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“A pack of British boys”

A study of erasure of class, culture, and gender in William
Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract

Lord of the Flies (1954) by William Golding is seen by many as a portrait of the violent darkness of human nature, and how all of humanity will revert to a savage state in the absence of civilisation. This essay argues that this is not accurate, since the book only presents the actions of a group of British boys, among which the majority of the violent acts are performed by boys who are most likely from an upper class background. This is put into the context of literary erasure, meaning the exclusion of social groups other than the most powerful ones in literary works. The essay also discusses elements in the book which by today's standards carry a racist tone, along with speculations regarding the author's intentions of not including female characters, and how these reasons are quite far-fetched. The book's portrayal of femininity as something weak and inefficient, and traditionally masculine qualities as the optimal stuff of leadership is also considered in the discussion. It concludes with a confirmation of the thesis that the book is representative of Western males from a hierarchical class system.

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Introduction

Lord of the Flies, by William Golding (1954), is a novel about a group of English schoolboys being shipwrecked on an uninhabited pacific island during an evacuation from an unspecified atomic war. In struggling to stay alive, they form a democratic group, which later falls apart in a conflict between two factions. Ultimately, all but one of the boys join the aggressive ‘savage’ faction or are killed.

Golding wrote the book as a response to popular adventure novels, which featured boys in similar situations who spend their time as shipwrecked by having fun, thriving intellectually, and barely missing home at all. The most notable and popular of these books is *The Coral Island* (1858), by R.M. Ballantyne, which is referenced by name on three different occasions in *Lord of the Flies*: once upon their arrival to the island, which is compared in beauty to the one in *The Coral Island* (Golding 10), once after having elected their leader and implemented rules, regarding to how much fun they are going to have (34), and finally on the last page as to demonstrate how things did not end up as expected (230). Golding did not agree with the notion that human nature would choose civility and order over savagery and brutality when faced with a lack of authority. Instead he believed that humans are brutal and savage by nature, and only held in place by society’s rules (Marx 21:20). When the keepers of the rules – in this case, supervising adults – disappear, the flock will inevitably turn to savagery.

When scholars of Golding investigate *Lord of the Flies*, the conventional interpretation of the work seems to be used: that it is a realistic representation of human nature (see for instance Kulkarni 3, Redpath 79, Babb 39). But how representative of human nature can a work actually be, when its entire cast consists of young males raised in a western society, and many of them in an upper or upper-middle class setting? According to Golding, he chose to write about a group of boys since he believed that they would reflect society in general – which he did not believe to be possible with a group of girls (“William Golding on Lord of the Flies.” 1:32). Yet another reason behind why he chose to write about boys was because he himself had been one (1:12), which makes it reasonable to assume that the reason the boys were English is that Golding too was English. But is it not also reasonable to assume that the events could have turned out very differently if the cast had consisted of people of another gender or background?

I believe that the traditional interpretations of the work are examples of what is termed *erasure*. The term itself simply means an instance when something has been erased (OED,

“Erasure”), and in feminist theory, the term “articulates a link between visibility and power by referring to absences as conspicuous or political” (Savelson 191). More plainly, it is used to indicate instances of women being erased in favour of men. This could for example occur in the form of a lack of female characters in a literary work, or female authors in a literary canon, or the exclusion of influential women in history books. Although the term originated in gender studies, it can nowadays also be used to describe the same phenomenon among any group that is not part of the majority, including but not limited to class, race, gender and sexuality (Savelson 191f). Erasure is not always committed by one group targeting another, but in some cases, the erased might contribute to the pattern. For example, the writer Ruth Rendell stated that the main character of her first detective book was “a man because like most women I am very much still caught up in the web that one writes about men because the men are the people and we are the others” (quoted in Symons 222f).

For people belonging to groups that are rarely erased it might not be easy to see why erasure is a problem. As Nathania Gilson puts it in her article “What I talk about when I talk about erasure”, it is important to expose erasure because of what happens when the cultural status quo is accepted. “It’s an acceptance that stifles, and is particularly dangerous for younger readers whose sense of self is developed by what they have access to – that is, a single story or narrative” (Overland). If literature and popular culture is dominated by the lives and views of one ethnicity or gender, then that becomes the norm to which its audience will compare themselves to. In *Invisible Man* (1952), Ralph Ellison compares the situation of being a black man in the United States to being “invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. [...] When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me” (qtd. in Bennet and Royle 79). Similarly, erasure of authors, characters, or role models of other backgrounds than the privileged, leads to a feeling of invisibility among the audience not belonging to the group in power of the medium.

