

Jonathan swift and george orwell



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jonathan Swift and George Orwell may come from very different times- Swift in a country in turmoil during the eighteenth century, Ireland and Orwell in England while Europe was struggling to overcome the strife of the end of World War Two. These dissimilar backgrounds caused the two writers to write profoundly divergent texts. Yet *A Modest Proposal* and *Animal Farm* are akin because they are both aimed at exposing a fault in society, in a rather indirect but ultimately much more effective style than if it were said outright.

The name given to this technique is satire. An example of this satire in *A Modest Proposal* for preventing the children of poor people of Ireland from being a burden to their parents and country is apparent as Swift logically atrocious proposes the idea to sell 100, 000 babies as food. " There will be fewer Catholics (the " principal breeders"); the poor will at last own something of value and men will treat their pregnant wives as well as they treat mares in foal...

Pretending not to realise the immorality of cannibalism, he makes a point that the poor should make an effort to help themselves, and also that they should be treated better, whereas in *Animal Farm*, the satire is evident in the way Orwell represents the communist revolution in Russia as a revolt of animals on a farm, and the systematic trial and slaughter of millions of innocent people by Stalin as the killing of a few hens. Orwell was a socialist who detested political lying and inequality. Copious amounts of both occurred in the Russian Revolution of 1917, which is what most induced him to write so bitter a book.

It is bitter in that it depicts a revolution for an ideal being increasingly betrayed until it totally disappears and the society returns to the state it was in before. I think Orwell was reacting mainly to the Marxist ideal, and the world today. Swift has described satire in this way: “ Satire is a kind of glass wherein a beholder may look upon anyone’s face but his own. ” I believe this to be a very concise definition, because in satire you never see quite what you expect, as the objects of the satire have been known to believe that their ridiculing was actually serious.

This happened when A Modest Proposal was first released in pamphlet form. Several people complained, protesting that the ideas put forth were outrageous and extremely immoral. These people metaphorically became Homer Simpson, following the trail of doughnuts into Mr. Burns’ study where it stopped just above the trap door. Waiting in blissful ignorance while Burns presses the proverbial red button. A Modest Proposal is arguably the most bitterly savage piece of writing in the English language, as Swift openly suggests that since the poor are treated so badly, we might as well eat their children.

Orwell was reacting to the Russian revolution when writing Animal Farm, so it is necessary to know a little about it: This revolution was a result of the ideas of Karl Marx and Fred Engels. The belief in these ideals became known as Marxism, the establishment of a classless society where total equality would reign supreme, in his vision of “ ending the exploitation of man by man”. Marx believed this would come about only after a revolution of the exploited proletariat against the oppressors, the bourgeoisie.

Marxism is based on the simple ideal that all people should be equal in every aspect of life, where the community owns property and everyone benefits from the common wealth. This idea was taken on by Lenin- known as the father of Russian Communism. Following the collapse of Tsarism in March 1917 he lead the Bolshevic party towards the seizure of the democratic Provisional Government, arguing that Russia was ripe for a socialist revolution and that it would bring about a “ dictatorship of the proletariat”.

Four Brutal and bloody years of civil war followed, with Leon Trotsky, working for Lenin, commanding the Red Army against the Whites (Russians loyal to the Tsar). When Lenin died in 1924, Joseph Stalin- one of the most ruthless and cruel men in history and Trotsky vied for leadership of the Communist Party; But Stalin gained the upper hand and managed to expel Trotsky from the party. For the duration of his exile until he was assassinated, Stalin never ceased denouncing him as a traitor. This is very similar to how, in Animal Farm, Snowball was constantly denounced by Napoleon.

By this time, Stalin had the power to order massive arrests in the 1930's where he wiped out not only any possible opposition but thousands of innocent Russians too. This is one of the most horrific events of this century, in that political enemies and millions of innocent and loyal people were herded off to concentration camps where they were worked literally to death, living in the most vile and appalling conditions. But still many people on the left found it hard to give up their loyalty to Marxism. It was because of this shocking event that Orwell, in the middle of ww2, resigned his job and began writing Animal Farm in November 1943.

