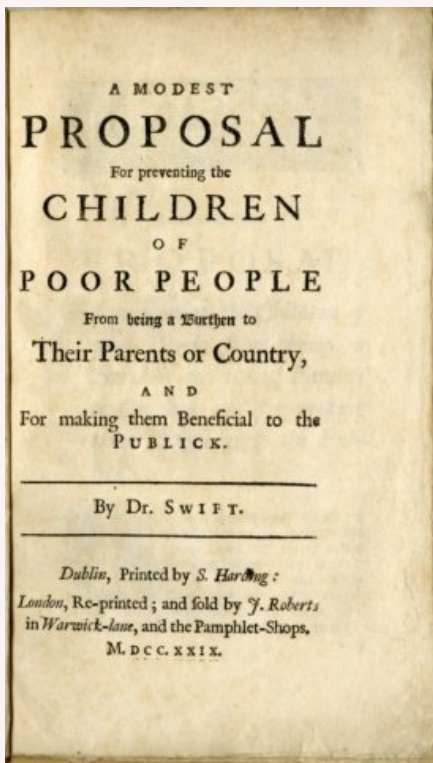


Cover



About this satirical essay

- First published as a pamphlet in 1729 by Jonathan Swift
- Full title: "A modest proposal for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or country and for making them beneficial to the public"
- GRAMPS
- Genre: Satirical essay
- Register: Formal
- Audience: Intelligentsia (educated, political classes familiar with the political essay genre).
- Mode: Writing for a publication
- Purpose: To amuse (outrageous) and to raise awareness of serious famine and poverty in Ireland.
- Subject: Swift's **literal** argument is that the poor Irish should sell their children as food to solve their poverty. His **satirical** argument is that the wealthy landowners 'devoured' the Irish with their cruelty.

Discourse & Structure

Discourse: (1) written or spoken communicate or debate. (2) speak or write authoritatively about a topic.

Written in **first person**

Swift uses a **humble mode of address*, referring to his idea as a "modest proposal", and repeating the adverb "humbly" ("I do therefore humbly offer").

However, he portrays a **deep-seated conceit** by his taste for **elaborate grammatical constructions** and by his **lack of empathy**.

The essay has the **structure of a rational argument** with **each paragraph adding a further step in the logical progression**.

The author seeks to **win our trust** by first **establishing the severity** of the problem before **revealing the true nature of the proposal** (see the first two paragraphs in particular).

Pragmatics

Pragmatics: the branch of linguistics dealing with language in use and the contexts in which it is used, including such matters as deixis, the taking of turns in conversation, text organisation, presupposition, and implicature.

As it is a **satirical essay**, Swift must rely on his readers recognising that he does not mean what he says.

However, the satire is all the more effective for being delivered with **unfaltering conviction**.

Being published anonymously would have enhanced the effect (but it wasn't).

The extract of this anthology text that OCR gave us has missed the section where the author dismisses more realistic options that Swift implies ought to be on the agenda.

I'm not sure if this'll help in your exam but no marks would be lost by mentioning it.

Grammar & Syntax

Syntax: the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.

Complex sentences, often with **two or more subordinate clauses**.

Use of **subordinate clauses** to disguise the *outrageousness of the main declarative clauses*. ("I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London")

Conjunction: A word used to connect clauses or sentences or to coordinate words in the same clause (e.g. "and", "but", "if")

Subordinate clause: a clause, typically introduced by a conjunction, that forms part of (and is dependent on) a main clause. (E.g. "when it rang" in "she answered the phone when it rang")

Attitudes & Values

People continue to speculate over whether satire ever changes anything: **the desperate situation in Ireland didn't change as a result of Swift's essay**.

It could be judged purely on exercise of its humour- "A Modest Proposal" continues to be one **regarded as one of the most remarkable satires in English Literature**.

But it also remains potent as a challenge to the arrogance and lack of empathy among politicians, academics and others with vested interests.

It poses the necessary question, *if this isn't the answer, then what is?*