



The Expression of Social Problems of the Period in Jonathan Swift's Works

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Abstract: This paper reviews the problems and events which happened in the 18th century, in short it investigates the social, economical life and political view of the period. The major social problem that represented is poverty, and how the poor are an eyesore for the people of Ireland as well as a financial burden. Writers of the time did a different approach, keeping in mind the total aim is to show their point of view with how their country is being run and the nation's lack of voice on the best way to eliminate the social issues that are influencing it.

Key words: misanthrope, poverty, sophisticated satire, social life, economical life, political view, critique, pamphlet, literary heritage.

Introduction. Swift's first major prose work "A Tale of a Tub" shows a plenty of themes and stylistic techniques which were used in his later works. It is both wildly playful and funny while being highlighted and harshly critical of its targets. In its main thread, the Tale illustrates the exploits of three sons, representing the main threads of Christianity, who receive a heritage from their father of a coat each. However, the sons soon discover that their coats have fallen out of current fashion, and begin to look for loopholes in their father's will that will let them make the needed modifications. As each finds his own means of getting around their dad's warning, they struggle with each other for power and dominance. Inserted into this story, in alternating chapters, the narrator includes a series of strange "digressions" on various subjects.

An Irish author, clergyman and satirist Jonathan Swift grew up fatherless. Under the care of his uncle, he received a bachelor's degree from Trinity College and then worked as a statesman's assistant. Eventually, he became dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Most of his works were published under pseudonyms. He best remembered for his 1726 book Gulliver's Travels.

Swift was born in Dublin on November 30, 1667. His father died when he was only 2 months old. His mother was a strong woman she managed to carry her children without any stable income. Unfortunately, Swift was a sick and weak child.

Later Swift attended Trinity College after graduating from the college he received the degree of BA. He met Temple's housekeeper's daughter Esther. She was just 8 years old girl. Despite the age they became lovers later. He was her tutor teacher and master of life. She had a nickname Stella.

He published many satirical works of verse and prose, including "A Tale of a Tub", "A Modest Proposal" and most popular one "Gulliver's Travels".

At the end of his life he lost the ability to speak and he suffered from a stroke. On October 19, 1747 he died. He was buried next to Esther Johnson in Patrick's Cathedral.

In 1690, Sir William Temple, Swift's patron, published "An Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning" a defense of classical writing. William Wotton responded to Temple with "Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning" in 1694.

"Gulliver's Travels" is regarded as his masterpiece. As with his other writings the work was published under a pseudonym, the fictional Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon and later a sea captain. Though it has often been mistakenly considered as a children's book, it is a great and sophisticated satire of human nature based on Swift's experience of his times. Each of the four books recounting four voyages to mostly-fictional exotic lands has a different theme, but all are attempts to deflate human pride. Gulliver's Travels, a misanthropic satire of humanity, was written in 1726 by Jonathan Swift. Like many other authors, Swift uses the journey as the backdrop for his satire.

In 1729, Swift published "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public", it is a satire in which the narrator, with intentionally strange logic, recommends that Ireland's poor escape their poverty by selling their children as food to the rich: "I was sure about American of my acquaintance in London, that a year old young healthy well-nursed child is a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food".

Swift is best known for Gulliver's Travels and A Modest Proposal. He originally published all of his works under pseudonyms such as Lemuel Gulliver, Isaac Bickerstaff, M. B. Drapier or anonymously.

For the majority of his life, Swift was a victim of Meniere's disease, which affects balance and hearing and causes nausea and dizziness. When Swift was about 72 years old, his disease began to keep him from his duties and social life. He became withdrawn and deeply depressed. Swift died in October 1745. He was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he had worked as dean.

Swift was a great friend of Alexander Pope, a fellow satirist best known for "Rape of the Lock." In a letter to Pope, Swift once called himself a misanthrope, but it seems more likely that he was simply frustrated by people who chose not to use the logic and reason they possessed.

The major social problem that Swift addresses is poverty, and how the poor are an eyesore for the people of Ireland as well as a financial burden.

Swift did a different approach, keeping in mind the end aim is to show his point of view with how Ireland is being run and the nation's lack of voice on the best way to eliminate the social issues that are influencing it. Swift immediately starts to address the issue of poverty in Ireland by discussing the poor families with numerous children. He expresses that "whoever could open a reasonable, shoddy, and simple techniques for influencing these children sound and helpful individuals from the federation would merit so well of the general population as to have a statue setup".

Perhaps one of the most contemporary social issues that Jonathan Swift satirizes in "Gulliver's Travels" is the status of the highly educated in society and their usefulness in practical life.

What social issues found in Gulliver's travels would be considered important in our present day society? What would Swift say about these present day issues?

Perhaps one of the most contemporary social issues that Jonathan Swift satirizes in Gulliver's Travels is the status of the highly educated in society and their usefulness in practical life.