I believe Animal Farm may be about the Russian revolution, but it is also about the world we live in today: the rise and fall of dictatorship. I believe both the communist ideal, with peoples' unwillingness to give up their loyalty to it, and the whole phenomenon of dictatorships were influencing factors towards Orwell seeking to expose the pitfalls of the above in a more effective way than trying to tell people straight out: satire. In Animal Farm, George Orwell makes his negative sentiments towards revolution, i. e. -communism and totalitarianism crystal clear.

He uses satire, instead of bluntly crying, " All political bosses are vicious pigs, to put his point across calmly and with humour, " In future, all Questions relating to the working of the farm shall be run by a special committee of pigs. " He satirises these through the application of a simple and spare style of writing, with a basic choice of words, such as " the big barn" and " It was a bitter winter". This understatement is litotes, where possibly the most shocking and inane happening of the twentieth century is represented as a child's story.

Political allegory ties in, as animals in the story represent certain people or groups of people. For example, Old Major draws a parallel with Karl Marx, whose ideas initiated the revolution, and the pigeons- communists spreading the doctrine of the revolution beyond the Soviet Union. Ireland, however, in the seventeenth century was the world Swift lived in. He is considered ' one of the most impassionate satirists of human folly'. The power and ferocity of his writing, like where he says this, " it is well known that they [the poor] are every day dying and rotting by cold famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected.

Could only be brought about by a man in outrage. He strongly criticizes the shiftlessness of the poor babies' parents but also the irresponsibility of their social betters. Swift wrote A Modest Proposal in reaction to the appalling state of affairs of the number of impoverished and oppressed in Ireland at the Time. It was oppression by the English that had done this to the Irish. Protestant Britain, nervous and unforgiving to those who had fought for King James, a Catholic King, constructed a social and economic cage in which to imprison the Irish, and put English keepers in place.

This 'cage' encapsulated Ireland to such an extent that the Irish Government "did little more than rubber stamp measures passed by England". As a result of the Protestant victory in Ireland, the hopes and freedom of the Catholic majority in Ireland were severely curbed. Some of Swift's biting cynicism and cynicism of this cruel monopoly by England can be noticed here, "This proposal... of no expense and little trouble... can incur no danger in Disobliging England.

For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation... lthough perhaps I could name a country that would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it. " Swift also lived in a time where it was fashionable for men to celebrate their intellect, wallowing in the belief that reasoning and logic could solve any mysteries. This 'age'- in between the sixteen and seventeen hundreds- was known as the Age of Enlightenment. John Locke, a philosopher of this time thought of the human mind as a blank slate at birth, on which experience wrote to define a person's character, while Thomas Hobbes portrayed man as only movable by considerations of his own welfare.

I feel that Swift was particularly reacting to the ideas of these two men of the Enlightenment. To write something as savage as *A Modest Proposal*, he must have felt that they were totally on the wrong track with their ideas. He provokes moral outrage because that is what he felt. Swift satirises the Age of Enlightenment, pointing out that, if all problems were solvable by reasoning, rationally there should be nothing wrong with his idea to eat the poor, as he was only making a logical extension of their present treatment.

Evidence of this 'ridiculing' of this time is manifest in the precise and 'calculated' style he writes the proposal, "I have reckoned upon a medium that a child just born will weigh 12 pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably well nursed, will increase to 28 pounds." Connected to that, is the Augustan Age in the reign of Queen Ann. During this period, Jonathan Swift, the poet Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison were among the major literary figures. This is significant because they wrote in a style that employed Roman Terms.

