

# Splenetic Ogres and Heroic Cannibals in Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729)

Ahsan Chowdhury  
University of Alberta

## I. Cannibalism: Ethnic Defamation or a Trope of Liberation?

In *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to Their Parents and Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public* (1729) Swift exploits the age-old discourse of ethnic defamation against the Irish that had legitimated the English colonization of Ireland for centuries. One of the most damning elements in Swift's use of this discourse is that of cannibalism. The discourse of ethnic defamation arose out of the Norman conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century. Clare Carroll points out that "the colonization of the Americas and the reformation as events ... generated new discourses inflecting the inherited discourse of barbarism" in early-modern English writing about Ireland (14). Narratives of native cannibalism were an indispensable part of these new discourses and practices. For the English authors as well as their continental counterparts, the cannibalistic other of the New World became a yardstick by which to measure the threat posed by internal enemies, be it the indigenous Irish, the French Catholics, or the Moorish inhabitants of Spain.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it was against the backdrop of the reforma-

<sup>1</sup> Carroll demonstrates that while continental authors like Bartolomé de Las Casas and Jean de Léry could treat the Amerindians and their cannibalistic practices as being less alien than their respective domestic enemies the moors and the

**AHSAN CHOWDHURY** teaches English at the University of Alberta as an Instructor. His research focuses on the eighteenth-century British literature and culture of empire. He has been published in *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700*. His current project delves into the representation of *Nabobs* and *Sahibs* in eighteenth-century texts, both British and Indian.

tion and counter-reformation conflicts as well as the exploration of the New World that Montaigne flirted with the notion as a metaphor in his comparison between the Tupinambá practice of eating the dead bodies of their enemies and the live torture practised by the Europeans. By contrast, the Protestant cleric and polemicist Jean de Léry used his graphic accounts of Tupinambá cannibalism as a preamble to the equally gory descriptions of the cannibalistic atrocities against the French Protestants perpetrated by the Catholics.<sup>2</sup> Ireland, an anomalous pocket of Romish bigotry and superstition in the Protestant British Isles, also became a fertile breeding ground for religio-ethnic defamation; the Catholicism of the native Irish almost naturally complemented their putatively barbaric ethnic origins in the minds of such Protestant polemicists as Edmund Spenser, Camden, Fynes Morrison, and others. Whether the cannibal slur is implied or explicitly stated, such polemical writing invariably condemns the Irish for being bestial creatures given to dietary practices not fit for the civilized part of humanity.<sup>3</sup> Even when the authors are sympathetic, pity is inevitably mixed with disgust and contempt for the objects of the slur. Swift's tract exists in this troubled continuum of ethnic abuse against the Irish. According to Frank Lestringant:

In a fundamental way, the “humble” propopsal is no stranger to the traditional prejudices targeted at the “savage” Irish, anthropophagus in intention and in deeds, formerly and presently, or rather potentially, cannibals, probable descendants, as it was once thought, of the ancient Scythes and “Scoti,” who drank with equal eagerness the blood of their horses and their enemies. (121)

In *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* (2001) Claude Rawson has also read Swift's deployment of the discourse of religio-ethnic defamation against the Irish

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French Catholics, the early modern English writers rendered the Irish even more alien (23–24).

2 Léry's account of the Tupinambá practice of ritually sacrificing the prisoners taken in war emphasizes the unmitigated cruelty and thirst for vengeance of the savages. However, the Protestant cleric, unlike Montaigne the moral relativist, strongly denounces the practice as being the product of abysmal depravity (132–33).

3 Robert Viking O'Brien, however, has problematized Spenser's use of the cannibal slur in both *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and in the “Savage Nation” episode in the *Faerie Queene* by arguing that Spenser found it difficult to portray the Irish as irretrievable others like the American cannibals, a move which would render the incorporation of the Irish into the British polity impossible (35–36).

by placing it in the tradition of English Protestant polemic against Ireland. He points out that Swift's complex relationship with his predecessors such as Fynes Morrison is comparable to that between Montaigne and Léry. Rawson writes, "Montaigne's relationship to Léry may have been similar to that of Swift to Moryson in that the lesser author in each case provided the explicit examples which the greater refused to exploit." It is the brooding reticence on Swift's part about the actual instances of survival cannibalism of the Irish in times of famine that makes his use of the cannibal slur so complex and effective. In spite of his genuine concern for Ireland and his condemnation of the self-destructive economic behaviour among all sections of the Irish population, Swift's use of the discourse of defamation retains the basic characteristics of the traditional religio-ethnic slur against the Irish: a mixture of pity and deeply felt contempt. If anything, Rawson adds, it is probably one of the most uncompromising instances of that discourse: "Swift's fable showing the Irish to be fit for a cannibal economy is perhaps the most uncompromising use of the cannibal slur ever directed at them in modern times." Rawson goes on to say, "There is no sign of a desire to moderate or soften the attack, but although the evidence of literal enactment offered obvious reinforcement to the fable, Swift made sure that the metaphorical boundaries were not crossed" (91). Although Rawson's reading points out the overdetermined nature of the deployment of ethnic abuse in Swift's writings compared to the often naive and coarse use of the discourse by his contemporaries and predecessors, it does not account for the use of the discourse of cannibalism not only as a mode of anti-colonial resistance but also as the central trope of an elaborate program of liberation embedded in Swift's *A Modest Proposal*.

I refer to cannibalism as a European discourse about the other rather than as a neutral term signifying the actual instances of ritual anthropophagy recorded and narrated by the discipline of anthropology. As such, I join William Arens and Peter Hulme among others who have posited a correlation between colonial discourse and the man-eating myth. Hulme has made the important distinction between cannibalism as a discourse about the other and anthropophagy as a supposedly neutral term, and, henceforth, I shall rely on this distinction:

[In the context of the historical construction of a European identity], "cannibalism" has nothing to do with social practices at all. The logical step, therefore, is to leave "anthropophagy" for those who want to talk—for whatever reason—about the eating of human flesh, and reserve "cannibalism," hencefor-

ward cannibalism, as a term meaning, say, “the image of ferocious consumption of human flesh frequently used to mark the boundary between one community and its others,” a term that has gained its entire meaning from within the discourse of European colonialism. (*Colonial Encounters* 86)

Also, while I do not share Arens’s rather sweeping condemnation of the entire discipline of anthropology as being a subservient tool of Western colonial discourse about the other, I do agree with his assertion that “the assumption by one group about the cannibalistic nature of others can be interpreted as an aspect of cultural boundary construction and maintenance” (145). Peggy Reeves Sanday concurs with Arens in spite of her evidentiary reservations about his overall argument: “He is correct in asserting that the attribution of cannibalism is sometimes a projection of moral superiority” (9). The political and economic advantages of such assertions of superiority frequently included the incentive to colonize the other on the pretext of civilizing her. In many instances, resistance on the part of the native became in the colonizer’s mind synonymous with cannibalistic traits. Drawing upon the example of the Spanish colonizers of the Caribbean islands, who came in the wake of Christopher Columbus and labeled the Arawak Indians as cannibals as soon as they began to resist the wholesale takeover of their land and other natural resources, Arens writes, “Thus the operational definition of cannibalism in the sixteenth century was resistance to foreign invasion followed by being sold into slavery, which was held to be a higher status than freedom under aboriginal conditions” (51).

