
Analyzing the Concept of Elusive

The beginning of the eighteenth century witnessed the establishment of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, and a gradual retraction of the civil rights of Roman Catholics (Papists). The Anglican minority took measures to enrich and empower itself through various policies, including mercantilism, which relied on the devaluation of a country's goods to increase its exports. This rush to increase trade value came with the price of rapid impoverishing of the working class. Moreover, the laborer was considered part of a country's capital, and no child was too young to go to work. In his satirical work "A Modest Proposal" Anglo-Irish essayist Jonathan Swift responds to the dilemma of the nation's proliferating indigent masses in a parody of the autocratic landlords of his time. He introduces a method of putting the begging mothers to productive employment, and their children to the purpose of the gratification of landlords. Conning an unwavering loyalty to his perverted scheme and drenching every word in reasonableness, Swift demonstrates his mastery in satire and effectively shocks, captivates and entertains the readers. If his support were not lacking in credibility (or his scheme in practicability), his tactful, persuasive style would leave few readers unconvinced.

In light of the socio-economic problems in Ireland, Swift adopts a can-do attitude and describes how, through deliberation, reasoning, and collecting information about Ireland's population and customs, he has seen the perfect way out: namely, by breeding unproductive and burdensome children for the purpose of providing food to the upper class, and a means of income to the mothers. There would be numerous uses for this dish of infant flesh; it could be served in every season, to any sort of dinner guests or with any dressing that best suits the family. This proposition would be beneficial to all classes of people in Ireland, and many similar examples from other countries exist to support the practice. The objections or alternatives to the proposal are not worth consideration.

Undaunted by the sheer absurdity of his plan, Swift achieves coherence in his organization of ideas and support through formal patterning, and executes an ingenious development to stimulate strong response in the reader. His methodical arrangement of reckonings and computations prevent logical conflicts from weakening his propositions or diluting his act of being a well-informed authority on the subject. He progresses in a systematic presentation of facts, his proposal, its method, and its advantages, following the author's reasoning process and making his essay comprehensive. Nevertheless, he manages to employ sustained irony to its best effect and the reader is shocked by what he is least expecting from a self-proclaimed patriot: that a child is a "delicious nourishing and wholesome food".

In the same assertive vein, Swift satisfies his audience with regard to the practicability and benefits of his proposal by presenting a multitude of mathematical, analytical and external support, while this serious persistence has the dual effect of amusing and outraging the reader. After providing a brief introduction to the economic conditions of Ireland that calls out for sympathy and concern, he zeroes in on his proposal by first offering statistics relevant to his problem at hand: namely, how to provide for "a hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born". Such numbers, while giving him the officious air he desires, imply that he is not 'fooling around'. They materialize the concerns of Ireland and the possibility of benefitting by his scheme. His suggestions that 'twenty thousand may be reserved for breed'

and the rest 'be offered in sale to persons of quality and fortune' are a mocking representation of the attitude of the wealthy toward the outnumbering poor, and the shock and fury they induce is comparable to the protestations against the violation of Human Rights.

Furthermore, Swift is conversational yet formal, clearly addressing the educated ruling class, and by means of subtle yet effective literary devices, he pulls off an admirable Juvenalian satire that lends the element of fascination to a social and political theme probably propagated to redundancy the serious way. Unlike contemporary revolutionary work sensationalizing the injustice toward the poor, Swift impersonates the class of people he means to upbraid, and in the style of the traditional Roman satire, he derides the reforms he wishes to suggest. This conflicting personality successfully exposes the outlook of the ruling class to the disinterested reader, while subjecting the perpetrators of the injustice to utmost ridicule and contempt. A reaction of shock and horror at the indecency of his proposition is followed by eye-widening wonder at his nerve to carry the exploitation of the working classes so grossly out of proportion. At the same time, stating metaphorically that since the autocrats "have already devoured most of the parents," they are entitled to the children, vividly suggests how the present conditions approximate the unthinkable.

Besides using a cleverly contrasting style, Swift combines the language of politics and economics to model the manipulative and shrewd approach of people toward the poor, and remarkably, through his apathy, influences striking unrestrained response from his reader. Coolly advising "buying the children alive and dressing them hot from the knife", he paints a lurid image through an unconventional attribution of predicate to the object. Replacing "children" by "pigs" in the above example creates a very flat, lifeless statement. Similar instances of the use of phrases from animal husbandry such as, "their flesh was generally tough and lean...and their taste disagreeable" heightens disgust and horror. Swift's professional advisory style is out of place with his 'modest' proposal, and for some, this may leave an unpleasant, sinister impression of human perversion. Swift is not to be taken seriously yet his manner stresses that the inflexibility of the boundaries of social acceptability is not to be dismissed.

Most of the outrage of the reader is a result of the solemn and earnest tone in which Swift proposes his solution. The unfaltering formal gravity of his narration conveys the extent of serious contemplation he has devoted to his theory and is one of the elements of his essay that create antagonism for the scheming attitude of the ruling class. Moreover his characteristic and persistent air of rationality depict the fact that the Aristocrats of his day were not only bent on achieving prosperity through the drudgery of the lower class, but were also blissfully unaware of the moral and ethical implications of employing exploitive means to achieve their end.

Along with distaste and revulsion it may induce in the average reader, "A Modest Proposal" also questions the depths to which human nature is capable of sinking to secure personal gains. Swift seems comfortable with the assumption that every Landlord would be able to 'stomach' the reform without a conscience and that every progenerating mother would bargain her flesh and blood. Since Swift doesn't spare rich or poor from the sarcastic implication of corruption, he is condemning the whole Irish nation to the verdict of moral degeneration. There are exceptions and nonconformities to every human stereotype, and Swift himself gives an excellent example by differing from other Anglo-Irish of his time.

Undoubtedly, Swift's Proposal has beguiled and impressed critics, readers and literature buffs

alike for generations with its innovative and inspirational technique. His text embodies the ironic but often true phenomenon that the wrong means might sometimes be essential for achieving the right end. Hence he utilizes his advantage by birth and education to join ranks with the discontented masses and lampoon the conduct of the upper classes. Jonathan Swift was not the first or the last of his kind. What makes his work stand out among the rest of the nationalistic prose is his mischievous contrariness and subtle symbolism, and his assimilation of the Irish spirit of optimism, unaffected, as he illustrates, by a surprisingly great extent of depravity.

Works Cited

Swift, Jonathan. "A Modest Proposal." *A Modest Proposal and Other Satires*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1995. Print.

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