

Spring 4-27-2018

Breaking the Pink Ceiling: Evaluating Male Homosociality and Queerness in Lord of the Flies

Kyle O'Kane
kokane@arcadia.edu

Arcadia University has made this article openly available. [Please share](#) how this access benefits you. Your story matters. Thank you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/senior_theses



Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Kane, Kyle, "Breaking the Pink Ceiling: Evaluating Male Homosociality and Queerness in Lord of the Flies" (2018). *Senior Capstone Theses*. 33.

https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/senior_theses/33

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at ScholarWorks@Arcadia. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Capstone Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@Arcadia. For more information, please contact gordonl@arcadia.edu.

Breaking the Pink Ceiling: Evaluating Male Homosociality and Queerness in *Lord of the*

Flies

Kyle O'Kane

EN490

Acknowledgments

There are many people that deserve praise for helping me through this thesis project.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Eaton and Professor Reale who have both helped me throughout this semester. Dr. Eaton assisted me thoroughly in narrowing my topic and giving me advice along the way. Professor Reale always had a smile on her face, and guided me through the research portion seamlessly.

I would also like to thank the entire EN490 class for all their support. Specifically, I would like to thank Annie Milak for being a great editing buddy, and Sigma Tau Delta for being a great safe space for me to talk about my frustrations.

I would like to thank my family, friends, and girlfriend Deja for always supporting me in my English endeavors. No matter how stressed I became, they would always pick me up when I was down.

And lastly, I would like to thank the text *Lord of the Flies* for being queerer than I could have ever imagined. Without you, this project would truly not be possible.

Lord of the Flies, originally published in 1954 by William Golding, remains to be an influential text for students and scholars alike, for its impactful themes of isolation, savagery, and social politics. The novel, one about a group of young English boys on an abandoned island after a plane crash gone wrong, has been analyzed through many unique perspectives over the years. Gender, in particular, has been discussed frequently, as many critics discuss the impact of the novel having only boys on the island and not girls.

Berthold Schoene-Harwood, author of *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man*, for example, ponders about topics like masculinity in the novel, and its relevance to the time period in which the novel was written. He states, “*Lord of the Flies* problematizes the irresolvable contradictoriness of two different traditional ideals of masculinity, one marked by stoical self-restraint, the other maintained by means of self-aggrandizing violence” (Harwood 52). The boys exude both stoic and violent tendencies, which brings up the discussion of how the boys were socialized in behaving a certain way because of their gender; however, while gender does play a significant part in the novel’s premise, there is a deeper issue that is left unheard. While the novel focuses on the relationships between the boys and their path to destruction, many readers view it from a heteronormative standpoint, ignoring any trace of queerness from the text. In reality, when one analyzes it further, various homoerotic undertones can easily be found, which can allow the reader to critically think about the male-dominated text in a new way.

When looking at homoerotic undertones in *Lord of the Flies*, it is important to understand the historical context that the novel was published in. Golding wrote the text

in 1950s London, a time where there was much debate and controversy over the issue of homosexuality. 1954, the date that Golding published *Lord of the Flies*, in particular, was one of the most notoriously homophobic times in London with the Lord Montagu Case. During this case, as recorded by Aleardo Zanghellini, “Lord Montagu, his friend the journalist Peter Wildeblood, and his cousin Michael Pitt-Rivers were charged [trying] to incite air-craftmen...to commit gross indecency...All defendants were found guilty...” (Zanghellini). This case is an example of the consequences that consenting individuals would receive for simply not following the heteronormative status quo that was in place.

It was a time where, as Victoria Powell writes in her article “Queer 50s”, “Men who were openly gay or who were suspected of being homosexual lost not only their reputations but often their livelihoods too” (Powell 284). Prison was a fear tactic in itself, and there was a lot to risk for any queer content at the time, especially in print media like novels. Despite censorship running amok, Golding managed to subtly include queerness anyway. With all this in mind, *Lord of the Flies* successfully contrasts the homophobic London with the novel’s abandoned island, a rare unsupervised space where the boys can interact with each other without fear or backlash about their sexual desires.

