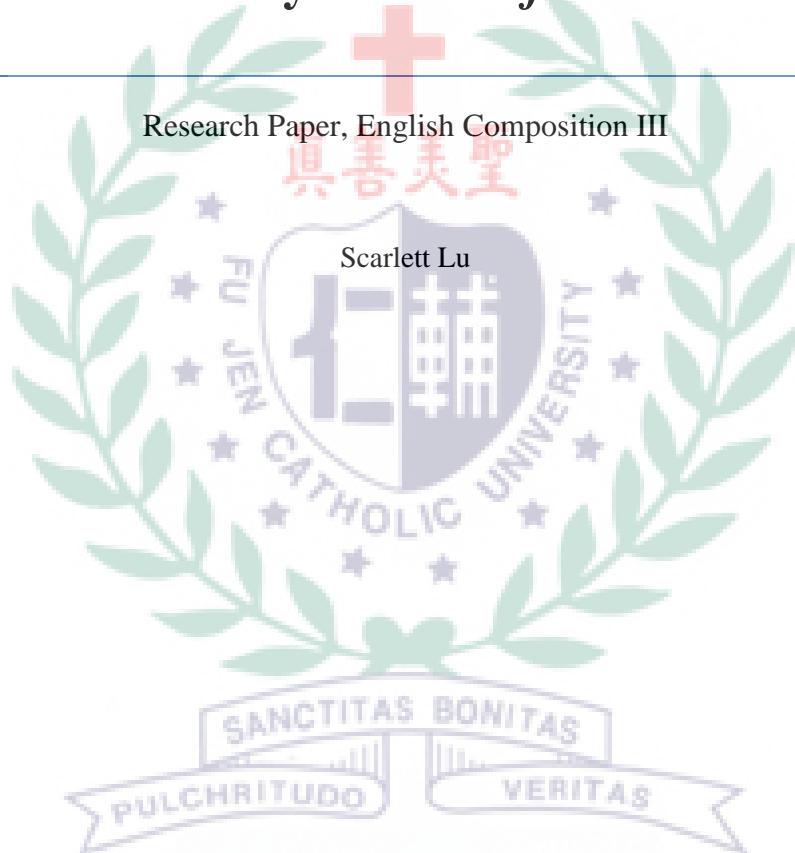


ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, FU JEN CATHOLIC DEPARTMENT
GRADUATION PROJECT 2016

Femininity in Lord of the Flies

Research Paper, English Composition III

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Research Paper

Femininity in *Lord of the Flies*

Lord of the Flies is a novel written by the Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding about a group of schoolboys stuck on a deserted island, attempting to establish a well-organized society but fail. The story lacks a real female character. Hence, most critics pay no attention on this issue. Nevertheless, the issue of femininity is implicitly presented in the story; male characters are rejecting the femininity. For example, in the protagonist Ralph's memory, he never read one of the books standing on his shelf because that is the book about two girls (Golding 112). Also, when the boys' hair grow longer due to the long stay on the island, they refuse to tie the hair back since it would be like girls (Golding 172). The novel embodies the confrontation between masculinity and femininity. In light of this, this paper argues that by considering Piggy the representative of femininity, *Lord of the Flies* illustrates how the exclusive nature of masculinity repudiates femininity, which causes the final disintegration of the society on the island.

Lord of the Flies depicts the disintegration of the order and the collapse of the harmony mainly embedded in the conflict between Ralph and Jack, the two competing leaders in the novel. The story is set in the middle of the raging war, when a plane evacuating a group of schoolboys from Britain is shot down on a deserted island. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, discover a conch and make use of it to assemble other boys. Piggy, who is the smartest and most rational character among them, timidly explains that the purpose of the meeting is to have the boys decide what to do, and then the children try to act like citizens in

the democratic adult society, electing Ralph as the leader. Jack, the boy who is the leader of the choir, is slightly unsatisfied with the result of the election because he also wants to be the leader. Out of the eagerness to compensate, Ralph allows Jack to still be in charge of the choir, and Jack decides to make them be the hunters. In the beginning, it seems that the boys hold a hopeful and bright future ahead on the island; however, the small-civilized society the boys aim to build is in fact in ruin, and the relationship between Ralph and Jack becomes worse. Afterwards, boys split into two groups, led by Ralph and Jack respectively, confronting with each other intensively. Then, with the death of Piggy, Ralph becomes the outcast and is hunted like an animal by Jack's group. At the end of the story, a British navy officer finds Ralph and rescues the boys. In the novel, Jack's overpowering Ralph illustrates how brutality and savage vanish order and civilization, leading to the disintegration of the society.

