

How to Cite This Article: Farid, M., Ahmad, S., & Arshad, K. (2023). Overpopulation as a Social Catastrophe in Ireland: An Analysis of Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal from the Perspective of Malthusian Catastrophe. *Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 446–459. <https://doi.org/10.54183/jssr.v3i2.266>



Overpopulation as a Social Catastrophe in Ireland: An Analysis of Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal from the Perspective of Malthusian Catastrophe

Maryam Farid	BS English (Hons), Literature & Linguistics, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Peshawar Campus, KP, Pakistan.
Sulaiman Ahmad	Lecturer in English, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Peshawar Campus, KP, Pakistan.
Khushnood Arshad	Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Peshawar Campus, KP, Pakistan.

Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 2023)

Pages: 446 – 459

ISSN (Print): 2789–441X

ISSN (Online): 2789–4428

Key Words

Ireland, Malthusian catastrophe, Positive checks, A Modest Proposal, Parliament, Satire, Population–surge

Corresponding Author:

Sulaiman Ahmad

Email: sulaimanahmad@numl.edu.pk

Abstract: The validity of Ireland's tragedies fixes itself perfectly on the theory of Malthusian Catastrophe proposed by Thomas Robert Malthus. To prove how Ireland is driven to the Malthusian havoc rests upon proving how and why the Crown exploits the Irish and their country. That is tackled by inspecting Swift's appeal to the government, A Modest Proposal, and convinces its audience that the ruin caused in Ireland is all in fact the blame of the Parliament, a panorama that Swift clasps onto in his essay. Swift's claims from this literary piece are used to make explicit why he thought the British were to be blamed for the Malthusian decree of Ireland. Further, the paper meanders into the positive and preventative checks of Malthus's doctrine aligning it with the absurd solution Swift presents in his essay. An impartial verdict regarding the so-called Ireland's genocide conspiracy is dispensed. The reasons why Swift's manuscript turns out a biting satire is picked apart and fiddled with. The researchers employ mammoth support from other research projects, Thomas Malthus's own records, and also from the controversial masterpiece of Jonathan Swift's A Modest Proposal, and have penned down a carefully formulated chronological stream of evidence that wraps in its bearings the results of the research.

Introduction

A *Modest Proposal* written by Jonathan Swift in 1729, is a controversial account of the dire plight of Ireland that suggested rehearsing child slaughter and cannibalism, under the reason of the increasingly scabbing incrustation of socio-economic provisions of ration, wealth, sense, and autonomy in Ireland caused by, yours not very sincerely, the Crown. Swift, an avid dabbler in Ireland and England's politics, found he was embroiled in the contentions of an exhausted and roughened Ireland in the 1720's and felt deep remorse and a driving compassion for her and her children. His entire recount was an appeal of a petition to the English government and the Dubliners, mainly the street folks, to sell their

children of one year to the butcher shops. The first year relief was a mercy-grant, to fatten up the sacks of bones, to be bought for not fewer than ten shillings and enjoyed as a delicacy on the tables of the gentry's class either as a whole gourmet food or fragments in different dishes. He proudly delivered that the daily average ration of meat in Ireland will never deplete, therefore malnutrition will only ever be talked about in stories. At that time his paper only received cackling laughter from fat political and aristocratic pot bellies and rejection from pudgy faces and fingers.

Thomas Malthus's catastrophe, identifies a gap that creates when the population growth eclipses the growth of the agricultural yield, which then flips the situation with the resultant of rapid decrease in population because of war or famine. One cycle of this phenomenon kicks starts a never ending series of oscillations, hence why it is catastrophic and may also be referred to as a Malthusian trap.

Paired with this, he believes there are two more sub phenomena that could either relieve a country from the trap or be a resultant drawback of it. These were the preventative and positive checks that he claimed are ever present in the system. The preventative check is the physical or mental option of refraining from procreating or marriage to prevent a population boost regarding the gnarly aftermath of growing population. The positive check is the shortening of a contingency due to plague, war and or famine. This may include natural causes such as poor health and the economic conditions.

On the first glance, the theories of both these do-gooders do not seem as twin concepts, or even cousin concepts for that matter, wherewith one talking about savage cannibalism and the other about the doom of extensive population rise. But a deeper delve into the background of Ireland from *A Modest Proposal* and the implying doom of the Malthusian trap dismantles the old verdicts about the literary piece and the message it was trying to revolutionize. Then it builds new graphics in the mind, that maybe Swift and Thomas Malthus were not too far lost. Maybe their worries and visions were encrypted from the same page.

Thesis Statement

The entire chiaroscuro of the research is the inclination of Malthusian Catastrophe in Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*.

Applying the predictions of the Malthusian catastrophe to Swift's questionable quick-fix, and finding out the culprit behind its deliverance, answers why Swift was so unapologetically grim

and bitter in his suggestions. His essay was a quick fix for an Ireland that was sailing too close to the whirlpool of the Malthusian abyss. There is urgency in his proposal that is trying to divert the attention of the authorities, the ministers and the economists of England to save the overpopulated and tattered Ireland. All these elements are scrutinized to answer what led Ireland to overpopulation and whether the principles of a Malthusian catastrophe align with Ireland's situation. Swift had calculated a pending doom heading Ireland's way because of the abnormal overpopulation. His cynical elucidation studied under that lens seems like it is two birds with one stone.

