidden joy*". **Spectrality** is thus at play as a structural motif but it also bears a **reflective** dimension as Woolf's ghost story reflects and refracts **archetypal ghostly motifs** borrowed from the British grand literary tradition, from *Ann Radcliffe* to *Henry James* via the *Brontës*—an intertextual web which critics hardly ever explore. This essay aims to see how, between life and death, text and image, Woolf turns her ghost story into an intermediary space, a site of **modernist negotiation** which, conjoining **inheritance** and **subversion**, works its hauntedness through both **intertextuality** and **intermediality** to create an open writerly text; a literary form at work.

In this, utterly luminous piece of writing Virginia Woolf conjures up two pairs of lovers, one ghostly and the other living. Despite the **suggestion implicit** in the title, it is **the lovers who are haunted**, and **not the house** – the dead by **their past**, and the living inhabitants by their spectral predecessors, whose presence persists in the small but telling events which are the currency of **mortal life**. '**A Haunted House**' might be described as a short story – and, in one way, as a ghost story – but its language is almost that of a **prose-poem**. The rhythmical prose beats like a heart with the **repeated refrain**:

"Safe, safe, safe," the pulse of the house beat softly.'

This mantra reappears later, with '**softly**' changed to '**gladly**', and then again in the final paragraph as the couple is reunited, with the adverb changed to '**proudly**' and '**pulse**' upped to '**heart**' – and, suggestively, the tense shifted from past to present, as 'beat' morphs into 'beats':

"Safe, safe, safe,' the heart of the house beats proudly. 'Long years—' he sighs. 'Again you found me.' 'Here,' she murmurs, 'sleeping; in the garden reading; laughing, rolling apples in the loft. Here we left our treasure—' Stooping, their light lifts the lids upon my eyes. 'Safe! Safe! Safe!' the pulse of the house beats wildly. Waking, I cry 'Oh, is this your buried treasure? The light in the heart.'"



The sibilant incantation of **“safe safe safe”** of the unseen lovers tells of **anxiety** allayed, a loss vicariously, but happily recovered by the agency of these supplanting two, who feel the invisible yet strongly sensed presence of the indelible persistence of love. So, in Woolf’s telling, the **treasure** is restored **love**, love regained and redeemed. The readers are left with the conviction that the lives did not live the people so often end up with, the unfulfilled and forfeit past is not irreclaimable after all.

The **pulsing sound** that beats through the prose in its almost poetic rhythms could almost suggest the quickening heartbeat of the narrator as s/he awakes. That final phrase, **‘The light in the heart’**, looks back to the use of both ‘heart’ and ‘light’ earlier in the same paragraph. Woolf’s **‘story’** positions itself neatly between **dream-vision** and **ghost story**, reinventing both using the new style of modernism and that movement’s interest in shifting tense and perspective. As with much modernist fiction, perception, rather than objective reality, is foregrounded.

Also, Virginia Woolf is known for **stream-of-consciousness** writing, *a literary style that reveals a person’s thoughts and reactions in a sometimes confusing continual flow*. This technique is used in **“A Haunted House”** so the clue to working out the point of view is to consider whose thoughts are revealed in this stream-of-consciousness. To work out point of view in a story it is helpful also to consider the pronouns used to work out the identity of the narrator.

Mostly the **events** of this story are told through the **thoughts of the current inhabitant** of the house, but despite being a first person point of view, one can also see events from the **(imagined) perspective of the ghosts** in the house, and even from the house itself. So, the technique of **stream of consciousness** is also applied in this short story. Thus, it can be seen that, in an essay on Henry James’ ghost stories, published in 1921 – the same year as ‘A Haunted House’ – Virginia Woolf called for new writers to find fresh and original ways of **arousing fear and terror** in readers of ghost stories. Woolf sought to do this with ‘A Haunted House’, a story which is both a ghost story and a riposte to, or analysis of, the conventional ghostly tale. But, given that final phrase, ‘The light in the heart’, it is also a **love story**, and – given its **relative plotlessness**, its **brevity**, and its **prose-poetry style** – barely a ‘story’ at all.