In the case of this essay the term ‘erasure’ will refer to a book presenting the actions and behaviour of a specific group of individuals to draw general conclusions regarding all groups. If one accepts texts like this one as a representation of human nature, one knowingly or unknowingly ignores all of the differences in attitude or nature of other groups than the one portrayed. With this in mind, this essay will argue that rather than being representative of human nature in general, *Lord of the Flies* can only be seen as a comment on the nature of a certain group in society, namely young males raised in a strongly hierarchical western society.

Culture

Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* was written and published in the 1950s – a time in which the British Empire was in the process of giving up its colonies across the world (Hawlin 71). Having grown up as an Englishman before this time, it is reasonable to assume that Golding was of the opinion that the British were more civilized than other cultures, as was a common view in the Empire. In fact, he admitted to believing that there was a hierarchy of civilizations, in which Indian, Chinese, and African cultures were below the level of the Brits, in spite of the fact that he also admitted to having no substantial knowledge of any of these cultures (Hawlin 72).

This view is reflected in the portrayal of the 'savage', as opposed to the 'English' in the book. Every time a character questions whether or not they are English and therefore civilized, this is opposed to "savages", generally along with an attribute which Golding considers to be savage. For example, when they first come to the island, one of the first things the boys do is to find a method in which to gather the boys and efficiently make decision concerning their common well-being on the island. They call to assembly through the blowing of a conch, after which decisions are reached through discussions led by a democratically elected leader (Golding 16f). When this order is broken, the behaviour is compared to that of savages (Golding 43f). It is explained that the English have rules, and that their methods always work best, whereupon order is restored. This implies that non-English cultures have neither order nor rules, which is, of course, incorrect. Instances like these increase in number and become more overtly stereotypical as the story goes on, since more and more of the children let go of their English ways.

One example of this is when some of the boys entertain the notion that there might be a ghost on the island. Piggy – the voice of reason – then speaks up and asks: "What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages? What's grown-ups going to think? Going off – hunting pigs – letting fires out – and now!" (Golding 99). The comment sets up a contrast between what Hawlin refers to as "white science and black superstition" (76), with white science being the strife of returning to civilization and maintaining a British way of thinking, and black superstition being a belief in spirits and a focus on surviving on the island, which further cements the view of savages as being bad and opposed to the English and therefore superior way of doing things. Piggy does not even seem to regard 'savages' as 'humans', a fact which strengthens the racist tone of the passage. Piggy, who has come to represent the white reason, dies at the same time as the conch, which has come to represent English democracy, is

destroyed. This happens during a final attempt to reason with the majority of children, who have all succumbed to what is seen as non-English behaviour (Golding 206). The scene “quite clearly echoes a mass of popular racist literature that sets the white hero before the pack of natives thirsting for his blood” (Hawlin 76), as Jack’s gang are painted, and armed with spears, not listening to Piggy’s question whether or not it is better “to be a pack of painted niggers like you are, or to be sensible like Ralph is?” (Golding 205).

The boys’ use of body paint is the clearest indication of how the breakdown of civilised behaviour among the children specifically represents the ways of tribal societies. Rather than seeing body paint as an expression of showing unity within a group, culturally similar to the concept of a standardised uniform, like the school uniforms they are all dressed in upon their arrival (Golding 14), Golding directly and explicitly opposes it to civilised behaviour (Hawlin 77). He does this by having Ralph telling the other children that they must choose between either keeping the fire going, or using body paint, but not both. The fire in this comparison represents the hope of civilization, while the body paint, since it is being used as an opposite, therefore represents savagery (Golding 160).