There is this intriguing dichotomy throughout the text between the boys’ degradation into savage beasts through violent acts and the rise of queerness and openness about sexuality that flourishes. As the boys cannibalize on each other and destroy any part of the British civilization they are accustomed to, they also rid of classic homophobic ideals, and explore their sexuality in a more fluid way. While most see the destruction and violence in *Lord of the Flies* as an image of toxicity, the lack of civilization actually progresses the boys into a more free and open mindset for the future.

The contrasting environments of 1950s London and the abandoned island are the main focus, for the boys deal with conflicting ideas of what to keep and what to get rid of from their previous civilization. Ultimately, queerness blooms when the boys begin to remove the homophobic social sphere that the boys have been socialized into. Without adult supervision, the boys are free to make their own decisions without their guardians’ input, opening up their agency to become freer as individuals.

By viewing *Lord of the Flies* as a queer novel, we can see how male homosocial groups develop in different environments, and how those different environments shape their queerness as a result. The forest on the island, in particular, becomes a safe haven of sorts for the boys, as whenever they enter the forest, queerness ensues.

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, editors of the book *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* discuss queerness in nature through other mediums, most notably *Brokeback Mountain*. Similiar to *Lord of the Flies*, the natural space for the boys in *Brokeback Mountain* plays a part in their queer experience. Sandilands and Erickson state, “Wilderness is, in this film, portrayed as a vast field of homoerotic possibility...[It] becomes a ‘safe’ space for outlaw sex...[and] their ongoing relationship is almost completely located in this one, remote spot” (Sandilands 3). The wilderness in *Lord of the Flies* is exactly similar to this concept, where all of the “outlaw” sexual encounters happen on the remote island with nobody around.

The analysis of the relationship between nature and queer sex is therefore called queer ecology; it is an ecology that “calls into question heteronormativity itself as part of its advocacy around issues of nature and environment...” (5). Viewing the queer ecology in *Lord of the Flies* allows further discussion on not only safe spaces for queer

individuals, but also how nature can play a bigger part in questioning heteronormative ideals as well. By queering William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, one can start a new discussion on how boys become more comfortable in their identity when they are given the freedom to open about their sexuality, and how that freedom becomes necessary in order to live a more sustainable life.

Before discussing how *Lord of the Flies* specifically is a queer novel, it is vital to have a background and definitions to reflect on in order to provide a context for all. First, there is the important term of homosociality, and what exactly it means to have homosocial groups; Nils Hammaren and Thomas Johansson, two scholars on masculinity studies, describe it as “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (Hammaren 1). While this is a useful definition, it is outdated and focuses too much on the biological sex of the person rather than the gender in which they identify with.; for all intents and purposes, I will be using homosocial to describe anytime where bonds are between the boys, or those of the same gender.

Along with that definition, there is then the concept of the homosocial desire, which “refers to men turning their attention to other men...(2). In *Lord of the Flies*, many boys express this desire without truly realizing or knowing what to do with it, as they are indeed the only people on the island. I will be focusing on the homosocial desire as seen in the text specifically due to its instability in the novel, and how easily it collides with the homosexual desire as well.

Eve Sedgwick, one of the core founders of queer theory, discusses the closeness between homosocial desire and homosexual desire; she declares, “To draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to

hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual - a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted (Sedgwick 1-2). She means to say that, for boys and men specifically; there is a thin line between the homosocial and the homosexual. Homosocial bonds between boys can be created, but there is this innate fear of not remaining too close or one might be seen as having a homosexual desire.

This fear, as Sedgwick claims, is called the homosexual panic, or the “private, psychologized form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail...” (89). It is rampant in many men, due to the homophobia that exists in male homosocial groups across the world. In 1950s London in particular, the 1954 Lord Montagu case scared many men off, as there was now proof that they could indeed be jailed for actions of this sort. Knowing some of these terms and background gives insight into key words that are in the lexicon of queer analysis, and how these concepts can be added to the bigger conversation.

In order to expand on the big conversation on queer analysis at large, it is important to extrapolate the text at hand in order to develop a clear view of how the text is providing a queer subtext for all. The main characters at play here are Ralph, Piggy, Simon, and Jack¹. Together, these four boys go on a journey of self-discovery, and while ultimately the path often leads to a deadly ending, the queer moments in between challenge the boys' expectations of what male homosocial bonds are truly all about.

