

Organized Satire

In the 1700s, Ireland experienced great hardship, but still had trouble making appropriate reforms. In response, Jonathan Swift, expressed his thoughts in “A Modest Proposal,” using satire to stir the public into action. In such a noble act, the basic organization and development of Swift’s essay played a surprisingly major role in his ability to manipulate and persuade people to his side. Swift’s organized and developed his topic in “A Modest Proposal” to keep his essay focused, guide his readers through his satirical solution, and make his underlying solution easier to accept.

“A Modest Proposal” is organized to support Swift’s satirical focus while still containing the topics of his genuine solutions. He begins his essay by introducing his general topic of poverty in Ireland, describing the streets of Dublin as “crowded with beggars.” He then transitions into the specific and related issue of Ireland being overpopulated by children who burden their parents and contribute nothing. From there, he is able to enter his satirical section, and focus on ironically eliminating children. However, when he moves to propose his “other expedients,” they mostly pertain to the overarching problem of Ireland’s economy. Because he introduces these problems in his first paragraph, “A Modest Proposal” stays on topic when he reintroduces the issues and corresponding solutions he actually cares about. By setting up focusing on one large issue early in his writing, Swift gives himself the opportunity to address other current solutions sincerely while staying within the confines of his essay’s topic.

Swift's developmental structure leads his readers down a series of small logical steps until they arrive at his plausible but antagonizing solution. Swift quickly moves from his broad topic of poverty to the issue of having too many useless children. He makes a very reasonable statement that, given the great number and burden of these children, finding a "fair, cheap and easy method" of giving the children a use would preserve the nation. It is not hard for the reader to accept this, as it makes sense logically, but Swift continues to develop this further. He calculates the high number of children of poor parents, and declares that it is impossible to care for them conventionally. To further establish his point, he moves on to examine the uses for children, noting their inability to steal, build or farm for a profession, and their low market price. He has shown that these children cannot be cared for, and cannot care for themselves, and has steadily lured the reader into his conclusion through his step by step development. From these premises, it makes logical sense to eat the children who cannot be cared for. Continuing, he causes more outrage by suggesting that the mother would be glad to give up her child for "eight shillings near profit," and that the skins "will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen," both of which make sense if it is accepted that the children are to be eaten. By developing his argument in small steps, Swift traps the reader in a path that makes sense logically at each turn, but is increasingly infuriating for the reader's morality, which effectively generates the ridicule and outrage that Swift wanted.

In addition, by placing his serious proposals between two satiric sections, Swift effectively conveys a more convincing argument by contrast. The satiric section, meant to outrage, blasts the unsuspecting readers with the sudden proclamation that a one year old child makes "a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food." He dehumanizes them, coldly

calculating that a child “...if tolerably nursed, increases to 28 pounds” going so far as to recommend various ways to prepare the children. The shock value is great, and he quickly turns around to propose the real changes he wants. He makes plain requests such as “taxing our absentees” and “learning to love our country,” which, in contrast to his previous satirical demands, are quite easy to accept. Afterwards, he reenters his innocent persona to profess that he lacks children of the right age to sell and is only working for “the public good,” which, now that the reader has realized Swift’s true intentions, reaffirms the ridiculous nature of his sardonic proposal and casts real proposal in an even more positive light. The actual solutions needed to be placed where they were in order to properly utilize the contrasting satire and make Swift’s real proposals appear agreeable and shockingly obvious.

By introducing his broader topic from the start, slowly developing the logic of his wild satirical argument, and carefully placing his real proposals, Swift is able to reconcile the varying focuses of his satire and genuine solutions, pull the reader along the satirical logic, and effectively make his serious solution a much stronger argument in comparison. Though the organization and development of written pieces are often overlooked as basic and obvious, they are crucially important to the fluidity of the topic, and doubly so for a persuasive essay utilizing satire. We often unthinkingly rely on a five paragraph essay format for analytical essays, but should take greater care to consider how organizing and developing a topic can impact the meaning and persuasion.