This is detailed further in the research, explaining how he is cutting down on population rise as well as tackling the problem of average availability of food at a yearly ration by lending this favor to the government and the Dubliners.

The research explores why Swift opts for the children of the street folks. It answers why it is always so easy to send the poor to the gallows when time comes for sacrificial actions for the beloved country.

Swift's proposal is studied under the wisdom of the Malthusian theory, the effectiveness of Swift's proposal and what other solutions may be in store is the ultimate target of the research.

Research Objectives

- The main objectives of this inquiry is to explore the dire conditions of Ireland when it was colonized by Britain to identify the patterns where Ireland was eroded leading up to the Malthusian trap and the fears of Swift and the general public in Ireland at the time, concerned with outsmarting the morbid imminence of the population trap or the catastrophic Malthusian cycle.
- It seeks to unravel the reasons of desperation behind the grim plan and the Parliamentary strategies, concerning the positive and preventative checks that are so

ever-present in the system and for how much of these checks was the Crown actually responsible.

- It also discerns why the solution in *A Modest Proposal* panned out to be so bitterly satirical and why Swift's genius and (goes without saying) disturbing plan fits so well and sits so critically with the inevitable expectation of the Malthusian catastrophe.

Research Questions

1. How is the representation of overpopulation and its following consequences exposed in Jonathan Swift's essay *A Modest Proposal*, keeping the Malthusian catastrophe in simultaneous retrospect?
2. How do the ever present 'checks' (positive and preventative) tie in with the satiric solution presented by Jonathan Swift in his *A Modest Proposal*?
3. Why does Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, articulated with Thomas Malthus's Malthusian catastrophe, pan out to be extremely satirical in nature?

Significance of the Study

The research provides a warning to the governments from living on the edge of the Malthusian trap and boasts a structure for refraining from falling into the same ditches and malpractices as Ireland was forced to fall down into.

The research kick starts a self-correcting chain of thought process into the elites, forcing them to relay over their corrupted mindsets of shoving the poor into the jaws of death first.

There is also the purpose of diverting the attention of the wise and the genius to look deeply into the schematic patterns of their own government's positive check policies, to knock some sense into the populace, to educate and propagate humanistic and less invasive population checks.

It of course seems too ignorantly didactic on the potential researchers' part, if it is not plainly recognized here at this point, that many thought-provoking analyses and meaty studies on Swift's *Modest Proposal* have already been stacked in the forums of researches. But being accessed under the brackets of the Malthusian catastrophe has never been dealt with before. Many research papers have credited Swift, but no inquiry has been made into the fascinating harmony and correspondence between Thomas Malthus's Malthusian catastrophe and the ciphered desperation in *A Modest Proposal* that whispered of the fear of the same catastrophic doctrine in Ireland.

Delimitation

The present research study is concerned with studying Swift's fine manuscript of *A Modest Proposal* under the Malthusian catastrophe dynamic, which is further used to explore the horrors of overpopulation in Ireland. The research delimits the inquiry into any specific cases of overpopulation around the world. It also delimits the study to Thomas Malthus's other works and or theories. Jonathan Swift's other works are also a delimitation to the research.

Literature Review

This research labor may be too fleeting and transient if the researchers fail to display the proof of dabbling and tinkering with works and studies relating somewhat to the same culture of this research. A research study was conducted by Shivani et al, it discusses the string of political and socio-cultural damnations that self-invite themselves along with overpopulation. Climate change, deforestation, bio-capacity decline, and urban sprawl, to name a few the researchers drilled into, to prove the utter havoc overpopulation leaves a country in. The framework of the research was to work on battling these dooms to ensure the extensive life of the natural resources for the future. The conclusion of the study was bittersweet, where the researchers confirmed that some older

policies and schemes proved more or less useless to bend the interpolation in population growth. Hence, the researchers concluded that a real dent in curbing overpopulation will show if educational culture becomes a common privilege in the rural areas and countries ensure an unbiased trend of sharing resources. What this research failed to announce is the alarming truth that a country may exhaust away in trying to regain more or less equal proportions of the population and resource abundance. It also failed to discuss Ireland, the most unfortunate tale of the Malthusian doom. How was a country like Ireland, with a severe socio-political rift (the Potato Blight and the Great Hunger) supposed to have achieved normalcy, is the question

Doris, in her research paper talked about Thomas Malthus's Malthusian catastrophe receiving critical hits from some theorists but still turning out to be more or less true for the world of today. She recorded in her thesis Malthus's prediction that population will grow geometrically while the food supply will only progress arithmetically. Friedrich Engels produced a counter argument, in 1844, questioning his prediction severely stating, "Where has it been proved that the productivity of the land increases in arithmetical progression"? Doris also wrote that Charles Darwin also shot down the theory by putting forth his survival of the fittest argument. He said: animals and plants "are kept in check not by limited births, but by food supply and predation. Each individual competes with others of the same and different species, which results in the survival of the fittest". Doris added that Karl Marx also did not want to believe Malthus's claim, because Marx's theory rooted for communism. Capitalism refrained from dividing the surplus among the poor in a way that they reached up to an equal status. Marx concluded: "But if Malthus were right, the workers would breed until they ate up the surplus and none would be left".