With this challenge in mind, the queer subtext is apparent right at the very beginning once they land on the island after the plane crash. The first prominent scene is when the boys, notably Piggy and Ralph, strip off their clothes and become naked. This

stripping of clothes is instantly a symbol of stripping away society’s ideals for a more open and free life. The boys are from a prep school with uniforms, so the removal of said uniform is a big step in standing against conformity and the civilized space that they already know. Once Ralph strips, Piggy is seen to be admiring him from a far. Golding writes, “He looked critically at Ralph’s golden body and then down at his own clothes. He laid a hand on the end of a zipper that extended down his chest...Piggy appeared again, sat on the rocky ledge, and watched Ralph’s green and white body enviously” (Golding 11-12).

There definitely is some emphasis made regarding Piggy’s view of Ralph’s body that probably would not be addressed if they were not on this island together. The open and unsupervised terrain allows Piggy and Ralph to deviate from the standard environment that they are used to, and see each other in their most raw depictions of themselves. While boys often deviate from the norm in prep schools often, the island is special in that it speeds up the process and gets them in a bare and open state very quickly.

For Piggy, the use of the word “critically” evokes a sense that he looked at Ralph for a very long time inspecting everything. The word “golden” to describe Ralph’s body could mean it stood out and shined from Piggy’s eyes. Gold also is something people search for, so there could be a dual meaning that Ralph’s body is the treasure that Piggy has been seeking. The fact that Piggy then started to strip insinuates that he wants to join Ralph in this new freedom and be open to the possible desires that he is feeling. Moments later, Piggy again watches Ralph’s body “enviously”; to be envious means wanting what we can’t have, and Piggy could desire Ralph’s body even though society’s rules say

otherwise. Seeing the queerness between Piggy and Ralph at the beginning sets the tone of how the island plays a role for freedom in the novel, as well as allows the duo to start to react to their new queer desires in the process. Piggy, throughout the text, continues to be Ralph’s loyal secondhand man, desiring to please him whenever see fit.

Later on, this new open environment impacts more of the boys, notably Ralph, Simon, and Jack. The three go on an expedition to determine if the island truly is an island or not. Here, they are trying to determine if their place is as remote as it seems; is this ecology open to be queer? They go up the highest mountain, and soon, more homoerotic language begins, proving instantly that this island is free to be queer. Golding writes, “The cause of their pleasure was not obvious. All three were hot, dirty, and exhausted...The creepers were as thick as their thighs and left little but tunnels for further penetration. Ralph shouted experimentally and they listened to the muted echos” (27). Here, the trio of Ralph, Jack, and Simon are having a euphoric experience with each other on their own “brokeback mountain”.

The cause of the pleasure of this “brokeback mountain” is not “obvious” because it is queer-coded and does not provide traditional heterosexual tendencies. According to literary analyst Thomas C. Foster, “Part of the reason for all this disguised sex is that, historically, writers and artists couldn’t make much use of the real thing...[and] scenes in which sex is coded rather than explicit can...be more intense than literal depictions” (Foster 149). As previously stated, the 1954 Montagu case caused censorship in all forms of media, and *Lord of the Flies* probably followed suit. Foster notes that encoded sex can sometimes be more powerful than the actual act, for the descriptions are not what one is

truly expecting. In this scene, we have erotic language with “hot”, “dirty”, “thick” and even “exhausted”, where they are tired from their adventure and need time to relax.

These words, at face value, do not seem sexual, but decoding the language through a queer lens ultimately reveals the intensity behind it. The most intense word in this section is none other than “penetration”; or the act of anal sex, where when looking at it queerly, one can see there is a “tunnel” for further use. Ralph “shouting experimentally” gives off another pleasurable vibe, where Ralph is experimenting with queer desire for the very first time. It is an adventure for all of them with Jack even stating, “This is real exploring. I bet nobody’s been here before” (27). The use of the word “explore” shows that these three traveled through this queer journey and discovered something that only few in this terrain actually encountered. By decoding what seems like a “normal” scene in the text, one can unlock the door to further queerness; therefore, Ralph, Jack, and Simon’s forest scene sets the ball rolling for future queer experiences on the island to occur.