Peter Hulme in his elaborate study of the construction of the various Caribbean peoples as cannibals by European colonial discourse comes up with a similar conclusion, “It is, rather [the Spanish discursive attempt to categorize the natives of the Caribbean into friendlies and cannibals], a work of *realpolitik*, establishing which Amerindians were prepared to accept the Spaniards on the latter’s terms, and which were ‘hostile,’ that is to say prepared to defend their territory and way of life” (*Colonial Encounters* 72). Hulme further points out that the supposedly cannibalistic Caribs were actually a confederation of autonomous villages that put up an armed resistance against the so-called Taino chiefdoms, a rival confederation of chiefdoms in the larger islands that were moving toward some form of native statehood at the crucial moment of European contact. Consequently, Hulme argues, “The European invasion therefore shattered the socio-political evolution of Caribbean societies, destroying forever (or, better, taking over and thereby destroying) the established chiefdoms but

moulding the autonomous villages nolens volens into a military alliance of tremendous tactical competence and incredible durability—which the European nations had then to fight for nearly 300 years” (*Colonial Encounters* 78).

In addition to armed resistance, the natives were also capable of exploiting the very discourse employed by Europeans to label them as cannibals to their own advantage in parodied forms.<sup>4</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere has observed, “The mere fact that a native population admitted to their cannibalism was not proof of the existence of that practice because cannibalism became a ‘weapon of the weak’ to keep European intruders away from native homes and habitations” (“Cannibal Feasts in Nineteenth-Century Fiji” 63). Building upon Arens’s work, Obeyesekere, an anthropologist, has reconstructed the complex discursive process through which certain Polynesian tribes, especially the Maori, managed to overturn the “cannibal talk” being constructed by the European intruders by engaging in exaggerated and parodic cannibal behaviour. While admitting that some form of ritual anthropophagy did exist among the natives in the Caribbean or Polynesia or in other parts of the ever-expanding New World, Obeyesekere focuses correctly on the impact of an European discourse of cannibalism upon the native pre-contact anthropophagus rituals that brought forth a native counterdiscourse of cannibalism as complex as the European one it parodies. Obeyesekere points out that what the European ethnographers and observers took to be unambiguous admission by natives of their cannibalism was actually no more than “European failure to understand parodic utterances” (*Cannibal Talk* 92), and he goes on to demonstrate that Percy Smith’s *Maori Wars of the Nineteenth Century*, purported to be written by a Maori, is in actuality “not Maori discourse

4 Thus, the band of “cannibal” natives hired by the steamboat’s white captain Marlow in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) could very well have been engaging in exaggerated displays of cannibalistic traits in order to exploit the Europeans’ cannibal fantasies. As Marlow himself observes, these supposed man-eaters are remarkable for their self-control even when the whites throw overboard their scanty supply of Hippo meat because it had started to stink. Despite being strapping fellows, they subsist on some kind of starchy food and do not make any move to eat their white masters. Marlow muses, “And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there” (57). Marlow, a narrator remarkable for his naivety, misses the most likely explanation for the uncharacteristic behaviour of these “cannibals.” Perhaps they are parodying the European discourse of cannibalism in order to ingratiate themselves to their white employers because they wish to exploit the European expedition to advance their own territorial ambitions against the tribe that has adopted Kurtz as a demi-god.

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per se, it is a Maori parodying the British discourse on cannibalism.” This Maori “propensity for taunting” their enemy, according to Obeyesekere, “can be creatively transformed into satire through story telling.”

Obeyesekere makes a valuable connection between the storytelling methods of the Maori informer of Percy Smith and Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*: “The preceding story [the parodic story told by the Maori to the British ethnographer] is not unlike Swift’s deadpan mode of narrative presentation in *A Modest Proposal*. And while the Maori narrative is not the equivalent of Swift’s self-conscious work of art it also possesses Swift’s ‘cheeky outrageousness’” (*Cannibal Talk* 95). But whereas the Maori interlocutor engages in an exaggerated parody of the colonizer’s discourse about the native’s man-eating habits in order to mock and intimidate the enemy by projecting his own group as a fierce tribe of cannibals, Swift resorts to parody in order to contrast the impotent self-cannibalism of the modern Irish with the resistant cannibalism of their mythical ancestors, the Scythians, as well as that of their Amerindian near-contemporaries, the Tupinambá. As a result, not only does Swift anticipate recent postcolonial revisions of cannibalism by recognizing its resistant potential when used as a parodic display by the native but he also goes beyond offering cannibalism as a means of resistance and uses it as the controlling trope of an elaborate program of political as well as economic liberation anticipatory of the cultural and political liberation movements that developed in Brazil and other parts of the “extended Caribbean.”<sup>5</sup> The extended Caribbean was the region heavily shaped by the European discourse about cannibalism at least since the epoch-making meeting between the much-celebrated Tupinambá and their equally famous chronicler Sieur Montaigne in 1562 at Rouen.

Thus, cannibalism, from the point of view of oppressed natives, could be a mode of resistance, a way of “devouring” the discursive presence of the European invader by resorting to exaggerated displays of ancestral practices by parodying the very terms used by their European tormentors. However, it could be much more than a protective colouring and could become part of an elaborate program of liberation, which not only excludes all European influences but also emulates those that would fur-

5 A term Peter Hulme has borrowed from Immanuel Wallerstein and used to denote “the tropical belt defined ecologically or meteorologically, rather than astronomically, as, say, the most suitable area for growing the ‘tropical’ crops of cotton, tobacco and sugar; or it is the belt of American coastline that lay within range of that other and equally frightening characteristic phenomenon, the hurricane” (*Colonial Encounters* 4–5).

ther the cause of freedom. The socio-cultural movement in modern Brazil known as the “modernismo” and its ancillary project known as “Revista de Antropofagia” were based on similar premises. The initiators of this movement consciously exploited the supposedly anthropophagic past of Brazilian peoples to which Montaigne’s colourful Tupinambá resoundingly belong. With relation to the Antropofagia appropriation of the cannibalistic past, Santiago Colas writes, “Confronting the European image of an aggressive, barbarous native, these writers saw not a threat but rather a word that summed up an equally long history of New World resistance to violent imposition of European norms upon the region” (130).

Oswald de Andrade, whose copious proposals and manifestos gave Brazilian “antropofagia” its unique characteristics, argued that since European utopian visions, one of whose most memorable fictional utterance being Gonzalo’s “Commonwealth” speech in *The Tempest* (1611), had been always based on the precapitalistic native ways of life such as the one that existed in Brazil before European contact, “time was therefore ripe to actualize these utopias in their proper place which was of course Brazil” (Bellei 94). Andrade’s project, however, as Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei has pointed out, was based on the “ambivalent strategy of incorporation by means of which the strength of the cultural other is used for the creation of a separate cultural identity” (99). It was an ambitious project “based on a diagnostic of the social evils plaguing an undeveloped, colonized country desperately in need of becoming modern in terms of aesthetic, politics, and social reform” (Bellei 92). Such a program not only acknowledges as its ancestral moment the native’s parodic utterance of the cannibal discourse imposed on him by the European invader but also elaborates that gesture into an extensive manifesto of liberation.