These terms were similar to those of Horace, Ovid and Virgil, in the era of Augustus; it is considered the golden age of literature. This use of the ode, emphasised common sense and reason over emotion is known as a neoclassical style. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell employs the use of black humour, humour pervaded by cynicism and disillusionment, to hammer home the egregiousness of what happens to Boxer, the horse. He was carted away to the "hospital, in a van Benjamin reads as being marked 'Horse Slaughterer'.

But soon after, one of the pigs, Squealer, "a brilliant talker", representing the big lie told by Stalin through propaganda, explains matters: " 'The van

had Previously been the property of the knacker, and had been bought by the veterinary surgeon'.... the animals were enormously relieved to hear this". The obviousness of the real situation, and the persona adopted by the writer is humorous, but tragic, in that he does not seem to realise what is going on either.

By doing this Orwell also creates irony- a contrast between what seems to happen and what really happens. The apparently naive point of view of the lower animals is taken on by the narrator. Thus, this simple irony becomes charged with great intensity, causing great frustration to myself when I read it. What makes this thoroughly striking, though, is the sting in the tail. We are told that the pigs hold a banquet in Boxer's honour, and in the last sentence of the chapter: " Word went round that from somewhere or other the pigs had acquired the money to buy themselves another case of whiskey. " The animals don't realise the connection between Boxer being carted off and the pigs strangely gaining more money, but neither does the narrator.

Here, the irony of what the animals believe and what we know to be the truth fills us with more anger and is thus more effective, than a plain denunciation could have done. Where Boxer's death makes me sad and evokes emotion in me, bathos is also found in that the animals do not realise what really happens to Boxer. This jump from the sublime to the ridiculous is bathos, just like where " the cows declared unanimously that Snowball crept into their stalls and milked them in their sleep". " I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old, a most delicious and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or ragout. ”

Examples of litotes and bathos found in the above are comparable to those already mentioned about animal farm. The easy, every day style in which this mass slaughter is proposed is precisely what makes it even more ridiculous The pathos in A Modest Proposal is carried through the whole essay, whereas there are only bits of it in Animal Farm.

I think that the black humour, or sardonic wit displayed in the gruesome, if satirical, ideas put forth in Swift's essay makes up part of it. The repulsive style of writing creates emotion through disgust and outrage. As the perverse display unravels through the essay, the pathos carries on with it, so the more the point is argued, the more I feel taken aback. After reading Animal Farm, I found subtle changes in the style of the persona. Although it is written in a decidedly light-hearted way, I feel that as the Communist ideal in Animal Farm is increasingly betrayed, the persona seems to give up on the animals more and more.

The simple, cartoon-like phrases like, “ under a lantern which hung from a beam” seems to disappear, replaced with complicated, more pessimistic ones like “ some kind of invisible influence, pervading the air about them and menacing them... ” To me this is almost as if the persona shifts from that of the lower animals to the pig's by the end of the book. Although litotes present in both texts, previously shown, curiously, it's opposite-hyperbole or comic exaggeration is found, I believe, in both texts as well.

<https://assignbuster.com/jonathan-swift-and-george-orwell/>

The mere quirk of the animals communicating and acting with both human and animal traits is an exaggeration of their natural behaviour in *Animal Farm*. This combination of accepted animal characteristics and human traits creates humour and exaggeration here, middle aged clover “ had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal”, and “ the cows declared unanimously that Snowball had crept into their stalls and milked them in their sleep”.

However in *A Modest Proposal*, simply the idea of going to the extent of eating babies is hyperbole. A young healthy child is at a year old a most delicious food”, or “ Infants flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentifully in March”. Swift’s exaggerated calculations and deductions also form part of this. They make the essay even more repulsive by making it seem as if he has spent the time to actually ponder at length over the matter of eating children. I think Orwell has used these techniques of satire in an original and intriguing, as representing so serious a topic as life to day and the communist revolution in a children’s story, a fable, as if the moral of the story is that communism doesn’t work.