An enlightening research article drawn up by Eric, discusses that the exhausting Potato Blight that hit Ireland in 1845 was more the doing of the new mercantilism regime popularized by the Parliament in Ireland, rather than the population over-surge that slowly started in mid eighteenth century stretching out to the post Potato Depletion. The researcher presses that this is the reason why Ireland's gut wrenching decline was never the case study of Malthusian concept but more attuned with the Malthusian policies. He finally settles the dust on this altercation by commenting that the large numbers adding into the contingency in Ireland was more of a blessing than a nuisance to Ireland in the larger strata of the export fabric. He admits that the obvious peril brought upon Ireland, which is this very same overpopulation, was directly by the hands of the Parliament. Furthermore the research is oblivious to the fact that overpopulation in a country, such like Ireland at the time, is never brought on because certain masses have suddenly developed a love for procreating when they are out of shingles and morsels. True, overpopulation can be seen as strength for some developed countries, but Ireland certainly did not fall even under developing countries at the time. Ireland inarguably was going under the worst spells of hunger it had ever experienced. In those conditions overpopulation was not brought upon as plan B, it was forced upon Ireland and it certainly did not help the Potato crops to miraculously not wither. The only matter the surplus population helped was an increase in the export of grains to England. However, the article failed to mention the warnings of the Anglo-Irish patriots such as Swift about the impending Malthusian calamity.

The proof of Malthusian abnormality during the pre-industrial era was studied by Quamrul in his research. The nitty-gritty of the research explored basically that the advantages of the agricultural surplus were poured into population growth. Societies with higher land productivity and resources birthed a higher population. The calculations of the overall research read that, in

regards with the Malthusian anomaly, higher land productivity and resources would mean an increase in population. The conclusion drew that in the years 1-1500 CE, after the Neolithic revolution, societies were leaning towards a conditional Malthusian steady state. This research defeats the concept of warnings for countries, because according to the Malthusian catastrophe, if a country is doing too well, even then there is the danger of the Malthusian trap. Quamrul was only limited to a general experimentation of the population dynamic in the catastrophe. It did not discuss Ireland's situation. It opens the debate that if Ireland's situation was flipped, meaning if Ireland produced a higher food ration in her struggling years, resulting in a population growth, would a Malthusian blunder still be inevitable keeping all of England's practices intact?

A research by Borja and Marcos, describes that the dangers of the Malthusian catastrophe have existed since the dawn of the industrial era up to date. But the 21st century finds population to be the highest it has ever been and it is being successfully battled with technological advancements. Future forecasts show that population has yet to be added into the pre-existing contingency and will be supported continually by further technological improvements. But if in the future technology fails to keep the yield bar higher than the population bar (because of resource exhaustion), then the world will topple back to the Stone-Age, and be damned by the Malthusian curse. But then technological advances are directly proportional to educational awareness which does affect population growth, meaning there will be a rise in the population as time goes by but it will be at an exponentially slower rate or even at a rate that is growing steadily with the progress in technological advancements. However, the research fails to talk about Ireland's dire Malthusian tragedy that started showing the telltale signs by the middle of the eighteenth century and Ireland's progress now in the 21st century. The paper also does not stir discussion

about how sensitive Ireland may be to a Malthusian hiccup in the future. Also the paper is insensitive to the many support treaties drawn up between countries regarding the ban of active territorial colonialism and the sharing of resources in the 21st century.

James, in his research paper talks about Swift's (1729) satire in *A Modest Proposal*. He mentions that Swift's audience comes too quickly to the conclusion that his account is only irony and satire. Whether this is actually true or not, he said, it also affects the read of other essays and accounts of Swift. The anxiety that was built between his die hard readers upon whether he really meant his suggestion in *A Modest Proposal* or was it just satire was somewhat calmed by Claude Rawson when he used the terms 'extermination velleities' for *A Modest Proposal*. The word velleity means 'a mere wish, desire or inclination without accompanying action or effort'. He meant to say that Swift's suggestion was only that, not an extermination policy in action. While that is a placebo presented to calm the nerves of some of Swift's sensitive audience, this research focuses too much on totally proving that *A Modest Proposal* was on all accounts mildly satirical and only just that. It failed to explore the reason behind Swift's rebellious streak.

This throng of an intellectual spiel of research works and their analyses not only show an ever present pile of the culture that is congruent with regard to this research study but also throws cards to fashion a display of an almost palpable but not entirely, the gap, carved out like a clear diamond. The research gap that this research exposes is the core of the reason that Ireland was sent to her Malthusian paralysis, which accounts that the Crown bled Ireland dry. This is driven home by employing Swift's struggles as his mission was in his essay to expose the pristine Parliament and her 'woke entitled principles'.

Theoretical Framework

To decipher the secrets behind Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, published in 1729 and Ireland's

contingency disintegration, Thomas Malthus's theory of Malthusian catastrophe (1798) is nominated. The Malthusian catastrophe is the impending trap in which a country may find itself if the population statistics surpasses the agricultural yield mark. It may exhaust a country and its resources to regain its original normal statistics back, which is population growth and agricultural yield more or less going hand in hand.

The theory is embedded by first breaking down the important elements of the theory. The evidence provided by Jonathan Swift is his *A Modest Proposal* is aligned with the theory to catch the signs of the theory and the treatment of the English towards Ireland. Then each aspect of the theory from Swift's claims is checked off to justify that the Crown, the true convict, drove the Malthusian dagger into the heart of Ireland.