In a prescient manner, Swift also resorts to parodying the age-old English discourse about native Irish cannibalism and deliberately exaggerates it to the grotesque act of child eating in order to distinguish it from the resistant cannibal practices of the ancient ancestors of the Irish as well as that of the New World natives. Moreover, in *A Modest Proposal* the parodic utterance of cannibalism as a colonial discourse imposed alike on the Irish and the Amerindian by the English paves the way for an elaborate sociopolitical and economic program of liberation embedded in the allusion to the classical cannibal myth about the Titan Cronus and his children. As such, my project joins Maja-Lisa von Sneidern’s *Savage Indignation: Colonial Discourse from Milton to Swift* (2005) in which she explores Swift’s potentially liberatory use of the colonial discourse of “waste management.” Sneidern points out that Swift’s project is facili-

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tated by the temporary existence of colonial discourse as “a swamp of language preoccupied with the unnatural, implausible, violated, and fantastic” between “the irrevocable end of an English divine polity and the emergence of science as authorized arbiter of ‘true discourse.’” Although admittedly the moment of indeterminacy was gradually contained “by rules of exclusion, like those Foucault identifies, [and] was put into the service of state-sponsored empire,” Sneidern argues that in the case of authors like Swift colonial discourse was used in parodied forms. For instance, Metropolitan reformers exploited the gradually constructed division between the grotesque, porous body and the pure, self-contained body to marginalize “Mother England’s human filth,” the congenitally criminal English under classes (74). Later “travelers, scientists, and colonialist” also wrote about the “filthiness of native peoples” (79) in a bid to construct the metropolitan centre as a sanitized body. Sneidern aptly observes, “They [the English] wanted the motherland purged of its excrement, and they wanted loyal and fruitful colonies; they wanted ‘their’ savages ‘noble’ and they wanted them dead. As we shall see, Swift let them have it both ways, with a vengeance” (74–75).

I argue that such a parodic use of the discourse of cannibalism is to be found in a dialogic reading of the different kinds of cannibal discourses layered into *A Modest Proposal*. While it is highly useful to place Swift’s tract in the long-contested discourse of ethnic and religious defamation or classical ethnography or even in the eighteenth-century tradition of using Old Testament typologies to condemn group behaviour, all of which frequently allude to cannibalism to express contempt for the community under scrutiny, we need to identify his parodic, therefore, resistant use of the cannibal discourse concocted by the English to label their others and the deeper liberatory implications embedded in it. Through his masterful manipulation of European classical myths about cannibal acts, the English “cannibal talk” about the Irish, the concomitant discourse about the New World cannibals also cooked up by Europeans, and the fanciful travel tales told by self-proclaimed reformed cannibals sojourning in the British Isles, Swift highlights the constructed nature of the cannibal talk and raises the possibility that the oppressed other can actually construct an oppositional identity out of the very material that makes up that discourse. In other words, *A Modest Proposal* could be appreciated anew if we can trace the dialogic relationship among its several structural layers: the comic-horror folktales about the foolish, child-devouring ogre; the classical myth about the Titan Cronus who devoured his own offspring; the popular “travel-lies”

that passed for true travel accounts; and the accounts of the brave savages of the New World with a reputation for cannibalism.

I use “parody” and “dialogism” in their Bakhtinian senses. In *Discourse in the Novel* (1934–35), Mikhail M. Bakhtin further developed his concept of the novel and novelistic prose as essentially being a dialogic literary form (an idea which he had posited in such earlier works as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1929), one that resists any attempt to superimpose a unitary authoritative language on the heteroglossia of contending social languages that make up novelistic prose. However, rather than being “merely heteroglossia vis-a-vis the accepted literary language (in all its various generic expressions),” Bakhtin points out that “it was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. It was heteroglossia that had been dialogized” (273). In *A Modest Proposal* also, we find that the languages of insincere Whig benevolence, the part fantastic, part pseudo-ethnographic discourse about New World cannibalism, the sensational travel narratives, traces of fairy tales, and classical myths are dialogized. Carole Fabricant has demonstrated that a recognition of the linguistic heteroglossia in Swift’s writings about Ireland allows us “to appreciate the many ways in which Swift was an Irish writer, speaking in a variety of tongues while simultaneously delighting in and striving to tame the instabilities of Language” (70–71). Similarly, an exploration of the complex relationship among the “variety of [cannibal] tongues” in *A Modest Proposal* would bring out Swift’s anticipation of postcolonial revisions of the much-debated discourse, especially the variety that not only recognizes its traditional use to establish self/other and civilized/savage dichotomies characteristic of colonial discourse but also points out its use as a tool of resistance when used in parodic forms by natives. Such a deployment of the discourse on the part of Swift is to some extent commensurate with that of Montaigne, who also subscribed to a distinction between the self and the other even as he valorized the cannibal as an idealized other. However, Swift does not romanticize the other; on the contrary, his other is as ruthless as the self. Contrasting Swift’s engagement with the other with that of Montaigne, Rawson writes, “The point in Swift is to rub in the incriminating resemblance with our despised sub group, not to highlight a depraved contrast with primitive virtue” (5). While I concur with Rawson that Swift does not construct the other as an embodiment of unadulterated primitive virtue, I also contend that his treatment of the cannibal discourse equips the other with agency as effective and ruthless as that of the European self.

Swift was definitely aware of the paradoxical nature of the discourse of cannibalism that according to Kilgour “involves both the establishing of absolute difference, the opposites of eater and eaten, and the dissolution of that difference, through the act of incorporation which identifies them and makes the two one” (“The Function of Cannibalism” 240). As I shall demonstrate, in *A Modest Proposal* the success of the program of resistance and liberation relies on a strategic maintenance of the boundaries between the self and the other. My own project, however, could be summed up in Kilgour’s memorable words: “Where in the past the figure of the cannibal has been used to construct differences that uphold racism, it now appears in projects to deconstruct them” (“The Function of Cannibalism” 242). In this regard, I join such recent revisionist projects as *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity* (2001), whose purpose, according to Kristen Guest, is to rethink the trope of “the cannibal, long a figure associated with absolute alterity and used to enforce boundaries between a civilized ‘us’ and savage ‘them,’ [which] may in fact be more productively read as a symbol of permeability, or instability, of such boundaries” (2). All such recent revisionist works certainly owe their existence to Maggie Kilgour’s pioneering work *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (1990).<sup>6</sup>