The fact that it is ever a popular book among children and adults proves that the imaginative way in which Orwell combined several satirical techniques worked to great effect. Swift’s fervent support of the Irish cause, which inspired him to write *A Modest Proposal*, laid the foundations for one of the most powerful works of satire in English literature. Economical and striking, I find Swift’s several afore mentioned satirical techniques alone and together create a brilliant overall effect, achieving exactly what he intended.

A Modest Proposal's pathos and bathos seems to work right through, while Animal Farm's works powerfully in places. I found that the shock of Boxer's death, and the sheep bleating, "four legs good, two legs better!" The way this betrays the very basis of 'Animalism', works to the greater effect than the latter because Orwell moved me so much more. However, I find the clever combination of the litotes and hyperbole in A Modest Proposal does pay dividends, from the litotes of the 'modest' proposal of so barbarous a suggestion to the hyperbole of the amoral persona Swift adopted.

Compared with the grand-scale understatement of the representative farm and talking animals, is to me less forceful and hard hitting than that of Swift's techniques. The allegory, or double meaning in the two texts is one of the most significant points about them. The way the animals, people and events represent real-life persons and incidents in Animal Farm compares with the way Swift says one thing in A Modest Proposal, but often means the opposite. I believe this allegory created by Swift's persona is entrancing, subtle and highly effective.

Although Orwell has been very imaginative in the use of allegory, to me Swift's works better. Orwell takes on a storyteller's guise in Animal Farm, but told through the point of view of the rather stupider animals. This persona is generally kept on throughout the book, but little tricks like the change from direct speech here, the animals shouting, "Don't take your own brother to his death!" to the indirect here "He [Squealer] had, he said, been present during Boxer's last hours... It had come to his knowledge, he said, that a foolish and wicked rumour had been circulated..."

This slight change shows Orwell does not agree with the pig's actions by reporting what he said. This creates distance between Orwell and the actions, so in a way we cannot blame him for what happens. Compared with the similar 'honest broker' approach of Swift's where he claims not to have eaten children himself, but to have not a friend, but "a very knowing American of my acquaintance..." who had. In the same way Swift passes the blame onto his 'acquaintance'. Swift's persona is more effective to me because of its apparent disregard for any convention or morality- being able to argue the plusses of cannibalism with a straight face.

Black humour, which I think carries through the whole of Animal Farm, in that by the end of the book a whole cycle had been completed, from beginning of revolution to the beginning of another revolution, including the cynicism of the end commandment- "All Animals are equal, but some are more equal than others". I think this is black humour as it unveils something about human nature that we are helpless to change- how it seems that someone nasty will always be in a position of power. It is like Orwell is saying that we cannot change this, so we might as well laugh.

Swift's black humour is present in the collision of the preceding litotes with the dark proposition of mass genocide, but I think also in the plain sick wit all through the text, for example "I can think of no one objection that could possibly be raised against the proposal." I believe the outcome of Swift's achieves a greater result, but that the irony in Animal Farm is quite brilliant. Swift used his persona to generate irony at every level of the essay so that he can criticise the hypocrisy of the rich, religious bigotry, and others by saying one thing but meaning the other.

The political allegory in *Animal Farm* means that on the one level it is a nice animal story, but on the other it is really condemning communism, and possibly depicting man as faced with the problem of natural hierarchy and inequality. I find *Animal Farm*'s specific brand of irony intriguing and effective. On satirical effect, I feel that *A Modest Proposal* is the better of the two excellent works. The ingenuity with which Swift dispatched with Ireland's greatest problems at that time and the brutality that he logically dealt with any objections that might be raised made what I think to be a fantastic satirical work.

The confidence and savagery with which he satirised the issues he felt strongest about and the high moral stand Swift took worked more visibly in my mind than the satire of *Animal Farm*. Although Orwell made superb use of techniques mentioned before, like representing people in general with the cows who believed anything they were told to believe, which made me reflect on the terrors of communism as well as the extent of brainwashing that is incorporated into any political state, I still view *A Modest Proposal* as the better of the two brilliant works of satire.