

Satire in a modest proposal assignment

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Jonathan Swift is one of the greatest satire writers of all time. He demonstrates satire through mathematical proposals and multiple quotations throughout a “ A Modest Proposal” to focus on the deplorable situation in Ireland that is caused by the English all while engaging the reader with his own barbaric proposal that he makes seem realistic through description. The readers must understand that Jonathan Swift is using satire because through his satire, Swift illustrates issues in society and announces blame to the rightful owners rather than just the obviously bizarre proposal he is making.

Swift’s modest proposal is created “ for Preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Publick,” (2028). More simply put, he introduces the idea of cannibalism to the Irish people. He suggests that the lower class Irish citizens sell their one year old children to the upper class so they can have them for meals. Swift explains the advantages to his proposal as being that the Irish will have property of their own, it will help bring an end to the overpopulation problem, and that his proposal will solve the food shortage problem.

Swift lays the framework for his satire to be effective through his unnamed narrator. The unmanned narrator is important because he seems to be sensible and well educated. Yet, he is removed from the situation because he does not have any children of his own. Since the narrator does not have any children and his wife is “ past child-bearing,” (2034) he has nothing to gain, and therefore the readers can believe that the narrator’s proposal is strictly named with Ireland’s best interest in mind.

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It is somewhat ironic that the narrator is unnamed. It is the invisible hand concept because the English landlords that are causing the problems are not visible in the pamphlet like the beggar women with the children following behind them are. On the surface, Swift's narrator presents an idea and makes it seem sensible through description. The common language and detailed picture allows the reader to get lost in the reasoning rather than focusing on the actual nature of the acts he is suggesting or his attack on Europe.

For example, Swift casually states that “ a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled,” (2030). The adjective, such as delicate and nourishing, let the reader focus on just another delicious meal rather than a meal that consists of a one year old child. The style of writing Swift chose to use, satire, is evident as early in his essay as the title. He titles his essay, “ A Modest Proposal. ” In most cases, modest typically means that it is a reasonable solution that can be easily obtained. In reality, Swift's proposal is malicious.

The idea of selling your child or children with the intentions of them being eaten is considerably inhumane. Here the underlying issue he focuses on is arousing the Irish and calling them to reform so they can live in a better environment. Swift implies that the Irish are content with their situation because they cannot come up with a simple solution to their overpopulation problems, food shortages, and money problems. Furthermore, Swift attacks the Irish by proposing the selling of babies; he is suggesting that the Irish

would do anything for money because they care about the money more than human relations.

They would marry and sell their children when they know the children are going to be slaughtered and eaten like the cows that have already been taken by the landlords. In addition to the attacks about selling babies, Swift continues to attack the Irish through mathematical reasoning. Swift goes through a math problem in his writing where he, among other items, he subtracts the number of children whose parents can maintain them and he subtracts the number of children that will die prematurely and comes up with, “ a hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born,” (2029).

The reader is automatically flabbergasted at the number of children who cannot be cared for. Referring to the children simply as statistics allows the readers to see the actual problem in terms of numbers instead of as just an estimate. Swift’s mathematical proposal attacks the Irish because they are having numerous children that they cannot take care of. He is also specific on the amount of diners one child will feed. He expresses, “ a child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish,” (2030).

Similarly, Swift points out the fact that the English would devour the Irish even without his proposal as they have already begun to do. He presents his thought in a straightforward manner when he comments, “ I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it,” (2034). Swift attacks the English landlords lack of compassion when he writes, “ 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,” (2030).

Here Swift is arguing that the English landlords have left their rates at an unplayable amount for the lower class Irish citizens. Thus, tenants have to choose between shelter and food, and they must choose food to keep their children alive. These tenants must then pay less on their rent escalation them into great debts. Since the parents cannot pay their rent and the landlords have already taken away anything that was of value to them, the tenants are of no use to their landlords anymore. He is also stating that children are not valuable unless they are being sold for some monetary value.

The English landlords are targeted a third time when he says, “ The poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress,” (2032). Here Swift is showing that the tenants can have their children taken away if they are owe the landlords rent and are unable to pay. He is testifying that the English do not care how they make and receive their money as long as they get paid. The English would stoop so low as to take away children from their families as if they were merely property without emotions or needs.

Jonathan Swift wrote “ A Modest Proposal” with the intent to awaken the Irish people and allow them to see that the conditions they are living in were not satisfactory. Through descriptive detail and the use of satire, Swift confronted both England and Ireland for their actions that led the Irish to the

poverty stricken life most citizens were leading. By using satire, Swift pitched a well thought out proposal that could only be deemed realistic through the use of satire. Works Cited Swift, Jonathan. " A Modest Proposal. " The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 1997. 2028-034