He argues that a populace is always indulging in securing the survival of their species, or better yet their contingencies, which is why it is the merriment of the greatest merit for a population. This is usually achieved without the same merit of the agricultural yield. Consequently, before x number of agricultural yield was being divided over x number of population, now it will be divided over $2x$ number of population. This anxiety will set off a snowball effect; the labor army must now be added in hefty numbers, to produce more yields. A high demand for employment will escalate, this will encourage low wages and the cost of provisions will sky rocket. During this utter turmoil, marriages are ruined and families suffer. The following years will more or less be the same, but slowly, very slowly for developing countries, the agricultural yield will catch up. The shackles will loosen up, the conditions of the laborers will improve, the cost of provisions will become affordable and the people will fall into an unbothered lull, enough to again be diverted towards ensuring happiness and their survival.

Malthus also talks about the preventative and positive population checks. The preventative

check is the insurance of keeping sobriety from marriage and avoidance from procreating. The positive check, so called, is when the population plummets due to war, famine and or plague.

Data Analysis and Discussion

England began locating plenty of exploitative grounds in the name of harmless trade ties, even before the active industrialization. Ireland was one such project. In *A Modest Proposal*, Swift tries subtlety in the most obvious trick, professing:

"...I could name a country which would be glad to eat up our whole nation..." (Swift)

What the historians recorded years later in their books about British schemes and how they first infiltrated Ireland; Swift has given a pronouncement of the intentions of the English as it was happening. History is never understood at the time it's being made, only later do the historians look at the big picture and analyze it. But Swift had caught the Parliament's regime of roping Ireland into one of its colonies and leaving her a Malthusian carcass.

This only meant that the Irish resources will only submit to the advantage of the Crown and the large contingency paired with the absence of factories and industry in Ireland, the courtesy of the labor force could be 'borrowed' for cheap, for the greater good of the Crown. Swift applies about this with an almost entertaining irony when he pens:

"...as to the younger laborers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment to a degree that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it; and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come". (Swift)

New Forced Mercantilism

Before colonization, Ireland was mostly pastoral with majority forest grounds, as late as the 1600s (Cracken 15–21) which heavily aided the fodder

that was foraged for swine, meaning Ireland was thriving with her cattle-grazing and pork supply. These cereals were also the main component of subsistence farming (Lucas).

Consequently Ireland had “what was certainly the largest livestock export trade in the world at the time” (Crotty 107). Some of these were shipped off to London to be even more bulked for the London market. But this little number quickly stretched out to enormous amounts when as much as 213,000 barrels of beef per annum was exported in the 1760s, but only 1% of it went to Britain. England’s greed had no stop and the want for Ireland’s products was the new rage in town. Swift does not shy away from comparing this obsessive want for meat (pig and beef) from the British to them exhausting away the country’s protein resources and shoving the poor Irish into multiplying their numbers. This pattern of Malthusian torture Swift pointed out, and with an almost absurd humor offers his Irish youth to be guillotined at the cutting board so that the Parliament may feast also on the meat the Irish were forced into birthing. His exact words:

“... the propagation of swine’s flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables, which are no way comparable in taste or magnificence to a well-grown, fat, yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a lord mayor’s feast...” (Swift)

As if this much colonial looting was not enough for the gluttonous England, between 1764 and 1800, pork had become a delicacy for the Parliament and sold off in the markets of London as if the Irish were shipping it off free, which they more or less were. This was brought on by the Foster’s Corn Law in 1748 that made it official that Ireland was not only good for importing dairy goods and meat, but also was very convenient and efficient with grain production. The potato produced in bulk and the cereal was incentive enough for the protestant

landlords to press on the rearing of pigs (Ross 103–104). This automatically saw, in the 1800s, that barrels containing pork went from 30,328 to 107,530. Britain took 87 percent of that, essentially raising the bar right from zero to that percentile (Donovan 114–116).

The total barrel of beef being exported into England did come down to 147,382 barrels, most of which again was Britain’s, 79% to be exact. But this drop in beef exportation was diminutive, because beef was a luxury the army was being cajoled with. It was recorded that some British Commissariats, towards the end of the Napoleonic wars, delivered as much as 14.3 million lbs. of Irish salted beef along with 12.6 million lbs. of salted pig meat (House of Commons 514). These digits shot up to a hefty 70 million lbs. of salted beef and 78 million lbs. of salted pork, between 1813 and 1835 (House of Commons 514).

The Fame of the Spud

An urgent pressure on agricultural cultivation of grains was also felt, both in England and Ireland (Jones) especially when by 1791, a steep rising interpolation of Irish grain being filed into England was recorded, from 31,423 barrels in 1771 to over 863,000 by 1791 (Newenham 48–50). Now this new rigid scheme needed more uncompromised land and more efficient workers. The lands of Ireland by the 1800s were almost all exclusively under protestant regime (O’Neill 1).

The way the landlords achieved this was utterly putrid. Swift also points this out, despite characterizing a cruel aristocratic friend of the government in his proposal (and this is where his entire satirical knack comes in play), swift breaks character to say that no one should instead of his proposal ask him to correct the ways of his country, for instance:

“...of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants...” (Swift).

