

# The hunger games by suzanne collins vs. a modest proposal by jonathan swift

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## **Contemplating A Modest Proposal**

Suzanne Collins *The Hunger Games* and Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* both tell the story of a suffering land, and what characters do or could do to try and survive in the world they are born into. Katniss and Peeta fight for their lives in the Hunger Games, while Swift solves Ireland's internal problems by proposing that we use one-year-old babies as a food source. Both provide compelling arguments and plots, but what makes their argument so strong is that they bring their arguments into the real world through satire. They both highlight differences between different groups in their personalities and situations, and use parallels to the real world as a support. Collins and Swift approach the argument in different ways, but their impact is similar.

Jonathan Swift describes the plight of the Irish people in a way that makes the reader feel sympathy for them. However, Swift's solution to their problems is to sell babies, which has moral repercussions. Swift almost completely ignores any form of moral argument against his idea of selling babies as food. However, he does acknowledge one argument he has, which is that Britain might have an objection. He does not even consider the potential problem that Ireland's population might decrease, and does not consider it a point of the argument.

We can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, and flesh being of too tender a consistence, to

admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country, which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it. (Swift)

Swift maneuvers the argument so that the only person who matters is England, but his use of satire in this matter highlights Ireland's plight in the face of England. The only problem England would consider relevant is whether the children from England would be sold too. Almost scornfully, Swift assures the country that the science of food preservation keeps their children safe, so they are allowed to partake in this idea without feeling guilty, portraying England as selfish and unscrupulous, despite their appearances.

Collins also introduces some form of misguided interests in the Hunger Games, especially amongst the people that populate the Capitol. Although the Hunger Games was meant as a tool to squash rebellion in the remaining 12 out of 13 Districts, it also served as a form of entertainment for the citizens of the Capitol, like Venia, Octavia, and Flavius.

...even though they're rattling on about the Games, it's all about where they were or what they were doing or how they felt when a specific event occurred. "I was still in bed!" "I had just had my eyebrows dyed!" "I swear I nearly fainted!" Everything is about them, not the dying boys and girls in the arena. We don't wallow around in the Games this way in District 12. We grit our teeth and watch because we must and try to get back to business as soon as possible when they're over. (Collins)

The people of the districts are forced to watch the spectacle, and must go back to work immediately so that they don't starve, while Katniss's stylists watch it for excitement. While their names being reminiscent of the Romans, we get the first image of them watching gladiator fights and deriving pleasure from the suffering the contestants felt. However, their dialogue of the Games is similar to how we react to variety shows and reality television in real life. Collins implicates us as Swift implicates England as beings that are so removed from the suffering of less fortunate people, we can watch as atrocious actions are carried out with no moral scruples, as we are separated from the victims by a body of water or land or a television screen.

Besides the moral implications from both works, the authors also use their plots and language to target the disparity between the rich and the poor. Swift targets the prejudices against the poorer fraction of the Irish population that are forced by circumstance to work for the richer part of the population. He speaks of the carcasses of babies as being useful only to those in the society that can afford the luxury of having mostly useless things. The richer women can use the children's baby soft skin for gloves, and the richer family would enjoy the delicacy of baby meat.

I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, increaseth to 28 pounds. I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Swift talks of the babies' weights as a convenient way of judging their value to the society as food, as we often talk of fish. A fish of 15 pounds catches a higher price than a fish of 10 pounds. He then furthers the idea of the rich dehumanizing the poor by emphasizing how the parents have already been devoured, in terms of resources, opportunities to create a better life for themselves, and their current states of being. As baby meat may become a delicacy, it makes sense that the landlords would be the main consumer.

The blame that Swift tacks on to the landlords of Ireland are paralleled with the blame that Collins pins on the citizens of the Capitol for how they live as opposed to the squalor of the Districts. When Katniss dines with Cinna during their first meeting, she highlights every aspect of the meal that she is eating, and sees if she can make that same meal for her mother and sister.

I try to imagine assembling this meal myself back home... I can't even guess what's in it. Days of hunting and gathering for this one meal ... would be a poor substitution for the Capitol version. What must it be like, I wonder, to live in a world where food appears at the press of a button? How would I spend the hours I commit... to sustenance if it were so easy to come by?

What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment? (Collins)

While the Districts can barely scrape up edible food for themselves, the Capitol never hungers, and never has to work to maintain their standard of living, at least not to the point that the District people have to. The food the

Capitol consumes is processed and packaged to a farther extent that you can press a button to get rid of your hunger. In our case, we can go to a McDonalds or a Restaurant and choose what we want from a menu to have it delivered to our table steaming hot. On the other hand, people in developing countries can barely scrape together resources to make a meal, let alone one that is cooked to perfection and made savory by oils and spices we import from the developing countries. The United State's wasteful living is almost a replica of the Capital siphoning resources from the rest of Panem for their own entertainment.

Both Swift and Collins place blame on us, the readers, as well as real life groups in better positions than others in general for passively watching the problems of others, and proposing solutions that may seem to help even if they are morally reprehensible in some way, as long as we ourselves are not affected. Swift uses numerous references to figures and statistics to show the effectiveness of a solution and to mask the moral reprehensibility of his suggestions. His suggestions are outrageous, but he ruthlessly points out that if we were to walk away from this solution, we would get morals mixed up in the matter, and eventually come up with no solution at all, and the problem would continue, and therefore, as the harbinger of this cure-all solution, he should receive a medal for his efforts. Collins doesn't use facts and numbers, but she develops her characters throughout the story, and uses the interactions to show how different people in the Capitol and people in the Districts are, and why they act the way they do. The people of the Capitol don't know any better as they were bred into this life of luxury, to the

point where if you were to put them in the Districts, they would die. The rest of Panem lives in fear of dying from starvation, so they're mindset is much more practical, and many would never be able to imagine living a wasteful life.

From the two authors, we can piece together social problems that plague the real world both today and centuries ago, as we take advantage of other groups and societies for their resources, and even though we are sympathetic to their suffering, we would never once consider giving our own comforts away so that they may have a chance at what we had. We just resign ourselves to watch their fate passively, and continue on with our own lives. Their works bring to light the fact that we push away the true major problems of the world out of selfishness and fear, and offer a chance for self-reflection and possible reformation.