When Jack creates his first face mask with the intent of camouflaging himself from the pigs (Golding 66ff), he keeps adjusting it until its practical use seems overshadowed by the ritualistic revelation Jack acquires through the process:

He looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger. He [...] leapt to his feet, laughing excitedly. Beside the mere, his sinewy body held up a mask that drew their eyes and appalled them. He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling. [...] the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness. (68)

Jack’s laughing and dancing show a disregard to his previous thought of camouflage, which generally concerns stillness and silence, and by having his laugh described as a “snarling”, Jack’s behaviour is reduced to that of an animal. As Jack and his group of hunters run away with the intent of killing a pig, the passage ends with the sentence: “The mask compelled them” (ibid.), which gives the impression that the children now follow the bidding of an inanimate accessory, rather than their own will. When related to the concept of white science versus black superstition, this passage initially shows a clear, scientific thinking, regarding camouflage before the application of the mask. This thinking is followed by superstitious,

animalistic, and from what we have learned from the passages above, supposedly savage behaviour, all through the application of body paint.

The body paint is also contrasted to the uniform of the British naval officer who comes to their rescue in the end (Golding 228). In that instance, one side consists of an armed, grown man, backed by a battleship, while the other consists of painted, dirty children with crude spears. This image of rescue by the white man seems to agree with the imperialistic view that savages were like children in comparison to their white colonisers – a view that was still quite common around the time when the book was written (Hawlin 78).

According to the article “Aggression and dominance in the social world of boys” by Weisfeld, cross-cultural research show that children of most cultures use aggressive behaviour in order to challenge and assert dominance among their peers (49). But even though this behaviour exists seemingly everywhere, the criteria for dominance can differ across different cultures (51). In most countries this dominance-seeking aggression is expressed through physical violence, particularly among younger subjects (52). It also concerns verbal aggression, and generally peaks around the time the children enter puberty (54), after which the criteria expand (51). In contrast, among Chinese adolescents, dominance and popularity within a group has been more closely linked to intelligence and academic success than to athletic ability or violence. This could be explained by countries like the US having a stronger youth culture than East Asian countries such as China or Japan, which have a culturally stricter control from parents and teachers (56).

In *Lord of the Flies*, the main characters, who are around, or just below the age when boys usually enter puberty (McKie, *The Guardian*), assert their dominance in ways deemed typically Western by Weisfeld. Ralph is described early on as having a physically athletic body “as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went” (Golding 5), which strengthens the idea of him as a leader. Jack is described as tall (17), but not as muscular as Ralph, since he is described as “sinewy”, rather than heavy about the shoulders (68). He uses demonstrations of strength over weaker individuals to seemingly compensate for this comparative lack of muscle mass. When being questioned on why he let the fire go out, he slaps Piggy (77), and after becoming chief himself, Jack defends his authority by threatening intruders of his tribe’s area, and punishes his tribe members with seemingly little or no motivation (180).

Given that the two most athletic boys are also the most socially dominant in the group, one of them specifically achieving this through his use of violence and verbal aggression, the boys of Golding’s work act strongly according to Western means of asserting dominance. As it turns out, it is Jack, the most aggressive one of the two, who ultimately takes control over

the entire group, apart from his rival (Golding 207). Since Piggy is the boy showing the most intelligence within the group, he would probably, according to the results presented above, hold a more prominent place within the social hierarchy, had the boys been from an East Asian culture. This mere possibility shows that violence and aggression is not necessarily typical to human behaviour, since it is not as typical for certain non-Western cultures.

To conclude this section, *Lord of the Flies* uses racist imagery to describe people from non-English cultures as savages, who are the antithesis to the goodness and excellence of the English. This demonization of other cultures is not in itself an example of erasure, but the absence of a culturally diverse cast does, when its goal is to represent human nature. When looking at the variations between different cultures' criteria for social dominance among their youth, the events in the book only seem to be a fair representation of certain Western societies.