They encouraged the tenants, who were mostly Catholic (O’Neill 01), to grow more

potatoes on lands that were compromised with war. This incentive was to give a false sense of security to the tenants, so that they may be motivated to marry young, produce larger families and then raise these children on these small holdings to be eventually added into the numbers on the farms (Swift).

One thing that helped the tenants feed into this fake incentive was that the tenants did not have to pay the tenth part (tithe) of whatever small income they got to the landlords and or the middlemen (Gill 35-36), which was again a diminutive advantage because of the absenteeism culture that was introduced later. The tenants though, slowly but surely, felt the desperation and the approaching panic (the blight and its consequences) when they saw that England was hell bent on making sure not a morsel of meat or grain was being taken advantage of by the Irish.

An even better advantage, to both the landlord and the tenants, was the convenient and efficient productivity of the root tuber. Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, expressed that it was true that the miracle of the potato production was a huge profit to the landlords, but the potato was also able to provide the tenants with a push that allowed them the permission of making the most basic necessities of livelihood possible for them. And was not that a total miracle (at least until it lasted), especially because the potato was literally the only food in the Irish kitchens, and majorly the only crop that was allowed to be used for subsistence farming. And because beggars can't be choosers (a phrase pioneered in England by an English writer), because god forbid Ireland had autonomy of choice in all of this mess stirred by the Parliament, potato soon became the rural diet.

Overpopulation and the Clearance Sweep

The landlords, after the Wars to be exact, in 1815, realized what a major loophole they had ignored by encouraging a false sense of security in the tenants. They were facing a steep rise in population. This was a real problem for them,

because after the friction of the Wars died down, the grain market felt a sheer decline in its demand -- although export of grain was still fresh and kicking towards England (Green)—the landlords wanted to now use those lands for cattle grazing. The landlords “began to utter bitter complaints of surplus population...” and “...the main cause of all this was kept in the background” (O’Rourke 46).

Evicted and jobless families poured into Dublin and other cities, and the influx was so large, it was a dead giveaway of a bad population problem.

Kettle, a fellow Dubliner at the time, had this to say about the absolutely bizarre inpouring into Dublin, “...I remember to have seen whole groups of homeless people coming into Dublin from the districts around; and in the County Meath I saw the remains of many houses in districts that were depopulated.”

Andrew Kettle’s narration coincides perfectly with Swift, another Dubliner who was depressed by the boosting numbers in Dublin. He shot at the obvious signs of a dire Malthusian limit when he commented in his essay *Modest Proposal*:

“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 the 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”.

He later explains that his purpose is only is to:

“...greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principle breeders of the nation as well as our most dangerous enemies; and who stay at home on purpose to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender...”

William Cobbett visited Ireland, he observed “...here are these starving people! And this is only because they have no law to give them their due share of the fruits of their labor! (Cobbett 93)

Root Tubers, Reason for Ireland's Malthusian Tragedy?

The English began adopting and spreading a very racist theory that the potato crop brought laziness in the Irish and killed whatever ambition the poor resource-less tenants must have had, which they believed was the whole reason that the 1840s Famine came to be known as The Great Hunger. Some even believed the potato crop had fertility enhancing abilities that apparently only seemed to work too well on the impoverished Irish.

Elizabeth Smith in her journals gives supple proof of this ignorance. Elizabeth Smith was an English woman married to an officer in the East India Company. During the fast spread of the famine in 1846, she recorded in her journal that the potato “*encouraged idleness, pauper marriages and dirty habits, and neither mind nor body could be fully developed upon such nourishment*” (Smith 105).

She recorded a month later “*I can’t help but despise a people so mean-spirited, so low-minded, so totally without energy, only I attribute it to the want of animal food; there can be no vigor of mind or body without it*”. (Smith 105).

Her ignorance is baffling when she wrote “*provisions continuing to pour into England from Ireland and yet the Famine is said to be pressing there*”. (Smith 107).

Just like her other English acquaintances, she never made sense of the reason the Irish adopted this diet and failed lamely to work out the obvious connection between that and the export schemes being sanctioned upon Ireland by England. These export schemes were looked over by the Protestant landlords who were promised lands in Ireland and also were chosen for this operation from the Parliament’s missionary armies.

Swift, however saw through this play and was not about to be cajoled in the hands of the British Parliament. He reports in *A Modest Proposal* an Ireland in shambles because he recognized the Malthusian cast that the Brits were wrapping

around her all too tightly. He gestures to the overpopulation when he says:

“I grant this Food will be somewhat dear and therefore very proper for Landlords; who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents, seem to have the best Title to the Children”. (Swift)

The Mammoth Modesty of ‘A Modest Proposal’; Have Swift and Thomas Malthus Butted Heads, Not At Loggerheads with Each Other?

Ireland was surely deliberately tested as bait with pretentious obliviousness by the British. She was driven straight into the much feared and contemplated dreadful Malthusian gyre but this one does not have any moral or faithful connotations in its eye. Ireland ended up with 2 million counts less of her Irish people that she had cradled and fed well before the British colonization. The fight was unarguably and quite literally starved out of Ireland, but the backbone and soul still survived and revived.

