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ENG 1050

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Summary of “ A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift

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Part I: Summary of Swift’s “A Modest Proposal”

"A Modest Proposal" is an essay written by Dr. Jonathan Swift in 1729. In the essay, Swift addresses the issue of poverty in Ireland and proposes a shocking and absurd solution to solve the problem and the burden of poor families. As we read through the essay we come to find out that his proposition is to have all of the children be sold, like livestock. Even comparing an infant and its delicacy to fish "Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after; for we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet" He also goes into a lot of detail on just how much each would cost even betting on the richer gentleman of the world to be very keen on getting on board with the proposition, " I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per 19 dear: expensive. prolific diet: prolific diet; commonly eaten. annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine" also talking about how the skin of the unfortunate ones would make for good clothing. " the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen." leading to him inferring that now that most of the men there have hunted about all of the deer, that the solution would be the human children as stated. "He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve; so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve for want of work and service. Stating that they would be used for boots and gloves and possibly other accessories from the children, as it says here." Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flea²² the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen." He later goes into stating that some other place may sell carcasses for even cheaper and from this we can assume that this wouldn't be highly available to the lower class. We can infer from the text that it would be most likely for mid to high class established families ." I calculate that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses; and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand." It is even left to us to infer that Ireland isn't doing so well on rations (food) either given that the Propagation of Swine's Flesh: The proposal's mention of the propagation of swine's flesh symbolizes the attempt to find alternative sources of food in the face of scarcity. To the point that they're even thinking of using human children as the food source.