And yet, Simon fully does not get to enjoy his possible queerness, as he is often the one shamed for doing so. He is seen as a shy kid who becomes The Other very quickly because he does not fit into the boys’ socialized standards. Perry Nodelman, a critic on Orientalism, describes The Other as one who “is opposite to the person doing the talking or thinking or studying” (Nodelman 29). Simon is often the character that is talked about instead of talked to, which creates a sense of misrepresentation for him.

Early on, the reader sees Simon trying to be affectionate towards the other boys in a sensual way. Golding writes, “Simon stroked Ralph’s arm shyly; and they had to laugh again” (Golding 25). Here, Simon is “stroking” Ralph, and stroking is seen as very

closely similar to caressing. He also does this “shyly”, displaying that he is unsure how the physical act will go, and he is still unsure about his own sexual identity. The two boys “had to” laugh due to the homosexual panic, and being afraid to be seen as queer.

Laughing is a good coping mechanism to distract oneself from this predicament; Ralph, as shown before, enjoys this kind of sensation, but chooses to brush it off to keep his power position alive.

With this scene, we also get an image of where sexuality is confusing for both individuals at play, where they both realized an incident occurred, but they do not know how to address it comfortably without their socialized heterosexuality being put into question. According to Michael Kimmel, author of *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality*, “Sex evokes conflicting and often contradictory emotions: profound guilt at moments of exuberance and pleasure...The moments of most intense intimacy and connection are also moments of loss and abandonment. In sex, we are often at once in full possession of all our senses and in danger of utter annihilation” (Kimmel 67). Here, Ralph and Simon feel these contradictory emotions and feelings, not knowing how to express their sexuality in a healthy way.

What began as a possible intimate moment left with their laughing and losing that connection in fear of embarrassment and acknowledgment from others. Instead, Simon’s act goes unnoticed and is silenced by Ralph. This silencing of “Simon Says” happens again in a future moment where “Simon put[s] out his hand, timidly, to touch Ralph, but Ralph start[s] to run...” (Golding 67). Simon tries again to express his queer desires to Ralph, but Ralph’s homosexual panic becomes so strong that he “runs” at the feeling of touch. Simon is timid to express any feelings that might isolate him, so by Ralph refusing

to engage, Simon’s self-esteem as a possible queer individual continues to diminish even further.

As Nodeleman adds about The Other, “In the act of speaking for the other, providing it with a voice, we silence it. As long as we keep on speaking for it, we won’t get to hear what it has to say for itself” (Nodelman 30). Instead of allowing Simon to talk about his intimate action, Ralph silences it and goes about their daily business, preventing the reader from learning more about this possible queer encounter. It doesn’t help that Ralph later tells Jack that “[Simon] is queer. He’s funny.” (Golding 55). This is our first use of the word “queer” in the novel, and it’s used to distance Simon’s funny ways from the rest of the boys. Ralph speaks for Simon instead of letting Simon speak for himself, continuously causing Simon to hide. Note that all of these occurrences are early in the novel where the boys are struggling to remove society’s rules, and they are still trying to find their own bearing on the queerness at hand.

With this queerness debacle, Simon becomes very closely related to the open forest, and soon, after being shy and scared about his possible queerness, uses the forest as a metaphorical closet for him to hide into. The text states, “When he was secure in the middle he was in a little cabin screened off from the open space by a few leaves. He squatted down, parted the leaves, and looked out into the clearing. Nothing moved but a pair of gaudy butterflies that danced round each other in the hot air” (57). Simon places himself in a “cabin” of sorts and hides in his little makeshift closet to distance himself from all the other boys.

It is a sense of hiding, much like the hiding of queer individuals when they don’t want others to know who they truly are. The gaudy butterflies dancing represent the

queerness within Simon that wants to branch out, but it is difficult to truly do so when he is entrapped in his own little cocoon. This is one of the scenes where one of our characters is attached to the forest completely, and his hiding shows that he shyly feels the open queer energy around him; ultimately, he chooses to remain in the forest in this closeted space, for society’s ideals still socialize him in believing what he is feeling is wrong in some way. Remaining in the wilderness continues to allow Simon to ponder about his thoughts and feelings in private without any judgment.