Class

There is no explicit discussion of class or class-related issues in the book, but there are some clues as to the class of some of the children. We find out quite early that Ralph's father is a commander in the navy (Golding 8), which is a traditionally considered to be an upper- or upper-middle class profession. When arriving on the island, everybody is wearing their respective school uniforms, which differ in colours and precise appearance, but all in all are fashioned in similar ways (6). One exception to this is Jack Merridew and his pack of hunters-to-be, who are clothed in the black cloaks of choir boys (16). The name of their school is, like the schools of the other boys, never mentioned. But considering the uniforms, and the fact that Jack refers to the group as a choir (17), it is reasonable to assume that they come from a choir school, i.e. a school, often in cooperation with a cathedral of some sort, which places a large emphasis on the pupil's training and participation in Christian choral singing (CSA). The majority of choir schools today, and thus most definitely around the time *Lord of the Flies* was written, are independent schools (ibid.), and therefore more typical to be attended by members of the upper classes. As for Piggy, we learn that his parents are dead, and that he lives with his aunt, who owns a sweet-shop (Golding 9), which would be considered lower middle-, or possibly even working class. He is also described as having a different accent from the others (69), which could either indicate that he simply is from a different area of the same socio-economic climate than the other boys, or that he is from a poorer area than the

'home counties', which are the counties surrounding London, and the area where the other boys come from (1).

It is fairly common for choir schools to be boarding schools, even though it is less common today than it has been in the past (CSA). If Jack and his hunters are from a choir school of the time, it is therefore quite possibly a boarding school, i.e. a school where the pupils live on campus for the majority of the school year. In his article "Surviving the Privilege of Boarding School", Duffell outlines some behaviours commonly recognisable among people who have grown up in a boarding school. He calls them "Boarding School Survivors" (4). Due to the detachment of emotional support from their families, students at boarding schools, who often start as early as six to eight years old, tend to work out survival strategies in which they hide their emotions and vulnerability in order to avoid being bullied (3). According to Duffell, this often leads to "issues concerning the inability to say directly what one wants, and the tendency towards hostility couched in innocence" later in life (4). This behaviour of showing oneself as tough is recognisable in Jack's behaviour – particularly as he curses himself for showing mercy to a pig during their first hunt, after which he swears never to show mercy again (Golding 29f).

In 2012, Stellar et.al investigated the connection between social class and levels of compassion, with 'compassion' being defined as: "feeling sorrow or concern for others along with a desire to alleviate their suffering" (8) among one hundred and forty-eight college undergraduates (3). Even after accounting for ethnicity, gender, and spirituality or religion among the subjects (8), they found that their results matched their hypothesis that members of a lower social class tend to behave more compassionate than their upper class counterparts. These results are theorised to be connected to how the members of a lower social class seem to favour a more interdependent view of the self, as opposed to members of an upper class, who tend to see themselves as more independent (2, 8). This was seen among the members of the lower class, as them being more vigilant of social context, wary of potential threats, and more attentive to others' emotional experiences (2). They were also more likely to initiate cooperative relationships than their upper class counterparts (ibid.). According to Stellar et.al, this correlation could come from the members of the lower class generally living in more threatening environments, while members of the upper class are able to focus on personal achievements and success (ibid.).

A correlation is seen when applying these results to the characters Ralph, Jack, and Piggy. Ralph and Jack are both members of the upper class, and though it can be argued that they show a degree of interdependency since they act as leaders, they seldom show

compassion toward the others. Jack, being the worst of the two, is violent toward the others (Golding, 77, 150ff, 189), and when he is ultimately the leader of the majority of the children, he seems to prioritise hostility toward the others rather than the well-being of those in his flock (180). Ralph seems friendlier than Jack, since he at least recognises Piggy's superior ability to think (84). As he is elected chief, he coordinates the large group and encourages order and collaboration to reach their common goal of being rescued (20f). He does, however act somewhat cruelly on some occasions (18, 69). At another point he – albeit temporarily – takes his position of power for granted (88), and at times he is uninterested in suggestions that might make their life on the island easier. For example, while Piggy suggests creating a sundial, Ralph thinks that “Piggy was a bore; his fat, his [asthma] and his matter-of-fact ideas were dull” (69) and answers Piggy's genuine idea simply by telling him to “shut up” (ibid.), which clearly indicates that he either lacks some social tact, or has little regard of his group-members feelings.

