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Hoaxes in Literature

11/17/15

Research Paper Outline

Intro: (Good intro stuff with catchy phrases and accurate punctuation)

Working Thesis: When understood within its surrounding historical and social context, Swift’s proposal can no longer be viewed as an intentional hoax.

Paragraph 1: (Close reading of the problem in the proposal), (I plan to revise this a lot but it is a start)

“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.”

Swift sets the scene for his proposal using indicative and compelling ideas to establish an authoritative ethos. In particular, the words crowded, beggars, rags, and alms project an overarching sense on poverty in his address. He provides many examples of this poverty in order to strengthen his original observation about the melancholic state of affairs in the town and country. His observation carries significance as it is the first thing he mentions in his work. It indicates that he will use his observation as evidence supporting a broader point later in the essay because he gives the reader a logical rationale to understand his argument. He mentions beggars of the female sex in particular, signifying the importance of the distinction between the levels of poverty between males and females. He draws on this distinction by mentioning children, adding motherly characteristics to the beggars and once again, sets up evidence supporting a later argument. He uses both the images of poverty and the abundance of children to offer a comprehensive solution to the melancholic situation at hand. The children, he proposes, should be used as food to feed starving people, eliminating both of the problems he presents in the first sentence.

Paragraph 2: (Historical Background)

TC: Swift’s perspective of the problems facing 19th century Ireland compares closely with historical research.

* The poverty in Ireland resulted from the potato famine: “To deal with diseased potatoes, the Irish peasant was to provide himself with a rasp or grater… a pail… for water, and a griddle” in order to strain them into a “dry pulp” in order to make bread (Smith 45-46).
* Swift compares this level of extreme desperation to his ideals by stating that “a well-grown, fat, yearling child, which roasted while will make a considerable figure at a lord mayor’s feast” (Swift).
* The Irish looked for other supplemental sources of food but their other options were “very liable to sweating and over-heating” making it important for the cargoes to “be taken out of the holds and ground at once” (Smith 64).
* Swift provides a much more feasible source of food than importing foreign crops from countries like the United States: “Infant’s flesh will be in season throughout the year” (Swift).

Paragraph 3: (Over population)

Similar to the potato famine, over population contributed to the overwhelming disparity of the country, giving Swift another pigeonhole to ground his proposal.

* Swift plays on a common assumption that “people are the riches of a nation” to show that “here, at least, was one country where populousness was not a virtue” (Landa 165).
* Swift once again offers a solution: “I do therefore humbly offer it to the public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed” (Swift).
* However in making this claim, Swift reveals his first self-contraction. He assumes that people are no longer the wealth of the country by offering them as food. When viewed holistically, Swift proposes that the children be consumed for the preservation of the Irish people. In his carful calculations, he weighs the lives lost from the consumed infants with the deaths from starvation and concludes that eating people results in less of it. Therefore, he still maintains the notion that people are the most important thing to a countries prosperity. This notion is so extreme, in fact, that he claims that eating other people is the best way to save a majority of the population.

Paragraph 4: (Swifts writing in context)

The nature of Swift’s ideas when compared with other similar proposals from the time look legitimate.

* According to Peter M. Briggs, (Insert Crdentials here) “Swift imitated the style and methods of argument of early pamphleteers in order to hold up to public view their implicit values” (1).
* He used similar writing techniques and marketing styles to try and mimic the success of earlier writers, John Graunt and William Petty.
* However, Briggs continues by suggesting that “To notice the relative equality of the abilities of Graunt, Petty, and Swift allows a new and different appreciation of the parodic relations among their writings and in particular the complex exchange of energies between original documents and parodic doubles.”
* Since Swift’s proposal followed the other two, his ideas stem from Petty’s and Graunt’s actions. He aims to present his ideas credibly with an authoritative tone by making very logical and step by step arguments. He incorporates evidence in his proposal, basing his arguments off factual reasons.

Paragraph 5: (The Hoax unravels)

Despite his attempts to present his hoax in a believable way, Swift’s work fails as a convincing hoax.