Jonathan Swift, the first Anglo-Irish promoters who promoted fully on behalf of the poor Irish (the Catholic Irish) the warnings of the impending doom that Ireland was sure to spiral into very soon, courtesy of his crisp and taut satire *A Modest Proposal*. At the time his paper only received cackling laughter from fat political and aristocratic pot bellies and rejection from beef-consuming pudgy faces and greased fingers of the Parliament members.

What took them most by surprise was the bit in *A Modest Proposal* about children of a mere age of one, wholly crusted with an apple in their mouths, decorated and unmoving, on purple linens of mahogany dinner tables, ready to be of service and leisure for:

“...*sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom...*” (Swift).

Swift was warning people and the Crown of the fast approaching crop blight and extreme hunger due to crop failure and Parliament's favorite scheme of forced mercantilism. He had acquired satire in his essay to be able to paint the

picture of Ireland, the way it really was. His Juvenalian satire gave him a chance and he bared the ugly truth of the government and held the mirror upright to the Parliament's face, which otherwise he would not have been able to do, as he was an avid friend of the Parliament.

James Sutherland, in his book, compares Swift's tactful play with his Juvenalian satire in a rather fitting way. He says Swift's approach is much like a dentist (otherwise called as polite sadists by many). Just like a dentist would do, Swift also first commences by pouring his modesty with the most polite manner of seeking permission from his readers at the very start of his piece by saying:

"I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection" (Swift).

And many objections they were liable to. The Parliament was less than enthusiastic to applaud Swift's efforts, whose satiric mock was an obvious jab at them. Then Sutherland progresses that Swift, as a dentist would, brings out the injection, and this betrayal and the injection itself sets in the cold numbness. His entire recount, the injection, was an appeal or a request of petition to the English government and the Dubliners, mainly the street folks, to sell their children of one year to the meat shops to *"make them beneficial to the public"* (Swift), something, in most ways the government was already doing.

Even when he is being unapologetically satirical, Swift cannot help but break character and still talk about the tenants with a caring streak:

"...the poor tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress, and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized and money a thing unknown". (Swift)

Meat: Beef, Pig or Human?

To give a threefold depth to his proposal, Swift suggests the kids of the street folk. This was to

shake the poor Irish by their feeble bony shoulders and tell them what the greedy Crown thought of them. It was a deliberate move to show to both the Irish and the parliament that he knew, and the Irish should know, that the government thought of the Irish as expendable street filth.

The proposal translated to the government and the pauper Irish to do what was already happening to them. Jonathan Swift's satire is clad in such materialized obliviousness, restrain and passion when he calls out the Parliament, shaming them and humiliating them in their own offices when he appeals with them:

"As to our City of Dublin; Shambles may be appointed for this Purpose, in the most convenient Parts of it; and Butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the Children alive, and dressing them hot from the Knife, as we do roasting Pigs". (Swift)

Thomas Carlyle said that the Irish resistance had been reduced and prohibited so much that they aggregated to little more than *"human swinery"* for the Brits (Carlyle 201). The satiric solution of Swift, even though it plays by the benefits of the poor Irish, suggested a mass genocide. Discussing further advantages that the solution will bring to Ireland, Swift estimates that: *"the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef"* (Swift), will also file into the treasury of the state.

There was an old Greek belief made popular by a Greek geographer Starbo that the Irish were *"anthropophagus"*. This was backed by some of the English at the time of Swift. The Irish being anthropophagus meant they devoured their own, because they were animals in human flesh and came down from the race of Scythians (God 79). The English people did not care that the country, forced to be dependent strictly on potato while their other food rations were being plundered and exploited, would surely be pushed into a bad Malthusian case. Regarding this belief of the English, Higgins wrote, *"The Irish were "a people so brutalized and savage that they would*

be prepared to sell and eat their own children” (Higgins 191). Michael Sadler commented and said that any decent and logical person “Would think about preventing the undue emigration of corn, cattle, and pigs, rather than of promoting that of the people” (Sadler 71).

To mirror these claims chiefly to ridicule them and show the actual real picture of the truth veiled, Jonathan Swift comments,

“I can think of no one objection that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom.” (Swift)

Soup Kitchens Proved the Genocide?

These were the accounts of the younglings in Ireland, and by the satiric morals of Swift, the oldies were not much of a problem because:

“...they are everyday dying and rotting by cold and famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected” (Swift)

By translation Swift by no means expelled the old folks from his solution to overpopulation and the mighty hunger; he only proclaimed that it will not be the government’s job to finish them off. This is especially ironic because the conditions that result in their untimely deaths are the recipe of the government. Swift points out the Malthusian signs when his satire very clearly announces that the Parliament did not care how they sucked out all the reserves of the country after plunging her into a dire population bulge, on the cutting board, hanging from bloodied hooks or expired of starvation and disease, all carcass was welcomed onto their ships. Once the younglings are dealt with and the oldies frail to their death,

“...the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come” (Swift).

This then means that if Swift showed the Crown’s total carnal tendencies, their appetite for Ireland was not going to be abated by any relief campaigns, especially if it was to be

provided by them. Swift resultantly then concludes to the Irish and conveys to the English that this colonization was in fact a genocide, to ensure that after they had orchestrated the Malthusian murder of Ireland, the Crown would not pay charges for all the crimes that were conducted and also to elongate the exploitation for as long as possible.