Piggy, being a member of a lower social class, is the one that shows the most compassion toward others. He is the first to start inquiring about the names of the other survivors (14), he takes care of the littluns¹ (111), and he is the only one to notice when one of the small children has disappeared after a fire (48). After Jack leaves the community to start his own tribe, Ralph starts listening to Piggy's suggestions and ideas, and for a while, the group seems to be working quite well together (145f). His inclusion in the story also keeps the book from completely erasing the working-classes of Britain. But with Piggy as an only representative of these classes, the book could still be argued to erase the effects one can achieve in a community of working-class members.

In the end, all of the behaviour typically deemed to be a brutal part of everybody's human nature, is represented among the characters belonging to, or being led by, members of an upper class. Jack's boarding school background also seems to demonstrate a link towards aggression. Based on the findings regarding the difference in compassion between the classes, it is also reasonable to assume that children from a working-class background, experiencing a similar chain of events would possibly have ended up in different circumstances than that the characters presented in the book.

Gender

¹ The term used in referring to the youngest boys on the island (Golding 62). From: “little ones”.

All of the characters in the book are male. This lack of a female perspective is in itself an indicator that the themes of the book are not necessarily valid for any more than half of humanity, since all other genders than the male one are erased in the context of the book. Naturally, had the book been about a group of girls in the same situation, it is quite possible that similar events might have occurred, just as if the cast would have been a mix of children of different genders, but there is reason to believe that there is not a one to one relation between the aggressive tendencies of young boys and girls.

In his cross-cultural study on aggression and dominance, Weisfeld states that there is more violence among boys than girls, and especially connected to dominance aggression with physical threats and violence (53f), not unlike the behaviour which the characters in *Lord of the Flies* show. But the fact that boys are more physically aggressive does not mean that girls are less aggressive over all. According to a study by Zimmer-Gembeck et.al, in which they investigated the differences between boys and girls in regards to their expression of status within peer groups, girls showed signs of aggressive behaviour as well, but they expressed it differently. Among girls, intimate friendships are the fuel for relationally aggressive behaviour, and girls are more prone to exclusion within the social group than boys are (364). So while boys tend to assert their dominance within the social hierarchy by violence and athletic ability, girls tend to use relational victimisation as part of their group-based patterns, often targeting people in prominent places within the social hierarchy (374). Similar results were reached by Ahmad and Smith, whose study regarding gender differences related to school bullying showed violent and destructive behaviour among the boys, and stronger tendencies to use malicious gossip and ostracism among the girls (70). As to why this difference exists, van Goozen stated in an interview regarding *Lord of the Flies* and its take on masculinity, that she believes that the reason girls control themselves and regulate emotion a bit more than boys is because society tells girls that it is not acceptable to “bite and fight”, so they find more complex ways to express indirect aggression (Simons, *The Telegraph*).

As stated in the introduction, Golding chose to write about boys since he believed that they would reflect society in a way that would not be possible with a group of girls. Though he does not elaborate on this in the same audio recording, he does bring up a difference he believes to exist between boys and girls in another interview. When asked about whether or not he believes evil, and specifically Jack’s evil, to be a result of freedom of choice or inherent human nature, he answers that “the nature of boys is not to be able to recognise the difference, just as [...] the defect, as I see it, in society is [the same]. In fact, in society we are just as innocent, naïve, and ignorant as Jack was” (Marx 13:25). Given that he does not

include girls in this statement, the difference between boys and girls would be that girls have an ability to recognize the difference between what in their behaviour is dictated by their free will, and they therefore have a power to change, and that which is part of their nature and therefore unavoidable. This would be an ability that boys and the rest of society do not possess. As he did not elaborate further on this point, one can only speculate about whether this is exactly what he meant, but it would match a statement he makes in the first recording, where he, seemingly in passing, mentions that he does not believe girls to be equal, but superior, to boys (“William Golding on *Lord of the Flies*.” 2:01) – a view that does not seem to be mirrored by the book’s portrayal of the feminine, as will be specified further below.

He goes on to explain that he chose not to write about boys and girls to avoid having to weave the issues of sexual relations into the work (2:28). According to medical research, however, the average age when girls reached puberty in the 1950s was 13.1 years (Finley, *mum.org*), with similar results for boys (McKie, *The Guardian*). The ages of the children in the book are not specified, but it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the children are considerably younger than 13, since Ralph, who is the physically largest one, and therefore most likely also the oldest of them, is “twelve years and a few months” (Golding 5). With this in mind, Golding’s excuse of excluding female characters to avoid having to write about sex seems a bit far-fetched, since everyone on the island is too young to have the sexual drive connected to a pubescent or post-pubescent individual.