The final character Jack also experiences queer tendencies, just to the more aggressive and violent extreme. Paula Alida Roy, a critic on masculinity and femininity in *Lord of the Flies*, talks about the sow-killing scene stating, “Jack’s deterioration from strong leader to cruel tyrant offer opportunities to look at male bonding and group violence, especially when we examine rape imagery in the language of the sow-killing scene” (Roy 175). While she is correct in the killing of the female pig being a giant metaphor for the rape of a woman, there is a scene that almost happens before the sow-killing scene that is a queer version of that, opening up more insight on when male sexuality can go too far in its freedom. The scene is early on when Ralph, Jack, and Simon encounter a male pig, and Jack replies, “I was choosing a place. I was just waiting for a moment to decide where to stab him” (Golding 31). The pronoun “him” here is crucial, as it challenges the heteronormative view of rape, with a male character contemplating on “stabbing” another male character.

Because the possible victim is a male pig, this could be seen as an allusion to Piggy, making a more horrifying visual come to focus. This scene also broadens the conversation on queerness and how not all of it is warranted all the time; consent is

necessary for anyone regardless of sexuality. This scene overall compares Jack to the other boys, and how tame their queerness is compared to his; his violent urges continue throughout the novel, and the embedded queerness just adds a layer into what he is capable of doing in this forest.

This embedded queerness of Jack’s continues to flourish with Ralph, as the two continue to be competitive rivals, trying to take control of the rest of the boys in the homosocial space. Their intense masculinity and “hatred” for each other can be seen as a secret queer desire in order to impress the other one of their skills. In fact, when other boys are not around, there are multiple instances where Jack and Ralph share a smile with each other, hinting at a possible attraction that the two share. Early on in the forest when they are discovering if the island is an island, Ralph and Jack immediately share a moment, where “Ralph found himself alone on a limb with Jack and they grinned at each other, sharing this burden” (39). The fact that they are alone together hints as a shared intimacy, and their grinning shows a sense of likeness towards each other. Their being on the limb attaches them to the queer ecology, and the “burden” they are sharing may be the potential queer desire that exists between them.

This queer desire continues to come up later in the novel whenever they’re alone. After debating about bathing or eating, “they looked at each other, baffled, in love and hate. All the warm salt water of the bathing pool and the shouting and splashing and laughing were only just sufficient to bring them together again” (55). Here, we get another instance of Ralph and Jack’s fond looks of each other, with love even being mentioned. Their staying together despite what is to come shows a close connection between the two boys, and how their connection challenges the ideas of what is good and

evil in the novel. Even in the climax where Jack and his minions are basically trying to kill Ralph as soon as possible, there is still a sense of queer desire.

In this sense of panic, Jack’s violent obsession with Ralph actually proves to be one surrounded by homoerotic desire. The text states about Ralph, “Then there was that indefinable connection between him and Jack; who therefore would never let him alone; never” (184). By Golding calling their connection “indefinable”, he is mentioning that it is special and unique, and cannot be defined by simple heteronormative terms. This connection between the two, no matter how violent or deadly, is more powerful than any other couple in the novel. Jack never leaving Ralph alone once again displays queer desire to the extreme, where obsession often takes over. Seeing the stages of Ralph and Jack’s “connection” in *Lord of the Flies* shows that queer desire is just as valid as heteronormative desire, to the point where it can be just as obsessive and problematic.