Reverend John Hughes, D.D., Bishop of New York at the time said, said that any action taken to assist Ireland, such as soup kitchens, only lasted six months (Oleksy 50).

People were dying in Ireland in depressingly dense numbers. Coffins had fallen short and bodies were laid outside the houses under the open sky. Huge ships from Ireland full of bodies floated to the coasts of America and the term ghost ship was first used and seen. “Many remnants of families crowded together in one cabin; orphaned little relatives taken in by the equally destitute, and even strangers, for these poor people are kind to one another to the end. A sister, just dying, was laying by the side of her little brother, just dead. They rarely complained despite hunger” (Bennett 28)

The 1948 UN convention defines genocide such that it is any event that causes bodily distress or mental erosion to a group. Body count was around two million (Oleksy, pg. 58) “Mental harm was caused by ‘learned helplessness’, where the Irish became mentally unable to regard themselves as worthy of taking action to mitigate the effects of famine. This ‘helplessness’ affected marriages and childbirth, hence it can certainly be classified as biological genocide” (Oleksy 58).

Major Findings of the Study

- The researchers find jarring truths about Ireland’s Malthusian predicament and Swift’s struggle to illuminate the warning in his essay *A Modest Proposal*.
- Swift has represented the severe condition of overpopulation and its consequences in Ireland in the 1720s which possess Ireland until after The Great Famine.

- Swift's Modest Proposal, is in a way a suggestion for the practical implementation of Malthus's theory.
- Swift's Modest Proposal, panned out to be very unsettling. His avid audience called it an appalling satire and were so shocked by his daring and vulgar (wrongly perceived by them) solution that most of them did not even want to acknowledge its actual message until quite later on.

Conclusion

Time is a fickle in all its finicky ways, but to say that even Time asserted compassion at the chiaroscuro of Ireland's cataclysmic sufferings, will certainly not be an understatement if one discerns the drawn up reasons that the researchers have based the article on. Then there will be nothing ignorant or dogmatic about the aforementioned statement.

Swift was left with no choice but to throttle his frustrations into active protest, penning his grievances about Ireland about to dive face first into the Malthusian whirlpool. He said about the utter nonsensical havoc that the English had spread in the following phrase: "We are apt to charge the Irish with laziness, because we seldom find them employed; but then we don't consider they have nothing to do" (Swift). Thus the Irish were devoured, their food rations looted from them, their numbers coerced into doubling and tripling, and then these same numbers murdered in a mass planted genocide and made to flee to America. The English made the Irish desperate for food, then forced the population surge, and lastly watched as they were exterminated by the thousands. This research intended to bring forth the truth of the Irish Malthusianism and also the perpetrator, the Crown, by the favor of Swift's satiric knack. His saving grace of a satire brought to light the sickening practices of the British Parliament and he warned in a Malthusian bias "that when the hen is starved to death, there will be no more golden eggs". (Swift).

At the beginning of this study, the researchers posed a question, "How is the representation of overpopulation and its following consequences exposed in Jonathan Swift's essay A Modest Proposal, keeping the Malthusian catastrophe in simultaneous retrospect?" In A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift, a controversial account of the dire plight of Ireland (Dublin), he suggested rehearsing child slaughter and cannibalism, under the reason of the increasingly scabbing incrustation of socio-economic provisions of ration, wealth, sense, and autonomy and governance in Ireland. Not only that, his burden was also the ever dilating numbers of the poor dwellers. The truth about the population pressure pans out to be even more bizarre, because the highest recorded number had yet to be reached. He delivers that the daily average ration of meat in Ireland will never deplete, therefore hunger and malnutrition will only ever be story-talk and in turn the population will be chiefly equated to the food ration the country should account to annually. He recounts that because the landlords have already devoured the poor tenants, and the old and frail will be left on the extermination terms of time, the children will be delicacies for the worthy left behind. Once the poor contingency, the insatiable filth will be wiped out, and the rich will be fed, a richer, classier and satiated generation will bud.

The second research question posed at the beginning of this research study was, "How do the ever present 'checks' (positive and preventative) tie in with the satiric solution of Jonathan Swift?" The satiric proposal translated to the government and the pauper Irish to do what the parliament had already been ordering. But cloaking his satire in such obliviousness, restraint and passion he was calling out the Parliament, shaming them and humiliating them in their own offices. When sinners commit a sin, and their rotting hearts are hidden from each other, there is a strange unspoken understanding that they all share, of choosing not to speak out loud about their malevolence. But when their sleeves are stained red, from all the truth that

they have accidentally blurted, they panic and are forced to stare straight at the devil they have been cradling in their rib cages. If England was sympathetic to Ireland's cause, they could have helped her more sincerely. It was not the question of the lack of resources for England, but a choice that weighed on their morality and humanity. Yes, the Irish Malthusian tragedy was a planned decimation, a mass extermination, so when England had sacked and swept all she wanted, there was no strength and spirit left in Ireland to charge England on this illegality.