In a sample of 13-16 year olds, Boulton found that a majority admitted to wanting to win in situations of ‘play-fighting’ to challenge, assert, or defend social dominance within their social groups (36f). In support of this, Weisfeld, when observing children socialising in a school environment, found that play-fighting frequently occurred among the social groups, and even if the data was inconclusive as to show a direct link between the activity and assertion of social status, a connection of some sort was clearly visible. This was due to the successful fighters being more socially dominant, even though actual fighting or aggression was never needed to assert their dominance. This behaviour was particularly common among boys (49). He also found that physical attractiveness, general athletic ability, and social skills are also important in connection to social dominance (55f).

This behaviour could be related to the expectations of men to assert their manliness. In his article “Masculinity as Homophobia”, Kimmel explains how the concept of manhood is partly defined by how strong and successful one is, and partly on the absence of femininity (184f). He also describes how especially adolescent boys (190), will be constantly prepared to avoid being seen as ‘sissies’ by their peers by showing their willingness to fight, and

challenging other peers' masculinity to bring attention away from their own (181). Based on the research above, the characters of Ralph, Piggy, and Jack can be divided into the archetypes of the ideal man, the feminine, and the ultra-masculine. A passage supporting this division in a quite early stage of the book is this, from when Ralph is elected leader:

None of the boys could have found good reason for this; what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. (19)

If one accepts the symbolic roles of these characters, this passage demonstrates the book's attitudes toward gender and leadership. Jack, who later turns out to be the most aggressive and violent character, is deemed an "obvious leader", while Piggy, in spite of being the most intelligent, is clearly not even seen as a contender, as the only one trumping Jack is Ralph, who is described as attractive and athletic (Golding 5). Since Ralph is also the one to take initiative and blow the conch to call a meeting and discuss the situation with the other survivors (13), he is not only strong and attractive, but also socially proactive, which means that he has got the potential to become a strong, dominant member of the group. His masculinity is further underscored when the reader finds out about Ralph's home, and that he reads plenty of 'boy books', but has never read the one, unnamed, book he owns which has female protagonists (125). As it is mentioned on several occasions that Ralph's father is a navy commander (8), our expectations of Ralph become that of a similarly capable leader – the ideal man, who distances himself from feminine things, as demonstrated by Ralph's avoidance of 'girl books'.

He is also described as having "a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil" (5), which probably means that the reader is to see him as a sympathetic person. This view is mirrored in Ralph's status as the good leader opposing the cruel leader, Jack, and also in the end of the book, in which Ralph is the last member of the group who is not under Jack's control, and is being violently pursued by the tribe (208). But in spite of Ralph being presented as a likeable and sympathetic character for the reader, he is often mean to his companion, Piggy. When introducing him to the others, he uses the nickname "Piggy" (18) in spite of having been asked specifically not to do that, without even inquiring about his real name (6). When Piggy confronts him about this, Ralph simply says "'Better Piggy than Fatty [...] with the directness of genuine leadership'" (22). He also ignores and mocks Piggy's ideas

on occasion (69), in spite of having admitted that Piggy is smarter than he is (84). Since Ralph is portrayed as the protagonist, and the keeper of civilised values, it is fairly clear that the book's image of the optimal leader is athletic and traditionally masculine, but not necessarily kind or sympathetic.

Piggy is less physically capable than the other boys, due to the fact that he is overweight, as well as having asthma, and bad eye-sight which means that he is helpless without his glasses (1f, 3). Because of this, he cannot assert any dominance in masculine tasks, and is forced to take on what are traditionally considered to be fairly feminine chores, such as taking care of the 'littluns' (111) and acting like a parent or mother toward the other boys (38), which means that he comes to some extent to represent the feminine. Piggy is also the only character besides Ralph to have a parent or guardian mentioned, although while Ralph is compared to his father, the commander, Piggy is connected to his spoiling and doting aunt, with whom he lives (3).

