

Orwell | Shooting an Elephant

George Orwell
Shooting an Elephant
and other Essays

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Shooting an Elephant

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. I was subdivisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. 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. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil

2 **Moulmein:** today's Mawlamyine. | 4f. **subdivisional:** *bezieht sich auf eine Unterabteilung der Polizeidivision*. | 5 **petty:** small-minded. | 7 **guts** (pl., coll.): courage. | 8 **bazaar:** oriental market. | 9 **betel juice:** chewed mixture of nuts from the betel tree (*Areca catechu*) and leaves of the climbing pepper plant (*Piper betle*). | 10 **to bait s.o.:** to attack s.o. | 11 **nimble:** quick. | **to trip s.o. up:** to cause s.o. to fall. | 13 **hideous:** shocking, ugly. | 14 **to sneer:** to laugh with contempt. | 15 **to hoot:** to shout with contempt. | 20 **to jeer at s.o.:** to insult s.o. | 21 **perplexing:** confusing.

thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it
 the better. Theoretically – and secretly, of course – I was all
 for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the Brit-
 ish. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I
 5 can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see 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 had been flogged with bamboos – all these
 10 oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could
 get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated
 and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence
 that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did
 not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less
 15 did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger em-
 pires that are going to supplant it. 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. With one part of my mind I thought
 20 of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something
clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of

1 **to chuck up s.th.** (coll.): to give up s.th. | 3 **oppressor:** *Unterdrücker(in)*. |
 6 **at close quarters:** from nearby. | **wretched:** *elend.* | 7 **to huddle:** (*sich*) zu-
sammenkauern. | **lock-up:** jail. | 8 **cowed:** discouraged. | **scarred:** *mit Narben*
bedeckt. | **buttocks** (pl., coll.): seat of the body. | 9 **to flog:** to beat. | **bamboo:**
Bambus(stock). | 10 **to oppress s.o.:** *jdn. unterdrücken*. | **intolerable:** *unerträg-*
lich. | 12 **utter:** complete, total. | 16 **to supplant s.o./s.th.:** to replace s.o./s.th. |
 17 **to be stuck:** to be caught. | 18 **evil-spirited:** mean. | **beast:** here: rough
 person. | 20 **British Raj:** rule of the British Crown on the Indian subcontinent
 from 1858 to 1947. | **unbreakable:** s.th. that cannot be broken. | 21 **to clamp**
s.th. down upon s.o.: to impose s.th. on s.o. | **in saecula saeculorum** (Lat.):
 forever and ever.

8 Shooting an Elephant