The last question of this research study was, "Why does Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, articulated with Thomas Malthus's Malthusian catastrophe, pan out to be extremely satirical in nature?" Swift saw his friends, people who thought like him, write to the parliament straight and square about the conditions of Ireland but the crown averted her gaze deliberately. He was a religious man who did not believe in threats and radicalism. But he knew that by only baring the schemes of the parliamentarian Brits naked, without the sheath of 'sense' or 'decency' (that the English thought they are the only advocates of) could he manage to rattle their conscience, or whatever was left of it. One is the most weak and vulnerable in one's shower room, bare, with all of one's flaws, and the whole world thinks of putting a mirror in there. Swift took the courtesy of a twisted humorless joke much like that. Swift literally held the shackled vampires, the flesh eaters, to the light of the day and watched them cry out in agony, when the shock of what they read had registered to the Parliament.

Recommendations for Further Research

Thomas Malthus made many other arguments that researchers can scrutinize with regards to Ireland's struggle. Future analysts can target the cannibalistic practices of other tribes and draw up conclusions about how those practices have affected their economy and people, both in the mental and physical dichotomies. One can even dissect into the psychological dissolution of the

pauper Irish due to the British Malthusian colonization.

References

- Abrams, Meyer Haward. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Sixth edition. New York/London: W.W Norton & Company, 1996.
- Ashraf, Quamrul. *Malthusian Population Dynamics: Theory and Evidence*. Department of Economics, Brown University, Rhode Island, United States, 2008.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. McClelland and Stewart. Toronto, 1985.
- Baus, Doris. *Overpopulation and the Impact on the Environment*. CUNY Academic Works, City University of New York, New York, 2017.
- Bennett, William. *Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland, 1847*. "Irish Views of the Famine". Xroads Virginia. Web, 1 November 2016.
- Burgess, Anthony. *The Wanting Seed*. Heinemann. United Kingdom, 1962.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849*. London: Sampson, low, Marston, Searle and Rivington. 1882
- Cobbett, William. *Cobbett on Ireland: A Warning to England*. D. Knight, ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart. 1984
- Crotty, Raymond. *Modernization and Land Reform: Real or Cosmetic? The Irish Case*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1981.
- Gill, Conrad. *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.
- Green, E. Agriculture. In R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, eds., *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-52*. Dublin: Irish Committee of Historical Sciences, 1956.
- Harris, Marvil. *Culture, Man and Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971.
- Harrison, Harry. *Make Room! Make Room!*. Doubleday. United States, 1966.
- Higgins, Lan. *Swift's Politics. A Study in Disaffection*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

- House of Commons Accounts and Papers. *Estimates; Army; Navy; Ordnance; etc.* Westminster, 1838.
- Hughes, John. *A Lecture on the Antecedent Causes of the Irish Famine in 1847*. New York: Edward Dunigan. 1847
- Jones, David S. *The Cleavage between Graziers and Peasants in the Land Struggle, 1890-1910*. In S. Clark and J. Donnelly, Jr., eds., *Irish Peasants, Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1938.
- London Times *The Great Irish Famine of 1845-46*. London: *The Times*, 1880.
- Lucas, Anthony T. *Irish Food before the Potato Gwerin*, 1960.
- Malthus, Thomas. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. London. 1798.
- McCracken, Eileen. *The Irish Woods since Tudor Times*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles. 1971.
- Monatano, Borja, et al. *Malthusianism of the 21st Century*. Department of Applied Economic Analysis. Universidad de Alicante, Alicante, Spain, 2020.
- Newenham, Thomas. *A Statistical and Historical Inquiry into the Progress and Magnitude of the Population of Ireland*. London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1805.
- O'Donovan, John. *The Economic History of Livestock in Ireland*. Dublin: Cork University Press, 1940.
- O'Neill, Thomas P. *The Irish Land Question, 1830-1850*. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 44 Vol, 1955.
- O'Rourke, Jhon. *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847, with Notices of Earlier Famines*. Dublin: James Duffy and Co, 1902.
- Oleksy, Juliana. *Irish Potato Famine: the Irish versus the English*. *Bergen Scholarly Journal*, 46. 3 Vol. 50-58. 2017
- Rawson, Claude Julien. *God, Gulliver, and Genocide. Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1954*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Ross, Eric B. *Ireland: The "Promised Land" of Malthusian Theory?* Institute of Social Studies - 'the Hague' - The Netherlands, 1996.
- Ross, Eric B. *The Riddle of the Scottish Pig*. *BioScience* 33(2):99-106, 1983.
- Royal Commission on Agriculture *Preliminary Report with Minutes of Evidence*. *British Parliamentary Papers*. Vol. 15: Agriculture. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1888.
- Sadler, Michael. *Memoirs of Michael Thomas Sadler*. London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1842.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. R. Campbell and A. Skinner, eds. 2 Vol, 1976.
- Sutherland, James. *English Satire. The Clark Lectures*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958.
- Swift, Jonathan. "A Modest Proposal". 1729. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Sixth Edition. Ed. M.H. Abrams. New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996. 1048-1054.
- Swift, Jonathan. *The Present Miserable State of Ireland: In a Letter from a Gentleman in Dublin to His Friend SRW in London. Wherein is Briefly Stated, the Causes and Heads of All Our Woes*, 1735.
- Uniyal, Shivani. et al. *Human Overpopulation: Impact on the Environment*. Banaras Hindu University, India, 2017.
- Verpoorten, Marijke. *Leave none to claim the land: a Malthusian catastrophe in Rwanda?*. University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium, 2011.
- Ward, James Garard. *Reading Swift and Ireland, 1720-1729*. University of Leeds, Leeds, England, 2004.