Critics have already offered various explanations for the disintegration of the society on the island in *Lord of the Flies*; however, it seems that none of them attributes it to the aggressive nature of masculinity that excludes every association with femininity throughout the novel. The author, William Golding, once provided the explanation by himself. According to him, the cause of the societal breakdown on the island results from nothing more complicated than the inherent evil of man: "the boys are suffering from the terrible disease of human being" (Golding, "Lord of the Flies as Fable" 42). To Golding, the disintegration arises from men's irrational and defective part of the soul. On the other hand, rather than focusing on the defect of the human nature, John. F. Fitzgerald and John R. Kayser suggest that the original sin and men's failure to reconcile reason with mystery because of pride leads to the collapse. In addition, critics such as Kathleen Woodward examine the reason of the

disintegration in the aspect of social constraints. In Woodward's opinion, the lack of strict law and order accounts for the failure of suppressing violent behavior and then further leads to the breakdown in *Lord of the Flies*. As the aforementioned explanations show, scholars mostly examine the reason of the breakdown by considering the boys the representation of human beings; the boys' lives are the analogies of human conditions as a whole. Thus, discussing the collapse of the society in *Lord of the Flies* within the scope of masculinity and femininity would provide an alternative viewpoint towards this topic.

The nature of masculinity is fraught with the agency propelling men to exclude every association with femininity, due to the fear of humiliation resulting from being considered unmanly by other men. According to Michael Scott Kimmel, an American sociologist specializing in gender studies, manhood gives men the capacity to act, and the action, however, is to repudiate femininity, since men are afraid of being deemed effeminate ones. Echoing David Leverenz's words that "ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority," Kimmel asserts that "masculinity is a homosocial enactment," and men are "under the constant careful scrutiny of other men," so men have to perform manly enough to gain other men's recognition (Kimmel, "Masculinity" 214). Therefore, to avoid "the fear of emasculation by other men, of being humiliated, of being seen as a sissy" which dominates the culture of manhood, men then have to exclude or escape from femininity (Kimmel, "Masculinity" 219). The flight from femininity for males is both historically and developmentally. Kimmel mentions that according to Freud, the main task of the little boys is to "develop a secure identity for himself as a man" by renouncing the emotional attachment to their mothers, and who fail to do so will unmasked by the other men,

being regarded as “a wimp, a Mama’s boy, a sissy” (Kimmel, *Gender* 32). In light of this argument, the flight from femininity can be further narrowed down to the fleeing from the mother-like figure. Stated by Kimmel, after pulling away from his mother, the boy begins to regard her not as the source of nurturance and love, but as an “insatiably infantilizing creature, capable of humiliating him” (Kimmel, *Gender* 32). Mothers symbolize the humiliation of infancy, helplessness and dependency, and since “men act as though they were being guided by (or rebelling against) rules and prohibitions enunciated by a moral mother,” all the refinement of masculine behaviors, such as neatness, cleanliness, politeness, “come to be regarded as concessions to feminine demands” (qtd. in Gorer). Briefly speaking, under the constant checks of other males, and due to the fear of being marked as effeminate one, men adopt the method of excluding every association with femininity which includes the motherly values, defining the exclusive nature of masculinity.

Scholar Bernard F. Dick, who once deals with the issue of femininity in *Lord of the Flies*, indicates two figures which can be identified as feminine representation in the novel—the sow representing maternalism, and the protagonist Ralph implementing the feminine values; this paper agrees with Dick’s viewpoints on the sow whereas not on Ralph, since Piggy carries more feminine traits, and obviously suffers from the oppression and exclusion from the masculinity. Dick first argues that the sow in the novel “symbolizes both matriarchy and maternalism,” and it has a negative effect on the schoolboys who consider the mother-like figure “a threat to their freedom” (Dick 22). Since the sow, slaughtered by Jack’s hunting group, is associated with the image of mother, it stands for familial value “without which society, culture, and civilization are impossible” (Dick 22). Dick also argues that

everything Ralph stands for, such as order, work and reprimands, has “maternal overtones” (Dick 22). In light of this, the sow’s death and Ralph’s planned death are linked: Jack’s hunting group kills the sow with the spear, and they also plan to kill Ralph with the stick sharpened at both ends. Hence, if Ralph turns out to be killed at the end, his death would be “a fitting punishment for men who implement feminine values” for the boys who are eager to display their masculinity (Dick 22).