Question no. 4. Magic realism in A Haunted House. Roll no. 9

In the first half of the twentieth century, **artists** have regularly **employed** Magic Realism in their work and Virginia Woolf was no exception. Besides the dominated themes of Modernism; depression, dejection, faithlessness, loneliness and alienation, Virginia Woolf also exercised her creativity in themes like Nostalgia and death. Both these themes are skillfully knitted into the fabric of her short story *A Haunted House* and the epitome of this is achieved with the thread of Magic Realism.

Magic Realism, also known as marvelous realism, is a style of fiction and literary genre that paints a realistic view of the modern world while also adding magical elements. Magical realism often refers to literature in particular a magical or supernatural phenomenon presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting. Magical realism is often seen as an amalgamation of real and magical elements that produces a more inclusive writing form than either literary realism or fantasy. The term magic realism is broadly descriptive rather than critically rigorous, and Matthew Strecher (1999) defines it as *what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe*.

A Haunted House is a ~~sort of~~ reminiscence of the author about a **ghost couple** who visits their earthly home every now and then in a search of their belongings. In this way, **the real world and the**



ethereal world can be seen in perfect harmony in the story and it creates a magical yet very realistic effect. The story unfolds a very unique idea about the nature of the death that it is not the absolute end of life but the author treats it as an existence in which departed souls come back to this world and search for the valuables that they've left behind. It is said that the ghosts who silently **move** in the house are careful and considerate enough, not to disturb the housemates, "*Quietly," they said, "or we shall wake them."* **Despite being a gothic narrative, the story does not evoke any horrific** feeling and thus makes it a masterpiece of magic realism.

In an unseemly manner this couple floats and slides through the house. Their amorphous presence is marked with surreal elements that fill readers with curiosity and wonder like; *the wind roars up the avenue. Trees stoop and bend this way and that. Moonbeams splash and spill wildly in the rain.* In perfect harmony with the supernatural beings, the house is personified as a safe haven for contentment and serenity to prevail. When the narrator says, *the windowpanes reflected apples, reflected roses; all the leaves were green in the glass,* glass, here becomes a symbol, a kind of gateway that stands for a difference between life and death. It suggests that there is a transparency **between both life and death, and these characters move back and forth between the realms of life and death** in search of their treasure. The spotlight shifts and moves with the characters. Among all this natural scenery, in a nostalgic state this couple is recounting their happy life in the house. This house is a treasure house for them and custodian of their memories that are still intact. According to narrator, they still feel like inmates of the house. They try to bless new inmates with benediction and cherish these happy moments instead of haunting them.

Traditional magical elements are not used in the story which makes it different from fantasy. The element of wonder and curiosity is enhanced by hinting at the fact that the "*The treasure buried; the room...*" Further and vivid description of the ghostly activities causes it to feel and appear real, when the narrator describes; *The wind falls, the rain slides silver down the glass. Our eyes darken, we hear no steps beside us; we see no lady spread her ghostly cloak.*

The concept of the story is rather unique as it is seen that both **ethereal and earthly worlds** are placed side by side, the life of ghosts runs parallel to the life of real couple who reside in the home. The narrator learns their secret that treasure for these ghosts is not any material object or have mercenary value but it is a light in the heart that becomes a binding force for them to this world. "*Oh, is this your buried treasure? The light in the heart.*" So they leave a message for the new couple that they should live their life in exuberance and love. It blends reality and fantasy and creates Magic Realism that adds strangeness to beauty and surreal dreamy atmosphere.

The deaths of Woolf's mother, stepsister, father, and older brother in rapid succession led to a focus on the nature of death and grief in her own writing. "A Haunted House" is one of her more positive depictions of death, as a continuing state of being where love and joy can still exist.

