

# Example by StudyDriver

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## Awe of a Modest Proposal Example

In 1729, Jonathon Swift intended on setting the British Isles on fire with his short story A Modest Proposal For preventing the Children of Poor People From being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and For making them Beneficial to the Publick, or more commonly known as A Modest Proposal. First published anonymously in 1729, A Modest Proposal is an essay that, on the surface, suggests that to in order to ease the country of economic hardships, the Irish should sell their children to the rich as food. Not only does Jonathon Swift challenge the way people viewed satire, Swifts influence would change the genre for future satirists.

While the aristocratic Brits and the royalty dined on steak and sipped vintage wines, the poor in Ireland were starving. First published anonymously in 1729, the essay quickly made the rounds of the British elite, some even responding to Swift. In A Modest Proposal, Swift unleashes his anger, not only at the British exploitation of his home country Ireland but at his fellow countrymen who were doing nothing to stop the exploitation as well.

The opening paragraph describes the streets of Ireland in a fashion that would make the most rational person not ever want to visit the emerald isle, It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex,

followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. (Puchner, 315), Swift often wrote about how everyone in Ireland was miserable and poor. From there, Swift keeps his attack squarely on the wretched Irish. Meant to light a fire in his countrymen, sadly, his message fell flat with the Irish and a century later the country would be struck with the potato famine, losing many Irish in the process.

While his message fell on deaf ears in his home country, the aristocrats found it to be quite humorous. Lord Bathurst responded to Swift with an equal amount of satire and humor, The more I think upon this scheme, the more reasonable it appears to me; and it ought by no means to be confined to Ireland; for, in all probability, we shall, in a very little time, be altogether as poor here as you are there. (Swift, 316). Despite his countrymen's lack of inspiration and the people he was lampooning finding humor in his words, the essay was a commercial success, as well as a lasting success.

Social and political satire was nothing new when Swift published *A Modest Proposal*. But what makes Swift's essay powerful and lasting is the painstaking detail that he uses, as well as his inspiration for his work. In the 1700s, political pamphleteering was a popular way for people to get their voices heard regarding any political or social situations. Short essays regarding economics or political protests were passed out or sold to the people walking the streets, we see this today with organizations fighting the powerful corporations. Swift used the popular political pamphlets as a framework for his proposal. Swift follows the style and method of the pamphlet; the intention was that the reader would take the intended message seriously.

Inside, the reader would find grand statistics about how many people have children, how many of those survive, and how many should be eaten, the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table (Puchner, 316). These kinds of statistics made the essay seem not only legitimate, but it also showed that Swift had seriously thought this out, which gives the essay a grim feel.

In addition to the statistics, Swift also appeals to the reader's emotions by tossing in an American's expertise on

the subject, 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 nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust. (Puchner, 316). By adding the expert opinion of an American, it helps legitimize the essay, we were the savages of the developed world, people might have thought this to be a serious essay. Another aspect of the essay that helps make it legitimate is in the last paragraph, Swift says that he cant make any money of this, because his children are too old to be sold, so by this, the reader is reminded of the authors sincerity.

Swifts influence could be felt in literature, and beyond. In literature, his influence can be seen in books like *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain, or works by T.S. Eliot. The lasting effect of Swifts satire and parody can be seen today in television shows like *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, and *Last Week Tonight*. In *The Colbert Show*, the show that Swift has the most obvious influence, the host Stephen Colbert, satirized the far-right talking heads like Bill OReilly or Geraldo Rivera, by taking their self-important ego driven shows and turning it into a joke. He would deliver the news, but like OReilly or Rivera, it would be with a hard-right stance, and behind him would be images of eagles and waving flags.

Jonathan Swifts political satire is a direct influence on todays television shows like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*.

While *A Modest Proposal* might not have been the powder keg explosion that Jonathan Swift had hoped for, but in the long run, his influence is apparent in todays culture. Take a look at any comment section on a news article or a YouTube video and you are reminded of the biting satire of Jonathan Swift, though the words might not be as smart as Jonathan Swifts were. Not only did Jonathon Swift challenge the way people viewed satire by parodying the look and framework of political pamphlets of the day, Swifts influence would change the genre for future satirists.