* While Swift mimics the style of credible pamphleteer’s, “the interplay between pre-text and its parody, simultaneously paired and opposed, establishes an unstable irony” which reveals the fraud in his work (Briggs).
* Phiddian claims that “The *Modest Proposal* is simply too aggressively alienating to be a successful as a hoax” and offers that we stop viewing at as such (605).
* While Swift’s textual rhetoric indicates that he wants people to start eating children to prevent starvation, his work has two voices making options in the proposal: “the reader must to distinguish between Swift’s voice and the proposers” (Phiddian 608). Therefore, swift’s intentions don’t necessarily align with the voice of the proposal. Instead the Proposer’s words indicate Swift’s perception of the magnitude of the issues Ireland faced. The proposal makes extreme claims in an attempt to make moderate actions acceptable. For instance, Swift writes that “my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children” because he wants to indicate that the starvation of youth is a big issue (Swift). Here, a dichotomy between the textual interpretation of the proposal and an implied interpretation exists. The text claims that in order to eliminate starving children, people should eat them. However, Swift’s true intention is merely to call attention to the problem and to point out that it won’t go away easily.

Paragraph 6: (The Reception of the Hoax)

Just as the hoax wasn’t intended to be taken literally, most of his readers understood his satirical tone.

* As William Monck Mason puts it, “The unconsciousness of the barbarity of his own project, which he so well feigns, greatly increases the effect, and produces a high degree of amusement” (Williams 340).
* His readers would never believe that Swift truly intended for such inhumane acts to be carried out, making his jests a form of amusement. He clearly aims to entertain with his radicalness, while still drawing attention to the issues of starvation and overpopulation.
* “There passages strike and charm English readers whose intellectual horizon corresponds to that of the authors” (Real 8)

Super Hype Conclusion

Bibliography

Briggs, P. M. "John Graunt, Sir William Petty, And Swift's Modest Proposal." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.2 (2005): 3-24. *Project Muse*. Duke University Press. Web. 12 Nov. 2015.

Briggs and his ideas about Swift’s work bring an inventive look into the pamphleteering. Specifically, how Swift’s work circulated around Ireland. In addition to that, he provides a comparison of Swift’s work to other pamphleteers from the time and analyzes their work in conversation with each other. One of my objectives was to look at the contex in which Swift’s worked existed and this provides insight into that context.

Landa, Louis A. “"A Modest Proposal" and Populousness”. *Modern Philology* 40.2 (1942): 161–170. *Jstore*. University of Chicago Press. Web. 12 Nov. 2015.

This source gives insight into overpopulation issue addressed in “A Modest Proposal”. She uses some of Swift’s older works to compare his intentions for his proposal. This source made me shift my research a bit from looking into Swift’s early life and biographical information to looking at his previous literary work. I found her arguments about his intentions to be compelling and I based my own off her analysis.

Phiddian, Robert. “Have You Eaten Yet? The Reader in A Modest Proposal”. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36.3 (1996): 603–621. Web.

A key piece to understanding Swift’s proposal is understanding his audience. This source provides analysis about who his audience was and how they received the hoax. Phiddian makes claims about the rhetoric of the proposal as well as its reception. He talks about the proposal’s effect and credibility as a hoax, which was something I intended to research. This source is the foundation for the encompassing conclusions I draw at the end of the paper.

Real, Hermann Josef. *The Reception of Jonathan Swift in Europe*. London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005. Print.

This source is used in collaboration with Phiddian’s work to create a historical sense of the reception of the proposal. As I described in my prospectus, I planned to look at how the hoax was viewed from the stand point of the commoners. This source made me look closely at the predicted impact from the other sources to the historical facts of the actual impact.

Swift, Johnathan. "Jonathan Swift - A Modest Proposal." *Jonathan Swift - A Modest Proposal*. 1729. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

This source is the main text of my analysis. I use it to create a close reading and apply other sources to it to create a dynamic understanding of the work in its context.

Smith, Cecil. *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Print.

The most purely historical source, this book has nothing to do with Swift or his work directly. Without the historical context that this book provides, there would be no context to understand Swift’s claims. Without any sort of scholarly claims on the subject, this source furthers the understanding of the Irish Potato Famine and the overpopulation issues that Swift addresses in his proposal.

Williams, Kathleen. *Jonathan Swift the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

A critique of Swift as a writer, this source gives information about the elements of satire one can find in his work. Using this analysis to compare his proposal so some of his other works generates many questions and deep conversations about the conviction of his proposal. I used this source to add to the rhetorical analysis of his proposal from some of my other sources in order to make my points stronger. This, along with the Phiddian essay have convinced me that his proposal was not viewed seriously at the time.