While working with the close reading for *Lord of the Flies* on queer theory, an effective digital tool used was VoyantTools, which looks over the whole text and shows, through graphs and lists, what words really stood out. One of the interesting words picked out was the color ‘pink’, as it was used to describe objects in the novel 38 times, the most out of any other color. For a text based on English boys, it seems odd to have pink be the main color used through the novel instead of a more ‘masculine’ color stereotypically used in Western culture like blue. The use of pink can be seen in the below graph:

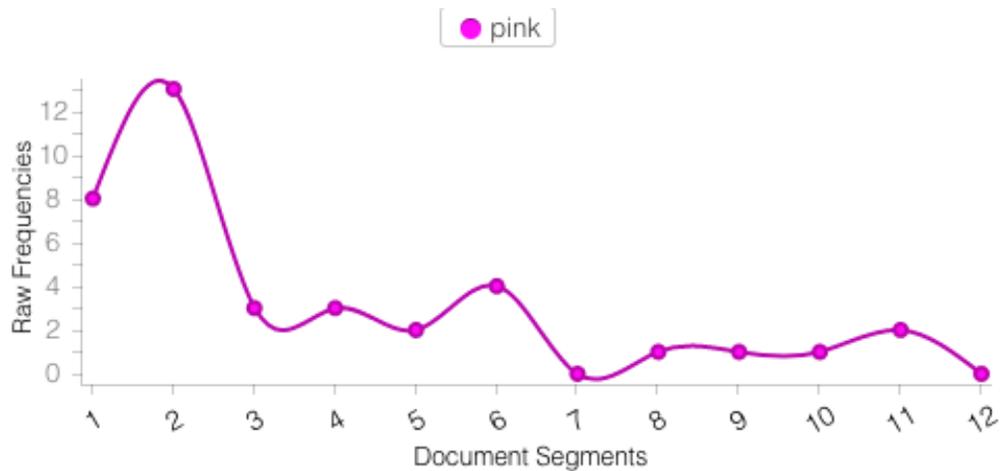


Figure 1: The use of the word “pink” in Lord of the Flies.

From the graph, we see that the word “pink” was used mainly in the first half of the novel. Pink was used mostly to describe the island and the forest, whether it is the pink dust, pink rocks, or pink cliff. The first half of a novel is where one heavily describes the setting, so pink being used in these sections makes sense. Golding writes, “There lay another of those pieces of pink squareness that underlay the structure of the island. This side of the castle, perhaps a hundred feet high, was the pink bastion they had seen from the mountaintop” (104). Here, we see the color pink being associated with the structure of the island, showing how vital the color is in holding the island together. Pink is closely related to homosexuality at this time, so to have something pink be the support system of this island displays deeply how big of a queer safe space the island truly is.

Pink, according to Sandilands and Erickson, is one of the two colors related to the connection of nature and sexuality, along with green. When working together, nature (green) and sexuality (pink) are broad topics that continue to be extrapolated to future the understanding of queer ecology. As Sandilands and Erickson state, “The dynamics of

queer environmental politics offer places for both environmental and queer activists to counter the normalized subjectivities offered by mainstream political choices”

(Sandilands 34). By combining both environmental and queer activism, an important discussion can be put in place for the mainstream heteronormative civilization to be challenged by both of the critical issues at play.

The two symbols in *Lord of the Flies* that best contrast the “normal” and the queer when it comes to the environment are the conch shell and the spear. Throughout the novel, the two items contrast in shape and function. The conch shell is ultimately seen as a yonic symbol, very reminiscent of the vagina, while the spear is a phallic symbol, reminiscent of the penis. The conch and the spear are both used in contrasting ways that symbolically express the opposing nature of heteronormative London and this queer island in which the boys are dwelling, respectively.

The conch shell, ultimately, is the oral device which the boys use throughout the novel to collectively unite themselves as a homosocial community; in the text it can be seen as a symbol of the British civilization that they already know, as well as a reminder of traditional heterosexual ways in which the boys were socialized into. When it is first introduced, Piggy explains, “It’s a shell! I seen one like that before. On someone’s back wall. A conch he called it. He used to blow it and then his mum would come. It’s ever so valuable” (15). The conch is described as something familiar that Piggy has seen, one that was even in someone’s house, completely connected to it. The conch is already put into a heteronormative context, with the idea of a man blowing into the yonic symbol in order to collectively bring a society together. The fact that the word “mum” is already related to the image continues to feminize the conch as a yonic symbol.

With the description of “valuable”, there is this continued sense of the purity and fragility of the object, and how once the conch is gone, all civilization is destroyed. Golding writes, “The conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist...There isn't a tribe...anymore! The conch is gone” (181). From a queer lens, the boys completely destroy the yonic symbol of heterosexuality into shreds in this moment, removing all of the rules that the boys learned back in London. Chaos and freedom for the boys rise, allowing for more queerness to commence. The removal of the “tribe” shows that there is no more group tactic or society formed; the boys, in the midst of their destruction, can fully be attached to this queer island they call home.

