

A not so modest proposal

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Jonathan Swift, author of “ A Modest Proposal”, utilizes his mastery of satire, outrageous claims, and rhetorical devices; Satire is the use of irony and exaggeration to expose or criticize people’s stupidity, vices, and faults. Swift succeeds in discretely criticizing the contemporary politics and policies of England; policies that potentially, and were mainly blamed on, driving Irelands economy into a depression. Swift adopts the persona of a well-intentioned economist, suggesting that the poverty and famine in Ireland can be dealt with by selling children for food and clothing; As a result, Swift argues that not only will the income of the poor increase significantly, but as well the population will decrease proportionally. Swift provides much detail regarding the number of servings a child might provide, projecting the costs of each child sold and their profit, and he estimates the amount of population affected. Swift even suggests that the meat of children would be a delicacy to the English and wealthy Irish land owners.

Although, in reality, Swift denounces England with clever use of irony and metaphors; describing how the Irish can be rid of their useless, needy children by selling them at the “ delicious” age of one year for food and their skin for clothing. Therefore, each child sold would be contributing back to Irelands depreciated economy. Swift purposely uses logical fallacies and a very “ knowledgeable” tone to satirize England. Swifts persona, a well-meaning economist whose sympathy for the poor of Ireland leads him to suggest cruel and murderous solutions, completely undermining any thoughtful intent. With such outrageous thoughts as “ a young healthy child well nursed is a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food.” Claims such as these catch the attention of the reader and shock them, but

this is exactly what Swift wanted. By grossing out the “ public” with shock factors, he had hoped they would take a second glance at the corrupt policies in place and hopefully reform it. Throughout “ A Modest Proposal”, Swift discreetly uses this shocking rhetoric as political attacks against England, suggesting that England is the core of the poverty and saddened population. At one point in the essay, Swift describes how the meat of children could not withstand long voyages without spoiling, though he “ could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.” Alluding to England and the “ devouring” of Irelands resources.

Swifts use of a “ knowledgeable” tone humorizes a very dark subject. Swift, with his economist persona, utilizes logos, presenting made up statistics to sound much more professional and credible. Giving such statistics as the number of children in Ireland, the number of children born per year, and the amount of money that could possibly be made from selling Irish children. Throughout the entire essay, Swift uses metaphors such as the comparing of physically eating a child, to financially

destroying Ireland. When Swift suggests that “ 20, 000” children should be kept for “ breeding” he is comparing them to animals. Overall, comparing how English authorities treat the Irish like animals. Although, Swift slowly shifts his tone from knowledgeable to serious throughout the essay, almost unnoticeably becoming a satire essay to a very serious politically driven one. Very clearly satirizing those who have proposed solutions that are solutions to economic issues, without fully considering the human cost involved. Swift shows the inhumanity of schemes that are based only on greedy principles.

Although Swifts use of irony is very shocking at first sight, another glance over and understating the greater historical context, reveals Swifts great genius and subtlety; I strongly agree with Swift as, he shows a complete mastery over irony and sarcasm, shocking readers with the solution of infant cannibalism. While in doing so, Swift shows the hypocrisy of politics, and politicians that caused the depression of Ireland. Swift recognized a problem, and proposed an unorthodox solution using only his pen, paper, and sarcasm.