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## Swift's Arguments in "A Modest Proposal"

A Modest Proposal is a complex satirical piece written by Jonathan Swift. The work is not to be taken at face value and it is important to delve into the content by seeing it as very satirical. The overt point being made by Swift in this piece of writing is that the Irish should eat their babies to end their starvation woes. He makes largely exaggerated points to support this obviously laughable view. The point he makes is so outrageous that it comes across as humorous to an extent. However, this overt point is merely made to mask the real point that Swift wishes to convey in his essay. The actual point he wishes to get across to the audience is that the British should be doing much more to address the famine and poverty that is affecting Ireland. He nails down this true point through a range of rhetorical devices and the sheer outrageousness of the point he conveys in the satirical essay. When portraying his argument, Swift first uses an appeal to logic.

An example of a logical argument used in his essay is "I believe no Gentleman would repine to give Ten Shillings for the Carcass of a good fat Child, which, as I have said will make four Dishes of excellent Nutritive Meat (Swift, Paragraph 14)." He argues the case for the Irish children to be used as food. He uses facts and statistics to confirm this point. On the surface, he makes a convincing argument for this. He uses the fact that there would be high-quality meat gained from eating a fat child and implies that the benefits would outweigh the costs because of how cheap the meat would be. Of course, the idea of eating a child and thinking of them as "nutritive meat" is absurd. However, the point of Swift's appeal to logic is to convey to his audience how logical arguments can be twisted to suit the agenda of the speaker. By taking issues at their face value and accepting logical arguments without contextual evidence, you cannot accept the full breadth of a situation. He appeals to the logical nature of the readers and forces them to consider the wider connotations of the Irish famine.

By using a logically sound argument to justify the eating of children, he uses humor to educate the British about what was going on in Ireland. This shock tactic is a ploy because he develops his own 'supposed solution' based on hard facts. But rather he wants the British to think up a solution for the various problems facing the Irish. Swift also evokes emotion in his argument that the Irish should eat their children. "But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of Success, I, fortunately, fell upon this Proposal, which as it is wholly new, so it hath something Solid and Real, of no expense and little Trouble, full in our own Power, and whereby we can incur no Danger in disobliging England." (Swift, Paragraph 17.) From this excerpt, we can see that he draws attention to himself and mentions England as a way of stirring up feelings of patriotic pride. He wants the readers to feel sorry for him and explains that this miraculous new proposal

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will give fresh meaning to his life. He also uses emotion in a more covert way. His whole narrative is designed to provoke an emotional reaction in the audience which is the British public. When they see this farcical argument being posed, they are forced to feel empathy for the Irish population in general and will tend to want to see what can be done to ease the situation. From the quote, we can also see that he hints that having Irish children being eaten will not be an affront to England.

In other words, he is trying to justify his argument by saying it would be fine for England. Of course, any sane person would not think it is justified, however, they are forced to consider why an extreme proposal like this needs to be considered in the first place. They would then consider their own feelings about the situation. Smith masterfully evokes emotion in the audience in a direct satirical way that is layered with deep meaning. Smith also successfully uses ethos in his argument. He makes a compelling case that he indeed is a person that should be listened to and therefore his proposal has great merit. An example that conveys this is “A very worthy Person, a true Lover of his Country, and whose Virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my Scheme.” (Smith, Paragraph 17) Here he discusses that another person who he values very highly also engaged in discussion with the argument. He, therefore, boosts his own argument and tells the reader he is a person who has value and a strong proposal. He gives us proof of his credibility.

The deeper ethos meaning hidden behind that is that Smith believes that someone being credible does not automatically make them right. He uses this outlandish argument to show how even credible people can present arguments that may seem rational on the surface, but the ones that are however very wrong. Overall, he uses blatant rhetorical devices in a satirical manner to emphasize how they can be used by others to make false arguments that seem to make sense. By displaying his tone in such a humorous and outright outlandish way, he engages the audience fully and forces them to consider their own stance on the problems facing Ireland and Britain’s role. The purpose of the essay is obviously not to present a valid argument for the Irish eating their children. But it is to display this grim situation in its fully bare form, by making arguments that are both plausible and rational. If arguments such as these can be made, then the reader will obviously feel that something must be done about the problems in Ireland. Smith is therefore successful with his purpose.

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