This issue of the distance between the society's intelligence and real world problems that need to be solved is one that we deal with in the present day. It is apparent, though, from Swift's dislike of the intellectual elite in Gulliver's Travels that he thinks intellectuals are hopelessly far from reality and useless for everyday life.

Jonathan Swift wrote perceptively about the emerging commercial society in Britain in the early eighteenth century. His particular focus was on the financial revolution and its implications for economic and political stability as well as for shifts of power between the landed and commercial classes. Following his return to Ireland Swift's focus shifted to the developmental problems of his native country. Swift's politico-economic concerns are fully reflected in his best known work,

Gulliver's Travels but his most pointed criticism of the emerging commercial system is contained in A Modest Proposal.

In reading Swift's poems, one is first impressed with their apparent spareness of allusion and poetic device. A few recent critics have carefully studied his use of allusion and image, but with only partial success. In general, Swift's verses read faster than John Dryden's or Alexander Pope's, with much less ornamentation and masked wit. He apparently intends to sweep the reader along by the logic of the argument to the several conclusions he puts forth. He seems to expect that the reader will appreciate the implications of the argument as a whole, after one full and rapid reading. For Swift's readers, the couplet will not revolve slowly upon itself, exhibiting intricate patterns and fixing complex relationships between fictive worlds and contemporary life.

Swift, in the persona of a learned scientist, attempts to tackle the chronic problem of over-population in Ireland. In turn, this problem leads to lots of other problems, such as poverty, starvation, and an excess number of Roman Catholics.

Jonathan Swift's poems are not always as spare in reality as Swift would have his readers believe, but he seems deliberately to induce in them an unwillingness to look closely at the poems for evidence of technical expertise. He does this in part by working rather obviously against some poetic conventions, in part by saying openly that he rejects poetic cant, and in part by presenting himself—in many of his poems—as a perfectly straightforward man, incapable of a poet's deviousness. By these strategies, he directs attention away from his handling of imagery and meter, even in those instances where he has been technically ingenious. One could argue that Swift's poems create a density of another kind: that "The Day of Judgement," for example, initiates a subtle process of thought that takes place after, rather than during, the reading of the poem, at a time when the mind is more or less detached from the printed page. One could argue as well that Swift makes up in power what he lacks in density: that the strength of the impression created by his directness gives an impetus to prolonged meditation of a very high quality. On these grounds, valuing Swift for what he really is and does, one must judge him a major figure in poetry as well as prose.

Swift had been ordained as a priest in the Church of Ireland in 1694 and received a Doctor of Divinity degree from Trinity College Dublin in 1702. While he was part of the inner circle of the Tory government in England, Swift had entertained hopes that he would be rewarded with an important Church appointment in England. Perhaps because his early satirical work "A Tale of a Tub" had raised questions about the nature of Swift's Christian beliefs, he was not so favored. As a result, in 1714, Swift returned to Ireland to take up the Deanship of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, a position he occupied until his death in 1745. For nearly six years after taking up the post of Dean, Swift published very little. At this point, he was not entirely reconciled to the prospect of living permanently in Ireland and thought his interests would best be served by avoiding any involvement in political controversy. However, as the Irish economy plunged into crisis towards the end of the second decade of the century, Swift found it impossible to remain silent. In 1720, he published "A Proposal for the universal Use of Irish Manufactures". This was the first of Swift's tracts on Ireland which were to establish his credentials as a great Irish patriot. The tract which was published anonymously urged people to boycott imports and to use only products of Irish provenance. However, Swift's main arguments were political rather than economic.

"Gulliver's Travels", first published in 1726, has been variously described as a novel, a fiction, a satire of human nature and a parody of travel writing including Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe.

What Swift is describing here is a society in which people's basic needs are met through the sale and purchase of commodities.

The fourth part of "Gulliver's Travels" also contains Swift's condemnation of Colonialism. Gulliver explains why he has not taken the steps which would allow the king to take possession of the territories he has 'discovered'.

In "A Modest Proposal" Swift expresses the ideas for preventing the children of poor people from being a burthen to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public. The work,

which is widely acknowledged to be amongst the finest satirical essays in the English language, is written in the form of an economic pamphlet and employs the methodology of political arithmetic to make its case that poverty could be alleviated in Ireland if the children of the poor were sold, aged one, as food for the rich.

As noted above, the “Modest Proposal” is in the form of an economic pamphlet and parodies the style used in proposals made by contemporary economic projectors. Several authors including Wittkowsky, Letwin, Hoppit and Phiddian have pointed to Swift’s parodying of political arithmetic.