However, while attempting to recuperate Swift’s deployment of the cannibal discourse in *A Modest Proposal* for a postcolonial reading one could learn a valuable lesson from Robert Mahony’s careful historicizing of the gradual construction of Swift as an Irish patriot in Ireland since his lifetime until the twentieth century:

Against the standard of British-Irish and inter-Irish antagonism that the twentieth century has inherited from nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, eighteenth-century Ireland diverges in a number of respects, among them that the relatively disadvantaged were, prudently, less likely to articulate in print

<sup>6</sup> Kilgour has pointed out in the European canon instances of what she describes as “fables of identity” that “are bound to a nostalgia for a state of incorporation that underlies many of the major trends in western thought: idealism, scientific rationalism, traditional psychoanalysis, as well as imperialism” (*From Cannibalism to Communion* 5). Borrowing Kilgour’s notion of the myths of “total incorporation” that characterize the Western canon, Rebecca Weaver-Hightower has more recently read the frequent allusions to cannibal visitations and piratical invasions in the island narratives as enacting the “fear of what [she] call[s] ‘counterincorporation,’ meaning that they dramatize a potential reversal of physical incorporation through which the castaway colonists gained control of the island” (93).

grievances against the London government than the relatively advantaged, who could even flirt with disaffection. (*Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity* xv)

Just as it would be ahistorical and misleading to assume that Swift had always been the patriot that nineteenth-century Irish nationalism made him out to be, so it would be a fruitless critical endeavour to reclaim Swift as an unproblematic postcolonial contemporary of ours. Swift's engagement with colonial discourse was at once resistant and complicit. Mahony goes on to add, "For instance, at the time his defense of Ireland seemed mainly *defensiveness* on behalf of the political sensitivities of the elite, while his attack on the Irish system of land management directly confronted that elite" (*Jonathan Swift* xv). *A Modest Proposal*, with its excoriating rhetoric against the "absentee" and their pathological mishandling of Irish land management, is an example of one such moment of direct confrontation, and this moment of confrontation is made memorable through Swift's masterful use of the discourse of cannibalism. In "Swift, Postcolonialism, and Irish Studies: The Valence of Ambivalence," Robert Mahony has demonstrated the theoretical problems involved in applying the "Empire Writes Back" variety of postcolonial theory to Swift's texts. Mahony argues that the very ambivalence of Swift's positionality: exile yet cosmopolitan, Irish yet English, oppressed yet oppressor, makes his work amenable to postcolonial theory, especially the kind that posits that the colonial enterprise corrupted the colonizer even as it oppressed the natives. As a result, when Swift addresses "the Irish" in *A Modest Proposal*, he is referring to an ambiguous category of which the Anglo-Irish settlers are as much a part as are the disgusting Catholic natives. Both are implicated in a cannibalistic economy of self-destruction, either as the consumer and the consumed or the producer and the product. Hence it is imprecise to relegate Swift's text to what is sometimes known as "settler-discourse" in postcolonial theory in opposition to the so-called "native-discourse."

However, it is equally problematic to try to retrieve the voice of the native in *A Modest Proposal*. Unlike the Maori informer (of the British ethnographer cited by Obyesekere) who parodied the white intruder's all too pathological obsession about native cannibalism in order to insert a counterdiscourse into the very terms of the colonial discourse he was participating in constructing, Swift cannot be fitted into the unambiguous position of the native. His own position was problematized by the fact that he was contending against a colonial discourse, remarkable for its complexity and longevity, in the construction of which his own in-group the Anglo-Irish themselves had taken part but, ironically, were in real

danger of being subsumed by. Clare Carroll's delineation of the gradual narrowing down of the targets of the English discourse of civility versus barbarity in Ireland allows us to appreciate the quandary in which Swift found himself. Originally directed against the Gaelic Irish by the early Anglo-Norman conquerors, it later provoked oppositional commentary from the Old English because the New English Protestant conquerors from the sixteenth century onward were tarring them with the same brush (Carroll 14–19). Ironically, as Carroll points out, “Written in the midst of the Nine Year’s War by a New English settler on the Munster plantation, Spenser’s *View of the Present State of Ireland* extends Stanihurst’s [Richard Stanihurst, an Old English author, whose description of Ireland was published in Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577)] ethnography of Gaelic savagery to include the Old English and draws on the Calvinist and Proto-racialist discourses of Derricke [John Derricke whose *Image of Ireland* celebrated the punitive violence meted out to the Gaelic Irish rebels by Sir Henry Sidney]” (19).

Swift in his own turn found himself and his in-group in a similar situation in the eighteenth century when the English were too ready to deploy the same discourse to define the Anglo-Irish. Little wonder that in *To the Whole People of Ireland*, letter number four of the *Drapier’s Letters* published between 1724 and 1725, the Drapier sounds indignant: “They [the English] look upon us as a Sort of *Savage Irish*, whom our Ancestors conquered several Hundred Years ago” (10:64). Swift’s position was further complicated by his antipathy toward the Irish Protestant dissenters who opposed the Church of Ireland. In other words, Swift is at several removes from the subaltern victim of the English cannibal discourse, the native Irish, and he definitely did not share the recognition of the subaltern’s ultimate victimhood posited by a certain variety of postcolonial theory. In *A Modest Proposal*, the subaltern, the beggar woman with the children clinging to her like so many spores, does not speak.<sup>7</sup> Swift certainly shared

7 The subaltern as historical subject, as defined by Antonio Gramsci, is lower class and male, whose repetitive insurrections against oppression are ignored and silenced in the bourgeois history of the establishment of the nationalist state. Consequently, the history of the subaltern groups is fragmented and episodic (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 216). The Gramscian concept of subalternity was later used by the Subaltern Studies Group (mostly a group of intellectuals from decolonized India), whose objective was to explore the possibility of reclaiming the repressed history of the insurrection of the subaltern classes against colonial as well as oppressive native rule in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial subaltern was made up of the lower castes, classes, outcastes, and tribal peoples. He (the colonial subaltern male) is defined by his irreducible difference from not only the white colonial ruler but also from the mimicman.

many of his speaker's prejudices against the native Irish. However, the awareness on his part that his own in-group the Anglo-Irish had become as much a target of the English discourse of Irish savagery and cannibalism as the wild Irish allowed him to parody it and through the parodic allusions point out the liberatory potential embedded in it. In other words, he understood that the Anglo-Irish were in the same boat as the natives but did not relish this precarious position. Consequently, he constructs a speaker in *A Modest Proposal* who is an unwitting mouthpiece of the English cannibal talk of which he himself is a victim in the sense that he has accepted the role of the passive, degenerate autocannibal foisted on the Irish by the English colonizer.