The treatment of Piggy often mirrors that of women in society. Piggy is denied his fair share of meat with the excuse that he has not contributed as much as the other boys, since he has mainly performed traditionally feminine tasks, such as taking care of the small children (111), a situation resembling that of women in many societies even today. His opinions are deemed as irrelevant and he is mocked for expressing them (98), which he points out to Ralph, during an assembly: "If I say anything [...] you say shut up; but if Jack or Maurice or Simon [say anything]" with the implication that Maurice and Simon would not be silenced or ignored, as Piggy is, but that their opinions would be heard and considered by Ralph (45). In order to make a fire, they decide to use Piggy's glasses to focus the sun, but even though Piggy too would benefit from this, and might willingly lend them to the group, they are taken from him without even an inquiry of consent (41). This also supports the idea that Piggy's opinions are not taken seriously by the group. On several occasions he is beaten and ridiculed by Jack, with Jack receiving assenting laughter, rather than a reprimand (41, 77, 79, 98, 189), which could be seen as representative of the high statistics of violence toward women in society. This is also brought to mind when Piggy is finally killed by Jack and his hunters (206).

Jack represents the ultra-masculine. He is the one committing most of the abuse toward Piggy, and focuses his and his hunters' energy on killing to such an extent that this becomes more important than being rescued from the island, as is evident when they let their signal fire go out after simply abandoning it to go hunting instead (73). He shows the signs of dominance and masculinity in the same way as Ralph in terms of physical prowess, but with

the difference that Jack regularly proves his athleticism by leading hunts and initiating instances of play-fighting, one of which leads to the boys turning violent and joking about killing a “littlun” (126ff), and one of which leads to the murder of one of the boys (172). It is notable that Ralph partakes in both these instances, while Piggy only joins in the second one. On one occasion Jack compares Ralph to Piggy, saying that “[Ralph]’s like Piggy. He says things like Piggy. He isn’t a proper chief” (141). By comparing Ralph to the character symbolising femininity in the work, he is effectually calling Ralph a ‘sissy’, and therefore challenging Ralph’s masculinity to defend his own.

At one point, a hunt culminates in the capture of a sow – incidentally the only ‘character’ apart from Piggy’s aunt to be referred to with a female pronoun – which they not only kill, but also violate by penetrating its orifices with their spears in a scene with heavy rape imagery, such as how the hunters “wedded to her in lust” chased and violently stabbed the animal until it “collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her” (152).

This could be argued to support Golding’s previously stated reasoning about sex: that he chose to exclude female character in the book in order to avoid having to write about sexual matters. Since the sow – as the book’s only female – is raped by the other characters, it might imply that this would also be the fate of female human characters on the island. As stated above, the characters are prepubescent, and would therefore not be likely to engage in sexual intercourse for the purpose of pleasure or sexual relief. But rape is often more closely related to dominance than lust, as it is first and foremost an act of aggression and violence rather than a relief of sexual lust (Messerschmidt 35). The inclusion of female characters could therefore lead the boys to express their urges of violence and sexual dominance on their fellows, rather than on their prey, as is the case in the hunt. This theory is, however, quite problematic, as it assumes that the occurrence of rape demands the presence of females, rather than of rapists. If the boys on the island would feel these urges of sexually aggressive dominance so strongly that they would rape someone regardless of their own arousal, it would make just as much sense for them to focus their urges on one of the fellow boys. Homosexual relations, and especially between young boys, was much more of a taboo at the time the book was written, so sexual relations or rape among the boys would probably not be considered appropriate to be added in the book. But this does not make the hypothetical scenario less feasible in the real world. It could therefore be argued that the exclusion of female characters would be to avoid the possibility of rape, but if rape is considered to be such a strong possibility, the inclusion of male characters would most definitely already make that a possibility, regardless of the taboos of the time.