Meanwhile, the spear is the phallic symbol that rises to occasion when the conch shell is seen useless to the boys at hand. Throughout the text, it is seen as the queer alternative to traditional heteronormative civilization, with the spear being a tool to be free and wild with nature. It is worth noting that the conch is mainly used on the beach while the spear is used in the forest, continuing to display how queer ecology can open up a space for non-heterosexual acts to take place. The boys use their spears for the majority of the novel to hunt for food, but it is not until the conch is fully destroyed that the boys all use their spears against each other.

In fact, it is just moments after the conch crashes that a spear is used against Ralph. Golding states, “Viciously, with full intention, [Jack] hurled his spear at Ralph. The point tore the skin and flesh over Ralph's ribs, then sheared off and fell in the water. Ralph stumbled, feeling not pain but panic...” (181). After hiding his queer desires for Ralph constantly, the spear is Jack's tool to use to fully express how he feels, as viciously as possible. The phrase “full intention” expresses that Jack knows exactly what he is

doing, and he is purposely hurling his “spear” at Ralph’s skin, shearing off some of his flesh. With the spear being used as a phallic symbol, Jack is able to use a masculine tool with the boys instead of the feminine object of unity that the group was using for a majority of their stay on the island. It is a door into a violent and queerer way to be, and the image of the spear reflects that. Ralph then uses his own spear not too long after, as he “thrust his own stick through the crack and struck with all his might” (194). Without the civilized yonic symbol of the conch shell being there to keep him socialized, Ralph fully joins the queer island with his use of the phallic symbol of the spear, displaying that he, too, can thrust with the best of them in a free way.

Queer symbols, like the spear, control how the island functions, and how the boys react to said island. Another queer symbol that impacts the queer ecology of the land is the triangle that the boys create in the middle of their assembly, which was “irregular and sketchy, like everything they made” (77). Piggy tries to distance himself from the triangle, as he “stood outside the triangle...[and eventually] tiptoed to the triangle, his ineffectual protest made, and joined the others” (78-79). In this instance, we see the boys making a triangle on the beach, not realizing the potential symbol that this shape relates to in the historic sense. In particular, the pink triangle was a well-known symbol during World War II, those that were gay, “marked by pink triangles, were a relatively small minority in the [Nazi] camps but had a proportionately higher mortality rate than the more numerous political prisoners, who wore red patches” (Plant 14). The pink triangle, while in modern days is a reclaimed symbol that the queer community has taken in stride, was a mark of humiliation, degradation, and entrapment. It singled out people

consistently and “othered” them compared to the rest in the camps; this stuck with the queer community, with a decent amount dying in the camps for just being who they were.



Figure 2: Pink Triangles as seen on homosexuals in the Nazi camps²

In *Lord of the Flies*, there are references to triangles, as they are often a test for all the boys to combat against. The first time it is actually visualized in the text is early on the bridge where Piggy sees a “deep, pink ‘V’” (Golding 11). The pink V as an image looks like an incomplete pink triangle, which is reminiscent of all the boys, who have not quite discovered their possible queerness in the novel this early in the text. To see the image, however, is a clear sign that there is much to come, and having it on the bridge shows that there is a path to queerness that the boys are about to go through whether they know it or not.

Piggy’s disapproval of the triangle created in the assembly, as mentioned earlier, can be a sense of not wanting to be queer, a sense of homosexual panic, but he eventually joins the others in a sense of camaraderie anyway. The triangle here can be seen as a label of entrapment like the ones placed on the individuals during the War, or it can be a reclaimed symbol for all of the boys for realizing their possible new queer identity. Either

way, this shape and color association further communicates that all can see *Lord of the Flies* as a queer novel, especially through historic context, from beginning to end.