We know from his comments in “The Battle of the Books” (1704) and in Book III of *Gulliver’s Travels* that Swift had strong views about the limitations of human rationality and particularly mathematics. Nonetheless, he was also aware that the use of numbers could give an argument the appearance of objectivity and impartiality. Part of the effectiveness of the “A Modest Proposal” derives from this appearance. The proposer comes across as rational and reasonable. He demonstrates that his project will be beneficial for all concerned even the children sold for food. There is no doubt that Swift was concerned about the condition of Ireland and the dysfunctional nature of its institutions in third decade of the eighteenth century. However, as George Wittkowsky argued there is good reason to believe that, in writing the “Modest Proposal”, Swift had in mind “theories as well as a condition”. The view of “The Modest Proposal” had a moral rather than a political purpose is supported by Herbert Davis. He argues that while, at first sight, it looks like political satire, this is not in fact the case. Swift, realizing he has no longer any power as a politician, appeals to the conscience of mankind. As far as Swift was concerned, all of this showed in practice that private vices did not give rise to results that were beneficial to the public. While it is consistent with his wider views on financial matters, Swift’s opposition to the setting up of the Bank of Ireland is difficult to justify economically. In practice, however, Swift’s opposition came late and probably had little impact. Although economic writers of the early eighteenth century may not have viewed the economy as a self-regulating system, an understanding of the importance of incentives was becoming quite widespread. In *A Modest Proposal* and in his economic and historical writings, Swift showed a keen awareness both of the incentives created by various policies and institutions and how these influenced outcomes.

Despite his role as the leading advocate on behalf of Irish manufactures, Swift was more than ready to criticize producers for failing to improve their products and their custom of cheating either as to prices or goodness. Swift’s advice to the weavers was that they should try to improve the reputation of their goods. According to Swift, the greatest damage to the kingdom, that is to say Ireland had been the result of a few manufacturers imposing bad ware on foreign markets thereby ruining the trade. Everybody thinks that his own decision is unimportant because he is only one of many among whom the loss is equally shared but everyone thinking in this way leads to serious consequences for which in Swift’s view the only remedy lay in the generation of public spirit.¹

Swift’s greatest strength as a political economist lay in his exceptional grasp of the interaction between economic and political power structures. He was amongst the first to appreciate that the emerging financial institutions had important implications for the nature of political power and political stability. In the current financial crisis, political questions have begun to be posed about regulatory failure and political capture. Swift sometimes wrote as if he believed that politicians developed the financial interest with a view to creating a constituency which would maintain them in power which might possibly have been going too far. Swift would not have been surprised by political capture. He would have been surprised that anyone would expect otherwise. Because satire requires the identification of internal contradictions, the art of the satirist requires the grasping of wholes, parts and their dynamics in the manner of a comprehensive social science. It would seem, however, that it was attitudes such as this that drove Swift to write “The Modest Proposal”, the greatest of his satires. “The Modest Proposal” can be regarded as saying if you really want to do something to solve the problem of poverty and unemployment while changing nothing much this is

¹ “Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World”. The Barnes & Noble Review.

the sort of thing you can do. You may think this is nonsense but your own proposals are just as monstrous because they will achieve nothing at all.

It is generally accepted that “Gulliver’s Travels” is written as a parody of travel books but there is disagreement in the literature about the extent to which a critique of travel books was part of its purpose. The same applies to “The Modest Proposal”. Although the “Proposal” is a parody of contemporary economic writing, the economic form is merely the vehicle and not itself the main subject of the critique. Regardless of the view taken on this question, there can be no doubt that Swift was aware that the emerging forms of economic analysis involving quantification and consequential reasoning meant that moral issues could be ignored. By his choice of subject matter, Swift placed them central stage. In doing so, whether by design or otherwise, he produced not only a critique of the voluminous contemporary pamphlet literature advocating various improvements but also the finest critique of consequentialism that ever has been written.

In conclusion, Jonathan Swift was a great writer that could express and show the problems of society such as poverty, unstable taxing system and so on in his works. He used pseudonyms, such as Lemuel Gulliver, Isaac Bickerstaff, M. B. Drapier, or just wrote anonymously. His deadpan, ironic writing style, particularly in “A Modest Proposal”, has led to such satire being subsequently termed “Swiftian”. Perhaps one of the most contemporary social issues that Jonathan Swift satirizes in “Gulliver’s Travels” is the status of the highly educated in society and their usefulness in practical life. In fourth part of this work he expresses usefulness of practical time. There we can see scholars that make foolish decisions on constructing a house or planting vegetables. But they are very smart. Moral is their smart, abilities are useless. In my opinion, Jonathan Swift saw hard childhood that’s why he tried to help other homeless, sick and poor children and people. He tried to help them by showing their problems and how the government neglected their problems.

The major social problem that Swift addresses is poverty, and how the poor are an eyesore for the people of Ireland as well as a financial burden. Swift did a different approach, keeping in mind the total aim is to show his point of view with how Ireland is being run and the nation’s lack of voice on the best way to eliminate the social issues that are influencing it. Swift starts by taunting and blaming the moms of the children by saying that if they are capable of finding work they should instead of asking for money. Swift, created the essay, “A Modest Proposal” as a sarcastic way to show people that they are not showing any interest or even coming up with working plans to decrease these social problems, for example, fetus removal, overpopulation, and poorness. Through his terribly twisted idea of savagery to take care of the problems of Ireland he can express what is on his mind.

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