Contrary to Oliver Ferguson's claim that there is only one voice in *A Modest Proposal*, a Swiftian voice does indeed break through the modest projector's pathological lapse into self-cannibalism when it alludes to the resistant cannibalism of the Scythian or the Tupinambá as well as to the liberatory potential of the Cronus myth. Ferguson writes, "The voice is the same, and the weary impatience with which the expedients are rejected is the same. And the one reference to England in the tract ('I could name a country, which would be glad to eat up our whole nation') is inconsistent not because Swift drained out the projector's voice with his own, but because he momentarily diverted the direction of his attack" (175). Ferguson treats Swift's use of cannibalism as a logical albeit satirical culmination of Swift's own economic thought: consume domestic products. Since the Irish refused to heed his advise, he throws the "one proposal so singularly appropriate to this abandoned nation—cannibalism" at them (Ferguson 174). Consequently, Ferguson does not pay any attention to the overlaying of the purely economic discourse with that of cannibalism, a distinctive discourse about the self and the other. The speaker is as much a target of the cannibal discourse as he is the participant. He consciously functions

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The notion of subalternity became a much-debated issue in postcolonial criticism when Gayatri Spivak in her controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" urged the Subaltern Studies Group to use this question as a corrective to their approach to the history of subaltern insurrections. Spivak disagrees with the Gramscian notion that the subaltern occupies an autonomous position, because such a notion inevitably leads to essentialism. According to Spivak, the subaltern is "irretrievably heterogeneous" (284); there is no ideal subaltern subject with a distinguishable voice, monolithic and representable. Moreover, the subaltern as sexed subject, that is the subaltern as woman, further problematizes the notion of subalternity. Spivak argues, "If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (287).

at three of the several structural levels: the comic-horror folktales about the child-devouring ogre, the cattle-herding humanoid Cyclopes in *The Odyssey*, and the popular travel-lies that passed for true travel accounts. The liberatory implications of both the classical establishment myth about Cronus—implied in the allusion to England devouring Ireland—and the classical myth about the fierce Scythians as well as the early-modern myths about the New World man-eaters are inaccessible to the insane projector and are the exclusive domains of the Swiftian voice, and it is at these levels that the liberatory potential of the cannibal talk is to be found.

## II. Of Ogres and Cannibals

In *A Modest Proposal* the projector's erratic tone, shifting frequently from broodingly melancholy and droolingly gloating to cloyingly modest, invites us to identify him with the ogre in European fairy tales. The ostensible aim of this complex dialogue carried out by a community of cannibals is to prove that the eating of children's flesh is a viable economic alternative to the Irish crisis. However, Swift, in his typically indignant manner, is implying that since the intractable Irish have persistently refused to accept reasonable economic measures to save themselves, they deserve to become mindless ogres. Frank Lestringant has aptly commented, "The community which devours its own children takes on the appearance of a new Moloch. It evokes the ogres of fairy tales, who, in his canine rage, would have become autophagous" (124). Perhaps not surprisingly, the projector finds an useful ally in an American savage currently residing in London, who confirms his hypothesis that young babies would make tasty and wholesome dishes for the tables of the Irish gentleman: "I have been assured by a very knowing *American* of my acquaintance in *London*, that a young healthy Child well nursed is at a Year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food, whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*, and I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricassee*, or a *Ragoust*" (12:111). The culinary dialogue assumes sadistic proportions when the modest projector considers the opinion of a "very worthy Person, a true Lover of his Country." According to the anonymous patriot, "the Want of Venison might be well supplied by the Bodies of young Lads and Maidens, not exceeding fourteen Years of Age, nor under twelve." Apparently, the "Expedient was put into [the patriotic gentleman's] Head by the famous Salmanaazor, a Native of the Island *Formosa*" (12:113). According to Salmanaazor's account paraphrased by the projector, "the Body of a plump Girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an Attempt to poison the Emperor, was sold to his Imperial *Majesty's Prime Minister of State*, and

other great *Mandarins* of the Court, in *Joints from the Gibbet*, at Four Hundred Crowns” (12:113–14). The projector, however, humbly turns down the “worthy” patriot’s suggestion because his “knowing *American*” acquaintance vetoes it by pointing out that teenagers’s flesh is tough and unsuitable as table meat; it is better to stick to the original plan of using babies for the purpose. Evidently, the focus in *A Modest Proposal* is on child eating and not on man eating. Unlike the manly and warlike Tupinambá (Swift calls them the “Topinambo”) in Montaigne’s *Des Cannibales*, who reputedly ate their enemies killed in fair battle, the mad projector and his disreputable friends gloat over the possibility of turning child flesh into a commodity.

Marina Warner traces the key characteristics of the ogre to the humanoid villains of classical epics like Polyphemous the Cyclops in *The Odyssey*: “In the early-modern fairy tales, ogres are similarly large, rich, strong, and very stupid” (164). The mad projector is also a very stupid, if not rich, man and full of projects that are supposed to generate riches. He is an ogre-like spokesman for the newly emergent commodity culture, which reifies people as things and is based on a never-ending cycle of consumption. Moreover, the projector has a propensity toward erratic mood swings, ranging from the melancholy brought on by his reflection on the destitute Irish mother walking the streets of Dublin “followed by three, four, or six children, *all in Rags*” (12:109) to the frenzied enthusiasm about the unquestionable efficacy of his absurd project: “Let no Man talk to me of these and the like Expedients, till he hath, at least, a Glimpse of Hope that there will ever be some hearty and sincere Attempt to *put them in practice*” (12:117). The fairy-tale ogres are also given to such extremes of melancholy as well as euphoria. In the persona of the projector the typically English civilizational malady of spleen brought on by newfangled consumerism finds an ogrish expression. The good Dr George Cheyne, Swift’s friend and the compiler of that eminent tome on spleen as a civilizational disease, *The English Malady* (1733), waxed eloquent about the debilitating effects of such newfangled dishes as fricassees and ragouts on the English constitution: “Since our wealth has increas’d, and our navigation has been extended, we have ransacked all parts of the globe to bring together its whole stock of materials for riot, luxury, and to provoke excess.” The learned physician goes on to point out that the inventive custom of breeding cattle for the table by “stalling, cramming, bleeding, lameing, sweating, purging, and thrusting down such unnatural and high-season’d food into them” produces the seeds of melancholy in their flesh (50). Little wonder that the speaker in Swift’s tract, whose plan also involves raising

Irish children as a delicacy fed solely on their mothers' milk, has such unpredictable moods.

