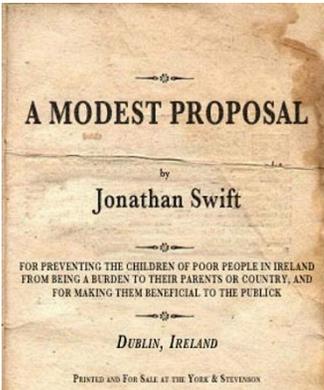


## "A Modest Proposal" and Satire



**Satire** can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire "derides"; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual (in "personal satire"), or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even (as in Rochester's "A Satyr against Mankind," 1675, and much of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726, especially Book IV) the whole human race. The distinction between the comic and the

satiric, however, is a sharp one only at its extremes. Shakespeare's Falstaff is a comic creation, presented without derision for our unmitigated enjoyment; the puritanical Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is for the most part comic but has aspects of satire directed against the type of the fatuous and hypocritical Puritan; Jonson's Volpone (1607) clearly satirizes the type of man whose cleverness stupidity-is put at the service of his cupidity; and Dryden's MacFlecknoe (1682), while representing a permanent type of the pretentious poetaster, ridiculed specifically the living author Shadwell,

Jonathan Swift (about himself)

Yet malice never was his aim;  
He lashed the vice, but spared the  
name. **His** satire points at no defect,  
But what all mortals may correct....  
He spared a hump, or crooked nose,  
Whose owners set not up for beaux.

Satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly; Pope remarked that "those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous." Its frequent claim (not always borne out in the practice) has been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a person is not responsible. See the text box to the right to see what Swift said, speaking of himself in his ironic "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (1739)

Satire occurs as an incidental element in many works whose overall mode is not satirical a certain character, or situation, or interpolated passage of ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or of contemporary society. But in many literary achievements, verse or prose, the attempt to diminish a subject by ridicule is the organizing principle of the whole, and these works constitute the formal genre of "satires." (M.H. Abrams)

**A Question to Ponder:** How does Satire (specifically, such as this) get the reader to examine not only what is being written, but their own values (lens?) through which they interpret what they read? At colleges all over this country, books are being banned and even words are expunged from curriculum because they are making students uncomfortable (and worse). Is it always a bad thing to be uncomfortable? Consider, in your answer – the definition of satire above (and Swift's appraisal of himself) as well as such ideas as the spider web of theories that we've created to get from one part of lives to the next (*Grendel*).

## The Satire Paradox, Swift, and Thesis

You will listen to a podcast by author Malcolm Gladwell; as you do, fill out the chart below. The teacher will give you a few minutes to look them over and to get ready before you begin. Have out your copies of today's handout on satire, "A Modest Proposal", and your notes from our discussion on that work

**Malcolm Gladwell** is the author of five *New York Times* bestsellers — *The Tipping Point*, *Blink*, *Outliers*, *What the Dog Saw*, and *David and Goliath*. He has been named one of the 100 most influential people by TIME magazine and one of the Foreign Policy's Top Global Thinkers. He has explored how ideas spread in *The Tipping Point*, decision making in *Blink*, the roots of success in *Outliers*, and the advantages of disadvantages in his latest book *David and Goliath*. In his latest project, *Revisionist History*, Gladwell examines the way the passage of time changes and enlightens our understanding of the world around us.

**CHART 1 - Gladwell's thesis** – REMEMBER – a thesis is the main point that an author is trying to make: Their argument. Think of the writer (or podcaster) as a lawyer – trying to make a case. They will present their evidence, and try to get you the reader (listener) to come around to their point of view. A good thesis will not contradict itself though it should develop in a way that builds its *evidence* in a deliberate and masterful manner (as a good lawyer would in a court case). In this chart write down what you believe his specific thesis to be as you listen – make it specific, and make it what you think his thesis to be at that time. Do this at least 6 times throughout the podcast as your idea of what the ultimate thesis is. Look at the clock when it begins and write down 5 minute intervals in the first column – use those times as a guideline BUT you may find the thesis changing quicker or slower than those times.

time	Thesis as what I believe it now to be (remember SPECIFIC)

**CHART 2 – CONNECTIONS TO Today's ("Modest Proposal)LESSON.** See the above page on satire, and the notes that you took up to this lesson. As you listen, write down any specific connections that you see to that lesson, to M.H. Abrams's definition of satire, or to "A Modest Proposal" or what you've read of *Gulliver's Travels*. Try to find at least 3 good ones.

**connection#**

**connection**