The fact that the character representing femininity practically shares the name of the doomed animals on the island does not seem a coincidence as, at the end of the novel after having been killed, “Piggy’s arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig’s after it has been killed“ (206). Piggy acted like a mother to the other boys on many occasion, and we are told that the sow was mother to a litter of piglets (150). As Alida Roy points out in her article “Boy’s Club – No Girls Allowed”: “The rape/murder of the sow and the final murder of Piggy suggest that the final movement into savagery involves the killing and defiling of the maternal female” (177). After Piggy dies, there is no more symbol of femininity on the island, and Jack’s expression of ultra-masculinity goes rampant. Ironically, the one thing that saves everyone from potential destruction in the end is the presence of another adult, masculine authority in chase of other men to destroy, namely the British officer (228), who takes a stand against feminine expression as he gets embarrassed when the boys start crying, and responds by turning around, letting them “pull themselves together” (230).

It could very well be argued that the book merely presents the ideas of its characters, rather than the author’s, regarding masculinity and femininity. According to this interpretation, the book warns its readers about the dangers of ignoring and banishing femininity and non-masculine values in favour of an ultra-masculine behaviour. Ralph is made to be a character that it is easy for the reader to sympathise with, and therefore becomes the most suitable character to be interpreted as the ‘hero’ of the work. Yet he still disregards and distances himself from his femininity in favour of asserting his masculinity, albeit to a much lesser extent than the book’s villain – Jack. This supports the contrasting interpretation that the book attributes the violence of its plot to common human traits, rather than masculinity in absence of femininity, which merely seems to be the most suitable way to lead a group.

It is reasonable to assume that while a scenario like the one in *Lord of the Flies* with girls instead of boys might not have ended entirely peacefully, it would probably play out differently. This erasure of non-male genders in the book supports the thesis that its themes are not representative of humanity in general. In spite of Golding’s stated view of girls’ superior abilities, the book can be read as portraying femininity as fragile, inefficient, and inferior to the masculine ideals of the book.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to argue that rather than being representative of human nature in general, *Lord of the Flies* can only be seen as a comment on the nature of a certain group in society, namely young males raised in a strongly hierarchical western society. Based on the evidence presented above, it seems that this thesis can be confirmed. The violence and barbarism believed by Golding to be deeply rooted within human nature may very well be there, but in this book, humanity is misrepresented. Different nationalities and genders have been erased in favour of the book's all-British, all-male cast, and it rather paints a portrait of the children's violent behaviour being the result of a toxic sense of masculinity, along with a possibly class-related sense of entitlement. The book's portrayal of culturally non-Western behaviour as dangerous and savage also creates racist implications in the book's overall tone.

It is important to bear in mind that *Lord of the Flies* is a fictional work. Any speculations regarding the motives or beliefs of the characters within are subjective, since there would be no way to confirm or denounce these speculations. This, by extension, includes how these beliefs or motives would manifest themselves if the premise of the book was to be changed, as it has been planned out and written by an author with the power to shape the narrative however they please. A fictional book cannot be wrong or right, as it says precisely what the author intends to say. Any perceived messages within the pages are a construct of the reader's reflections.

With this in mind, literature is reflective of the world it is produced in, and an awareness of problematic aspects within praised books is an essential step toward ridding society of those aspects. No book is either all bad or all good, but by illuminating the problematic aspects of a literary work, readers may focus on the amiable qualities and aspects of the work, and not mistake its problematic aspects for reasons for it to be admired and studied. After all, while a book supplies the reader with the story it contains, it is the reader that forms an interpretation of it. If the readers condemn a book for its faults and ignore its qualities, it will be forgotten. Likewise, if they praise it without addressing its faults, those faults will live on unquestioned, and perhaps be reflected and imitated in a society of those readers.

In this case, Golding's book is by all rights a literary classic and deserves to be remembered and studied, for other reasons than the ones discussed in this essay. But the praise of it as a portrait of human nature contribute to archaic notions that the beliefs and behaviours of a certain group of people are more important to talk about than that of the rest of the world. By addressing this in future research and education, readers can learn about

common attitudes among Western men of the mid-twentieth century without mistaking it for universal truth, while still being able to focus on the qualities of this book.

In continuing this fairly young practise of investigating erasure in classic literature, we can help to encourage a discussion about the views and attitudes in the literary canon that do not comply with our modern beliefs of equal human rights and possibilities. This might help to increase the attention given to previously erased groups within the literary canon, such as authors from non-Western cultures, female authors, or LGBT-authors, and teach young readers that something is not necessarily true just because people have been reading that 'truth' for a very long time.

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