The speaker in *A Modest Proposal* might also be likened to a one-eyed Cyclops. His single-minded project to turn Ireland into a cyclopean landscape teeming with cattle, black and white, human and animal, certainly qualifies him to be a foolish cyclopean man-eater. He is blind to the potentially liberatory uses of cannibalism as a viable alternative to the project of passive auto-cannibalism he puts forward to his countrymen. As a discourse about the other, cannibalism, whether invented by Europeans or exaggerated and parodied by the natives, is frequently designed to bolster the identity of some dominant group at the expense of a rival group competing for the same natural resources. William Arens writes, "This intellectual process [labeling the other as cannibal] is part of the attempt by every society to create a conceptual order based on differences in a universe of often competing neighboring communities" (145). By contrast, the projector in *A Modest Proposal* is making a very unusual use of cannibalism. He is advocating that the modern Irish should become cannibals in order to eat their own. He is in favour of what seems to be a rather problematic version of the cannibal discourse. It is self-cannibalism rather than being a form of "endocannibalism," a rare affective gesture observed by some modern anthropologists.<sup>8</sup> At least the foolish Cyclopes do not eat their own. Our Cyclops/ogre projector proposes that the poor Irish should produce children in order to sell them as table meat and make a clear profit out of the transaction. The eaters would be the rich Irish. The stringent policing of the self/other dichotomy that constitutes the resistant use of cannibal discourse on the part of the natives like the Maori or the Tupinambá is thus totally lost on the foolish projector. The poor Irish, whose babies are to be sold as table meat, appear to be creatures of a more disgusting nature than the Cyclopes. According to the projector, they "would become as fond of their Wives, during the Time of their Pregnancy, as they are now of their Mares in Foal, their Cows in Calf, or Sows when they are ready to farrow, nor offer to beat or kick them (as it is too frequent a Practice) for fear of a Miscarriage" (12:115). The Irishmen in this passage are likened to swineherds or cowherds or shepherds, not unlike the Cyclopes, who also looked after cattle but presumably did not abuse them unwarrantedly. But the Irish are worse; they are autocannibals.

<sup>8</sup> "Endocannibalism" has been used by Peggy Reeves Sanday in order to denote the practice of eating the dead bodies of kin as "a physical channel for communicating social value and procreative fertility from one generation to the next" (7).

The modest projector does resemble the Cyclopes in one respect, however. As Mark Buchan has pointed out, the Cyclopes do not feel compelled to visit the neighbouring island which is eminently cultivable because “they are perfectly self sufficient, nothing outside their own island can tempt them” (18). Not unlike the Cyclopes who exist, according to Buchan, in a pre-linguistic realm of the imaginary, the speaker in Swift’s essay is also advocating an autonomous and antisocial existence (27–29). Maggie Kilgour’s comments on one of Stephen King’s short stories as being a contemporary example of the propensity in Western thought to produce the autonomous self through the metaphor of incorporation is admirably applicable in this context: “The desire for absolute self-reliance and independence from all external influences would be best satisfied by self-cannibalism, in which one doesn’t even need to rely on the world outside for food.” She goes on to add, “The modern definition of the self in terms of self-identity and self knowledge is parodied as being not only narcissistic but self-cannibalistic” (*From Communion to Cannibalism* 150). The projector with his obsessive insistence upon a rational final solution exclusive of all rival projects is indeed an embodiment of the self-cannibalistic drive inherent in the development of the Western autonomous self.

The oppressively self-enclosed landscape comprised of cannibal shepherds and their human cattle in *A Modest Proposal* might distract our attention from the more acceptable cannibalistic alternatives represented by the allusions to the ancient Scythian ancestors of the modern Irish, to the fearsome and patriotic “Topinambo,” and, last but not least, to the English, who would “eat up” the whole Irish nation without the aid of condiments. However, it might be argued that the American acquaintance of the projector is a New World savage and as such his insistence on child eating undercuts my distinction between parodic/resistant cannibalism on the part of New World savages such as the Maori and the ogriish cannibalism proposed by the projector and his unsavoury acquaintances.

The anonymous American man-eater is a solitary individual, who, by some fantastic turn of events, has turned up in London. He does not represent any recognizable group of New World savages, some of whom like the Mohocks were brought over and paraded in London as an exhibit in the early years of the eighteenth century—hence the name of the unruly gang of rich young men, the “Mohocks” alluded to in one of Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* papers. Addison’s lovable Tory squire Sir Roger De Coverley feels threatened by the Mohocks roaming the streets of London when his friends attempt to persuade him to join them for some theatrical entertainment. Mr Spectator reports, “My friend asked me, in the next

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ingenious hoax.

place, if there would not be some danger in coming home late [from the play *The Distressed Mother*] in case the Mohocks should be abroad” (195). By contrast, the American acquaintance belongs more to the realm of eighteenth-century “travel lies,” as Percy G. Adams has designated a class of eighteenth-century travel tales, which were designed to satisfy the vanity, cupidity, and political, religious, and personal prejudices of the author (11). Hence, the “knowing American” is no desperate native admitting to cannibalistic practices as a “weapon of the weak” against his European enemy.<sup>9</sup> The American savage, the notorious Salmanaazor, and the speaker himself all belong to the colourful realm of travel lies. The American is another would-be Salmanaazor, who was actually born a Frenchman and later claimed to be a Formosan ex-cannibal, converted first to Catholicism by the Jesuits and later to the one-and-only true religion of Anglicanism. His elaborate hoax was so successful that he was even offered a position at Oxford to teach the Formosan tongue to the future missionaries to Formosa. But not everyone was taken in by the ingenious hoax; as a matter of fact, the person who supposedly found him and “converted” him, a Scots army chaplain named George Innes, soon saw through the elaborate ruse but decided to go along with it in order to secure a better position for himself in the Church (Adams 93). In other words, the relationship between the wily chaplain and the roguish travel liar was that of a parasite and his host, a real-life counterpart of the Volpone-Mosca partnership immortalized in Ben Johnson’s *Volpone* (1607). Men of letters as well as hack writers were quick to respond to Salmanaazor’s fanciful tale. Addison and Steele saw through the hoax and the following notice appeared at the end of *Spectator* No. 14, on Friday, 16 March 1711: “On the first of April will be performed at the play house in the Hay-market an opera called *The Cruelty of Atreus*. N.B. The scene where in Thyestes eats his own children is to be performed by the famous Mr. Psalmaanazaar [sic] lately arrived from Formosa: the whole supper being set to kettle-drums” (quoted in Adams 95). Swift, who tormented the fraudulent astrologer Partridge, creates the characters of the foolish speaker and the knowing American with the same

9 My reading adds to Rawson’s take on the ironic dialogue between the “knowing *American*” and the projector: “When the Modest Proposer invokes the cannibal expertise of ‘a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance in *London*,’ in what might be thought of as an ironic variant of Montaigne’s conversation with Amerindians in Rouen, and of the point in ‘Des cannibals’ that the Indians have more to teach Europeans than vice versa, the evidence similarly suggests that neither the American teacher nor the Irish pupil has any reason to feel flattered” (84). I argue that, in addition, the American could also represent a parody of travel liars like Salmanaazor.

dexterity in *A Modest Proposal*. But unlike Salmanaazor and Partridge, of whom the knowing American is an excellent type, Swift does not fool the speaker and through him the Irish for personal gain. His intention is to reiterate the grotesque and impotent savagery of the Irish as contrasted by the resistant cannibalism of the “Topinamboo.”

