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Prospectus for “A Modest Proposal” Hoax Analysis

I want to write my research paper about “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift. I would like to investigate what effect the time period in which “A Modest Proposal” was written had on not only the believability, but also the outrage caused by the paper. I find this piece of literature interesting because of the politics of the time, as well as Swift’s personal agenda, and the fact that they play such a large role in this piece of writing. Satire is often written for some political agenda, and this is a prime example, but was also a hoax because people took Swift’s preposterous ideas seriously.

People often read pieces of literature but do not learn about the context or time period they were written in. At the heart of Swift’s views was his distain for England’s policy towards the Irish, as he was Irish himself. Under the umbrella of this historical analysis, I will be able to investigate several avenues of the story’s believability and political statement. This will include background information about the conflicts between the English and the Irish, evidence of Swift’s personal political agenda, histories of satires and hoaxes similar to “A Modest Proposal,” the contribution of literary tactics and structure towards the believeability, and how the reader could have seen that it was meant to be a satirical work and not view it as realistic. These questions all lead back to the central theme and purpose of “A Modest Proposal.” Swifts craftiness and writing skill are also further emphasized through this type of close historical and literary analysis of this piece of writing.

At its core, this hoax is meant to be a political statement. That is essential to an effective reading of this literary work. It is also necessary to understanding why people took this writing seriously and did not immediately see it as satire, which made it into a hoax.

In terms of sources, there is a wide variety of things that I can look at. This obviously includes a close examination of the text itself, as well as scholarly analysis of the literary tactics that Swift employed to add a layer of believability to the paper. I will also use sources that provide the historical context under which this paper was written. This type of source and its analysis will likely take up the majority of my paper, because understanding the history of “A Modest Proposal” is extremely important in understanding the paper itself. More specifically, I will examine the politics that Swift was playing into, and the ones that made him upset enough to write the paper. Towards the end, I also hope to expound on the implications of this story on politics and Swift’s fame, especially after people discovered that it was a hoax and meant to be satirical. It’s also possible that I will explain what made the paper so popular, even for modern day readers.

I feel that writing this paper will provide a holistic analysis of “A Modest Proposal,” which will help me, and potentially other readers, to gain a higher level of understanding and knowledge about Swift’s paper. I personally get more enjoyment and am much more likely to retain the information presented in the paper if I am provided with context about the paper. Furthermore, the support for the Irish that swift presents through his writing made him a renowned figure in Ireland, even in modern times. His writing has had a profound impact on satire and politics, especially around the time that his writing was published.