Although agreeing with the argument that the sow stands for maternalism, this paper does not agree with Dick’s opinion that Ralph represents the maternal values. Indeed, in the novel, the sow before being hunted is described as “sunk in deep maternal bliss” with the “great bladder of her belly was fringed with a row of piglets that slept or burrowed and squeaked” (Golding 134). Furthermore, Dick’s assertion that the boys regard the mother-like figure as a threat echoes what Kimmel states that “the flight from femininity is angry and frightened,” because mother symbolizes the humiliation of infancy and “can so easily emasculate the young boy by her power to render him dependent” (Kimmel, *Gender of Desire* 32). However, this paper argues that it is Piggy, rather than Ralph, represents and truly implement feminine values, since when Ralph would like to preach the importance of family and work, he counts on Piggy very much. Ralph’s reliance on Piggy to remain rational becomes more explicit near the end of the novel, when boys split into two groups and Jack’s group grows in strength. When Ralph is in the process of trying to remind his group of the importance of maintaining the smoke, he suddenly becomes silent, seems to be lost in himself, forgetting about the significance of the fire. It is Piggy who speaks to offer the expiation, “cos the smoke’s a signal and we can’t be rescued if we don’t have smoke” (Golding, *Lord of the*

Flies 173). Ralph then replies with a shout saying that he knows that all the time and does not forget it. This scene implies that due to the growth of people's numbers Jack's group, Ralph starts to lose or forget his insist on the duties, and Piggy becomes the key person serving as a significant reminder of him. Furthermore, Piggy is more of the feminine representative than Ralph because many of his physical traits and behaviors are coded as feminine, and his position in the group is very disadvantaged since the masculinity would like to edged out the lack of manliness.

Piggy's body and upbringing mark his femininity compared with Ralph. In Western culture, there is the notion that the femaleness is a deformity, which can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle, who asserted that "we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of the nature" (qtd. in Aristotle). Also, Reynaud has argues that "the body is the instrument of masculinity" (Reynaund 141). The sharp contrast between Piggy and Ralph's body is explicit in the very beginning of the novel. Piggy is very obviously physically weak, considered unmanly. He is very fat, wears glasses since three and is "the only boy in [our] school with asthma" (Golding 9). On the other hand, Ralph, who is constantly referred as "the fair boy," is fair-haired, taller than Piggy and is the person with a good body built "who might make a good boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went" (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 10). When Ralph takes off his shirt to swim, Piggy "looked critically at Ralph's golden body" and also "watched Ralph's green and white body enviously" (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 11, 12). Furthermore, directly derived from his chubbiness, the name "Piggy", which is not Piggy's real name but a nickname he does not want, itself has a obviously connection with the sow slaughtered by

Jack's group and represents maternalism. This implicitly reinforces Piggy's image of a feminine character. Also, compared with Ralph, Piggy's family background gives him a touch of femininity. Piggy is raised by his aunt who runs a candy store, and it is undoubted that Piggy has a very strong bond with, or is very dependent on his aunt, since he keeps retelling what his aunt tells him to Ralph. On the contrary, Ralph's father, a naval commander, is constantly mentioned by Ralph in his speech. In terms of this, Piggy to some degree represents the female voices because of his aunt, while Ralph stands for the speech from males due to his naval father.