In *A Modest Proposal* the carnival of the ogre-like characters, whose native element was the spurious travel tales, is abruptly interrupted by the intervention of a recognizably Swiftian voice. The long harangue toward the end of the tract beginning “therefore, let no man talk to me of other Expedients” is a succinct summing up of the ethically sound remedies Swift has all along been recommending to the recalcitrant Irish. One of the rhetorical high points of the harangue is the allusion to the “Topinamboo,” who, despite being (supposedly) man-eating savages, love their motherland. The modern Irish by contrast fall short “Of learning to love our Country, wherein we differ even from LAPLANDERS, and the inhabitants of TOPINAMBOO” (12:116). With the allusion to the “Topinamboo” or Montaigne’s Tupinambá, we move into serious discourse about European engagement with the New World others. Emphasizing the importance of the encounter between the Tupinamba and the Europeans as a crucial point in the complex dialogue between Europe and its others, Peter Hulme writes:

If ... cannibalism needs to be understood as a topic within the dialogue between Europe and its others, and therefore within the context of the colonial world, then our symbolic starting point must be the historically resonant appearance of the Tupinambá, who disembarked at Rouen in November 1562, where they conversed with the young French king, Charles IX, and with Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne’s conversation with the Tupinambá, and the reflections it produced in his essay “Des Cannibales,” reverberate through all subsequent cultural debates about cannibalism. (Introduction 5)

The ongoing cultural debates about cannibalism were to be harnessed by the anti-colonial cultural and political movements in Brazil and other parts of the extended Caribbean in the twentieth century. As has been mentioned earlier, indigenous movements such as the Brazilian “antropofagia” appropriated cannibalism as a liberatory trope.

In *A Modest Proposal* we come across the anticipation of a kind of “antropofagia” resistance. Swift’s indignation in this Irish tract, as in others, stems from the fact that the Irish have not only persistently failed to give up harmful economic practices such as the consumption of superfluous

English commodities but also to adopt the vigorous economic practices of their oppressor. The spirit of antropofagia resistance, which demands that the oppressor's influence must not only be excluded but also emulated as and when suitable, is also to be found in other Irish tracts by Swift, especially *An Answer to a Paper Called a Memorial of the Poor Inhabitants, Tradesmen, And Labourers of the Kingdom of Ireland* (1728) and *An Answer to the Craftsman* (written in 1730 but not published until 1758).

*An Answer to a Paper Called a Memorial* was Swift's rebuttal to Sir John Browne's otherwise good-natured attempt at suggesting the heavy importation of food grains as way to alleviate the terrible shortage in Ireland. The speaker in *An Answer to a Paper Called a Memorial* condemns the foolish practices of the tenant farmers and landowners, which have led to the current impasse. According to exasperated speaker, "This [the neglect of farming and land management] gave Birth to that abominable Race of Graziers, who, upon Expiration of the Farmers Leases, are ready to engross great Quantities of Land" (12:17–18). The graziers, with the assent of the landowners, have turned Ireland into a vast grazing field which "became all desolate, and easily managed by one or two Herdsmen and their Boys; whereby the Master-Grazier, with little Trouble, seized to himself the Livelyhood of a Hundred People" (12:18). The modern Irish are happy to slide into bovine passivity by acquiescing to the harmful economic practice of cattle grazing instead of trying to emulate the aggressive economic policies of their English masters. Ireland lost her right to trade freely with other European countries through a series of punitive mercantilist legislatures. These legislatures were designed to ensure English monopoly over all kinds of trade. Principal among them were the navigation acts dating from 1663 and the curb on the woolen industry in Ireland placed in the early years of the seventeenth century. They were designed to render prohibitively expensive and difficult all exportations and importations of commodities from and to Ireland. According to Louis A. Landa, "These discriminatory acts, which seemed so unjust to Swift and other Irishmen, were viewed in different light by the English, who merely had been putting into effect the prevailing mercantilist principle that a colony or a dependent nation is intended to serve the national economic interest of the mother country." Landa goes on to write, "Swift does not challenge the rightness of the mercantilist attitude toward a dependent kingdom.[...] To have done so, as he must have realized, would have been to run counter to widely accepted views. Instead he bases his arguments on another level—a constitutional one" (19). Swift fiercely maintained in his Irish tracts that Ireland was not to be treated like a colony because

the Anglo-Irish were fellow subjects with equal rights. Contrary to the oversimplified view that Swift invariably backed the landed interest at the expense of the trading interest, he subscribed to the mercantilist prescriptions for national wealth. As Landa has pointed out, “To a great extent his solutions for Ireland’s economic problems are based on a fundamental mercantilist assumption, that importations are, economically speaking, an evil, that an excess of exports over imports—a favorable balance of trade—is the means by which a nation may be enriched” (24). Consequently, in *An Answer to the Craftsman* Swift proposed ironically that Irish trade be operated for the sole benefit of England because the English “have a just Claim to the Balance of Trade on their side with the whole World” (12:177). Oliver Ferguson writes,

*A Modest Proposal* had refuted by ironic misapplication, the maxim that people are the riches of a nation. *The Answer to the Craftsman* [sic] refuted not only this maxim but four equally fundamental principles of economy: that a nation’s exports should exceed its imports; that if goods had to be imported, they should be in raw condition, if at all possible; that a surplus of gold and silver should be maintained and increased; and that a country should promote sufficient tillage to answer its own needs. (180)

Patrick Kelly has more recently pointed out that *A Modest Proposal* was “Swift’s most notorious economic pamphlet” (129) not because it had anything radically new to offer the reading public but because of its reliance on sensational methods: “For all his prestige as the Drapier and the champion of the Irish poor, Swift at the end of the 1720s can be seen therefore to represent not only a profoundly disenchanted but more significantly an increasingly outdated view of Ireland’s economic prospects” (140). In spite of his acknowledgement of Swift’s seminal contribution to the flowering of economic discourse in Ireland in the 1720s and 1730s following the publication of *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* in 1720, Kelly places *A Modest Proposal* and other pamphlets exclusively in the realm of Irish economic discourse and thereby ignores the fruitful cross-pollination between the discourses of cannibalism and economics in Swift’s writings.

Whether or not such measures were outdated at this point in Irish history, Swift clearly believed that only by “consuming” such mercantilist policies, the prerogative of sovereign kingdoms like England, could Ireland save herself from her miserable plight. Consequently, the speaker in *An Answer to a Paper Called a Memorial* compares and contrasts the Irish and

their cattle-like acceptance of harsh colonial exploitation with the heroic resistance of the American Indians: “For a People denied the Benefit of *Trade*, to manage their Lands in such a Manner, as to produce nothing but what they are forbidden to trade with; or, only such Things as they can neither export, nor manufacture, to Advantage, is an Absurdity, that a *wild Indian* would be ashamed of” (12:18). The speaker is so exasperated with the Irish penchant for cattle grazing that he goes on to recommend an extreme remedy, namely Ajax’s madness triggered by a flock of sheep he mistook for the enemy: “But we shall never be sober, until we have the same way of Thinking” (12:19). A frenzied overturning of the self-cannibalistic economy is the solely efficacious remedy at this juncture.

In *A Modest Proposal* the Irish appear to have lost all potential for active resistance and have become cattle-like creatures themselves, not much different from the black or white cattle they tend, instead of engaging in fruitful agricultural or trade activities. The poor Irish child becomes a newborn calf by implication as the speaker writes, “It is true a Child, *just dropt from its Dam*, maybe supported by her Milk, for a Solar year with little other Nourishment; at most not above the Value of two Shillings.” Launching into a bout of statistical insanity, the speaker adds, “I calculate there may be about Two hundred Thousand couple whose Wives are Breeders” (12:110). In a fit of eugenic ingenuity, the projector proposes that of the cattle-children only twenty thousand should be reserved for “breed.” The Irish Catholics or “our Savages,” as he refers to them, are indifferent to wedlock and many such brats are born out of it anyway (12:111). These savages appear to be no better than the cattle they tend, when compared to the fierce Scythian tribesman and the “Topinamboo” of the New World. Thus the Irish are both cattle-like and cannibalistic. Claude Rawson has described this paradoxical representation as “a famous unresolved equation in the literature of cultural or ethnic defamation.” He adds, “Part of the trick is to describe the victim as bestial, and then to instance cannibalism as a sign of this, even though the example of animal behavior initially registered might not even be carnivorous, let alone cannibal” (76). The desolate and heart-chilling landscape inhabited by savage cattle-herders, who are themselves cattle-like, is further developed in *An Answer to the Craftsman*. Ferguson comments, “From an economic standpoint, *The Answer to the Craftsman* is really more shocking than *A Modest Proposal*, for it proposes not the slaughter of Irish children but the annihilation of Ireland herself” (180). However, one has to look at the pamphlet from a standpoint other than the purely economic one in order to appreciate its bone-chilling implications. The mad projector calls Ireland a “new

*Arcadia*,” where “the industrious Shepherd and the Cow-herd may sit, every Man under his own Blackberry Bush, and his own Potatoe-Bed” (12:176). The whole kingdom of Ireland would become one vast grazing ground with a handful of shepherds’ huts and a garrison for the English army of occupation to keep the peace. One of the most chilling arguments the Projector puts forward for turning Ireland into a “new Arcadia” in *An Answer to the Craftsman* is that the Irish are “turned by Nature” for such an occupation, “as [they] are descended from the *Scythians*, whose Diet they are still so fond of” (12:177–78). During famine-like conditions the modern Irish were known to bleed their cattle and mix the blood with some kind of porridge. According to the speaker, the curious diet of the Irish, “Which [the blood porridge], in *English*, is Bonnyclabber, mingled with the Blood of Horses, as they formerly did, until about the Beginning of the last Century Luxury, under the Form of Politeness, began to creep in, they changed the Blood of Horses for that of their black cattle; and, by Consequence, became less war-like than their Ancestors” (12:178). The Irish have thus devolved from warlike savages to bovine, pitiable wretches, who are only good as “a Screen between His Majesty’s *English* subjects and the savage *Indians*,” fulminates the speaker in *An Answer to the Craftsman* (12:176). In the unfolding confrontation between the English colonizers and the Amerindians, who used the trope of cannibalism as a mode of resistance, the Irish are only fit to serve as a human shield.

In *A Modest Proposal* there is no such screen between the colonizing English and the colonized Irish. Toward the end of the tract, a distinctly Swiftian voice undercuts the projector’s foolish optimism that the trade in the perishable flesh of human babies would not disoblige England because it cannot be exported: “*Although, perhaps I could name a Country, which would be glad to eat up our whole Nation without it*” (12:117). The English are being likened to the arch-devourer of classical myth Cronus/Saturn, the cannibal father of the Olympian gods. Concluding his “eucharistic” reading of *A Modest Proposal*, Frank Lestringant writes, “This vision [in *A Modest Proposal* that presents an “unfeeling nature” and a “famished population which devours itself”] which has been qualified as ‘proto-Malthusian,’ is, in addition, placed within the shadowy light of Saturn, the god who devoured his own children and whose melancholic influence marks this masterpiece of black humor from the very first words” (125). Although Lestringant recognizes the Saturn/Cronus myth, his reading does not uncover the potential for liberation inherent in the establishment myth. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Cronus, the Titan, received an oracle that one of his children would supplant him, so he devoured them one by

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one, until Rhea, the distraught mother, “A huge rock wrapped in swaddling clothes she gave to be devoured” and the brutish father “took it in his hand and in his belly crammed it down” (486–87), apparently without masticating. The ruse allowed Zeus to survive and eventually overthrow his cannibal father in order to establish the Olympian supremacy. By the same token, the English in *A Modest Proposal* are also capable of eating up Ireland “whole,” without bothering to masticate. If we take the image of England swallowing Ireland whole without culinary refinements as a veiled allusion to the Cronus myth, then it is apparent that Swift managed to tap into the original spirit of the Greek myth by short-circuiting the propensity in Renaissance visual art to reinterpret the myth. As Marina Warner points out, Renaissance paintings fascinatingly depict Cronus as violently tearing his children limb from limb and masticating them although there were no classical precedence for such a portrayal. “Such representations,” Warner goes on to add, “were perhaps influenced by the more famous cannibal ogre, Polyphemous the Cyclops” (169). Swift, by contrast, distinguishes between the Cyclopean cannibalism proposed by his psychotic persona and the Cronus-like devouring of Ireland by England, an act which is potentially reversible. The metropolitan centre as the filiphagous father may temporarily swallow the colony whole, but the logic of the original classical myth ultimately curtails the father’s power: “The motif of the transgressive cannibal parent, as excess, as outrage, may serve to define limits: on the father’s power” (Warner 172). Whether or not such measures were practicable at this stage of Irish history from a purely economic standpoint, Swift had been urging the Irish to adopt a “cannibalistic” program of liberation from colonial oppression, one that would not only reject the harmful foreign influence but would also “consume” those that are beneficial, such as a foreign trade balance in favour of Ireland, a resurgent domestic agriculture and industry, a large, hardworking native population, and the right to coinage, all reversals of the aggressive mercantilist policies employed by the English in their bid to colonize others and enrich themselves.<sup>10</sup>

10 Santiago Colas, however, has pointed out the limitations of the cannibal discourse when used as a tool of resistance by anti-colonial movements. He writes, “For coexisting with the aggressive, active resistance implicit in the eating of one’s enemy goes a wishful identification, a desire to be the enemy, or at the very least a desire to take on his or her strength.” The Cuban experiment has demonstrated that the writers and intellectuals who advocated the cannibal/Caliban metaphor in order to emphasize the vanguardism of the common people inevitably ended up by denigrating them as “an inert mass that required a catalyst,” writes Colas (137–38).

In *A Modest Proposal*, then, Swift internally dialogizes the discourse about man-eating by interweaving popular travel narratives, traces of European folklore, and classical myths. The self-cannibalism of the modest proposer and his creepy cronies serves to highlight the necessity of adopting the resistant cannibalism of the ancient Scythians and the modern Tupinamabá as well as the liberatory one suggested by the reversion to the original spirit of the Cronus myth. *A Modest Proposal* illustrates that the man-eating myth could be recuperated for liberatory goals, one that not only acts as a resistant ploy but also as a process of discriminatory assimilation that appropriates the useful attributes of the oppressor in the interest of freedom.

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