Though being the most knowledgeable one among the boys, Piggy's position on the island is very inferior due to the association of his body and upbringing with femininity; his inferior position shows in Ralph and Jack's rejecting him caused by masculinity's efforts of fearfully fleeing from femininity, and Ralph and Jack's evident display of masculinity further highlights their exclusion from Piggy. Compare with Ralph, Piggy's chubbiness, ill physical health and upbringing, which is recognized as unmanly, cast a negative influence on him in terms of his social interaction. Firstly, due to his chubbiness, Piggy even can not be called by his real name. Piggy's inability to make others call his real name implies that he loses his subjectivity, and that his identity is defined by others, and may be considered less important in the masculine-valued society. Also, by making the connection with Piggy's name and the sow, the text suggests that Piggy in the eyes of the boys is pretty much the same as the sow, which represents motherly figure and also masculinity must kill off, and indeed the death scene of Piggy is the as bloody as the way the sow dies. As for the negative influence Piggy's upbringing brings to him, it indirectly makes Piggy unqualified for being elected as the leader

in the male socialization. The audience's different reactions to Piggy and Ralph's speech tell how eagerly the nature of masculinity drives the boys to avoid and belittle femininity. When Piggy constantly mentions his aunt, Ralph, annoyed by Piggy, says, "sucks to your auntie!" (Golding 12). Mother-like figure, to the boys, stands for the humiliation of infancy and dependency, and Ralph's rejection to listen to Piggy's word from his aunt is an act of escaping from the fear. Also, perhaps influenced by his aunt, Piggy himself carries with the maternal overtones. His maternal overtones display when the boys become too excited about making the fire, swaying toward the island to do it, Piggy "with the martyred expression of a parent", has to "keep up with the senseless ebullience of the children" (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 38). On the other hand, in Ralph's speech, the male figure, which is the father, brings the complete different effect from Piggy's aunt does; he makes Ralph seem to be more attractive and then elected as the leader. In front of the assembled group of people, Ralph becomes more convincing when he makes a reference of her father. Ralph says to his audience, "my father's in the Navy, he said there aren't any unknown islands left.....And sooner or later ship will put in here. It might even be my Daddy's ship. So you see, sooner or latter we shall be rescued" (Golding 37). By his words, and because of the male figure appearing in the speech, Ralph's audience "was lifted toward safety," and they "liked and now respected him." Every one including Jack clapped for him. Briefly speaking, femininity revealed in Piggy's body and upbringing makes Piggy considered less important in the society, and also makes him never be able to be the leader of the groups, since masculinity rejects femininity so fiercely.

Apart from body and upbringing, the job division on the island also illustrates how

masculinity tries to distinguish itself from Piggy, the representative of femininity. On the island, Piggy's chubbiness along with his ill physical health leads him unable to become the leader, hunter or explorer, which are the positions embodied with the masculine values. Edged out of the fields of "masculine jobs," it seems that Piggy is assigned on the "domestic" works, which further makes the boys stay away from him because of his role as the care-taker, the mother-like figure. On the island, even though Piggy is the only person who seems to care about the little kids, the "littluns", the taking care of the littluns tends to "be regarded and assigned as" Piggy's responsibility by others, which implies that Piggy's role is defined by the restriction given by others, a sign of being considered inferior and less powerful. For instance, once assembling the group, Piggy, out of his own will, constantly asks the names of the others, in an effort of figuring out the exact number of the schoolboys. However, when Ralph tells Piggy to make a name list of the boys and Piggy is not able to do it, Ralph is irritated because Piggy is not doing his job well. Compared to Piggy, Ralph and Jack are explorers, and Piggy is rejected to be part of this job since the maternal values he carries annoy the boys. Ralph and Jack first go to explore the island. When Piggy wants to follow them, Jack says to him, "you're no good on a job like this," and Ralph tells him to go back and take names, since Ralph thinks that it is Piggy's job (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 24, 25). The aforementioned exhibits Piggy's inability to decide his own role and responsibilities because his feminine trait makes him regarded as the inferior one in the group.

Echoing the fierce rejection of femininity, the nature of masculinity strongly shows in the job of explorers and hunters. Being explorers, Ralph and Jack are displaying and implementing their manhood. Just like what Kimmel remarks on masculinity, to the group

oppressed by it, masculinity stands for “the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest” (Kimmel “Masculinity” 217). As for Ralph and Jack, they deem the island something submissive, so that after exploring the island, “eyes shining, mouths open, triumphant, they savored the right of domination” (Golding 29). They display and implement the masculinity by “dominating” and “owning” the island. In addition, hunter is also a job coded with strong message of masculinity. According to Kimmel, “violence is often the single most evident marker and manhood,” and the core of hunting activity apparently involves the practice of violence (Kimmel “Masculinity” 215). Briefly summing up, masculinity, which is represented by Ralph and Jack due to their display of it and their contrast with Piggy, puts Piggy in the inferior social position, and this results from the masculinity’s dislike of and flight from maternal values.

The exclusive nature of masculinity propels the boys in *Lord of the Flies* to define associations with femininity as the “Others” and rid them of, which results in the societal breakdown in the novel. In the process of masculinity rejecting femininity, the concept of “Otherness” shifts temporarily from Piggy to Jack, and then from Jack to Ralph after Piggy’s death, and the act of keeping denying femininity leads to the intense conflicts which causes the disintegration of the society, and if the naval officer does not appear at the end, it would be the elimination of all the boys. The Other has traditionally been studied regarding the marginal of the society, and it can be applied on the studies such as race and racism, or sex and sexism (qtd. in McHoul). Aristotle considers the Other as the outsider (qtd. in Harle). Throughout the novel, the application of the Other shifts between the characters, showing who holds the power and who is banished. In the beginning of the novel, Piggy is the Other

against by Ralph and Jack, who forms the male bonding due to the acknowledge of each other's masculinity. As mentioned, masculinity is a "homosocial enactment," Ralph and Jack pass each other's scrutiny when they explore the islands together. In the text, Ralph and Jack "were friends," forming the male bonding when exploring the islands, displaying manhood and dominate femininity at the same time (Golding, *Lord of the Flies* 29). Piggy, on the other hand, due to his un-masculine body, family background and cares and worries, is not manly enough to be the insider of the group, thus considered the Other whom should be excluded. At that time, Ralph excluding Piggy by making fun of him, regarding him as the unsuitable one among them, and when the group needs fire, Jack rudely snatches Piggy's glasses off his face, and Ralph is totally fine with it.

Subsequently, after the split of the groups between the boys, the role of the Other shifts to Ralph's group against by Jack's team because of Ralph's association with Piggy, the representative of femininity. Unlike Jack, who has to confirm and reinforce his manhood by showing his dislike towards Piggy and displays his superiority above him, Ralph allies himself with Piggy when he adjusts his value and realizes that "Piggy could think" (Golding 72) and help the group be rescued from the island. The turning point occurs when the moment that Ralph discovers the fire is out because Jack brings people to hunt, resulting in the boat passing by without rescuing them. Ralph and Jack's relationship grows vicious since then and Ralph starts to turn to Piggy. At that time, receiving the accusation from Piggy, Jack beats Piggy and breaks one side of Piggy's glasses, Ralph says, "that was a dirty trick" (Golding 78). At this moment, Jack seems to be the outcast; however, Jack returns with the strength to confront with Ralph-Piggy's group, making Ralph's group the outsider. Jack's

confrontation with Ralph is largely because of his dissatisfaction with Ralph's connection with Piggy. In the novel, Jack accuses Ralph of being like Piggy and saying things like Piggy so that he is "not a proper chief", implying that a qualified chief should not be linked with the effeminate Piggy (Golding 126). Also, Jack bloodily slays maternal sow, suggesting masculinity's brutal wiping out of the femininity, also foreshadows Piggy's death. After Piggy's death, Ralph, who is regarded as the betrayer of masculinity, becomes the only outsider and the only target who needs to be rejected in order to build Jack's fully masculinity. Sharpening both ends of the sticks, setting fire all around the island, in order to catch and kill Ralph just like slaying the sow, the exclusive nature of masculinity drives Jack to conduct the ultimate act of ridding connections with femininity, which obviously causes the disintegration of society, turning the properly-established one into chaos. Eventually, if the naval officer does not appear to rescue, the aggressive nature of manhood would eliminate all the boys on the island.

In Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy is the representation of femininity, and this novel illustrates how the exclusive nature of masculinity leads to the final societal disintegration of on the island. The nature of masculinity propels men to exclude, dominate or even kill off every association with femininity because of men's fear of being considered unmanly by other men. Piggy's vulnerable body and family background make him considered feminine by other boys on the island, putting him in the inferior social position evidenced by Piggy's being edged out of the group, being assigned on the stereotypical female jobs and being regarded as the Other. In the confrontation of Jack and Ralph-Piggy's group, the efforts of rejecting femininity clearly display. Briefly speaking, under the lens of masculinity and

femininity, *Lord of the Flies* is a novel about a group of boys, driven by the exclusive masculinity, try to get rid of femininity and finally result in the collapse of the group.



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