Speaking of the boys’ rescue at the end, the novel’s ending scene displays another clash of the heteronormative civilization with the queer space, as the boys eventually interact with an adult for the first time in the text. The adult in question is a naval officer who comes by ship and sees all the chaos that the boys encountered. He is wearing a uniform, the symbol of conformity and following the rules, like the boys in the beginning, representing the heteronormative space that the boys grew up in. The fact that he comes to this queer space shows that visitors sometimes will intrude safe spaces, as nothing is set in stone. No matter how queer the island was to the boys, this naval officer strips them of their queerness, wanting them to come back into the civilized fold and act as “normal” again. Golding writes, “The officer, surrounded by these noises, was moved and a little embarrassed. He turned away to give them time to pull themselves together; and waited, allowing his eyes to rest on the trim cruiser in the distance” (202). Here, the officer sees the pain that the boys have gone through, and is embarrassed they got to this level as human beings.

His waiting for them to “pull themselves together” is an example of waiting for the boys to conform back to London standards, as he is patiently waiting for them to rid of their queerness and forget any of this even happened. The trim cruiser is symbolic of war, and all the problems and hate that coincide with that, like homophobia. Despite the naval officer appearing to have come just in time to “save” these boys, he also, in effect, comes just in time to revert their line of thinking, as they prepare for their society of strict rules to follow. Some of the boys die on this queer island, notably Simon and Piggy,

cementing their queerness to remain forever. Everyone else must forget any of this ever happened, like it was only a dream.

Yet, it was not a dream. This island became a queer dystopia for many of the boys who only knew heteronormative ideals and nothing else. Ralph, Jack, and the others connected with the queer ecology, and the ecology constructed their ways of behaving, feeling, and thinking. Throughout investigating the homosocial bonds that are formed through this long experience, one can see how quickly the nature and the forest allowed for the homosexual desire to occur. In an empty and open space without any adults, the boys were able to embrace their innate feelings without anyone telling them otherwise. The naval officer takes it away from them at the end, but ultimately, it does not really matter. The boys, for as long as they did, embraced the island’s queerness in a time where homophobia ran rampant throughout London, and that is a merit in itself.

By viewing William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* as a queer novel, a well-informed discussion can begin about queer safe spaces, and what happens when one is free to own their identity. According to Mark McCormack, writers of the chapter “Queer Masculinities, Gender Conformity, and the Secondary School” in *Queer Masculinities: A Critical Reader in Education*, “[With] *Lord of the Flies*... all [the students] end up writing about is the homoerotic overtones, because they think it is a novelty... This meant sexuality was very rarely discussed in English lessons, not recognizing it was this form of silencing that kept sexuality ‘novel’ (McCormack 37). In most English classes, sexuality, especially queer sexuality, is pushed under the rug and is not given the platform it deserves to have a worthwhile conversation. Even in McCormack’s example, the students

bring up the homoerotic overtones of Golding’s novel, but it does not amount to anything, as the teacher would prefer less “taboo” topics.

In reality, talking about the queerness of *Lord of the Flies* is vital as it is one of the few novels where the nature of the land might be the queerest character in the text. Also, with a novel about young impressionable British boys going into puberty soon, it is important for young children everywhere to understand that heterosexuality is not the official norm, and homophobia is not the end result. If a child has homosexual feelings, it is perfectly acceptable to do so, and a safe space can be created to embrace that queerness further. In the end, *Lord of the Flies*, while at face value, can be viewed as a destructive tale of human savagery, is also a novel about human sexuality, and the openness of queerness for all. Discussing this different view allows other readers, especially queer ones, to start an even greater dialogue, one that can start to break the pink ceiling for queer individuals alike.

Bibliography

- Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively And Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2014.
- Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. Penguin Groups, 1959.
- Hammaren, Nils and Thomas Johansson. “Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy.” *SAGE Open* (2014): 1-11.
- James, Chad St. “Understanding the Pink Triangle.” *The Mediocre Life of Chad St. James*, 29 Aug. 2016.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality*. Albany, NY: State U of New York, 2005.
- McCormack, Mark. “Queer Masculinities, Gender Conformity, and the Secondary School.” *Queer Masculinities: A Critical Reader in Education*, edited by John C. Landreau and Nelson M. Rodriguez, Springer Science+Business Media, 2012, pp. 35-46.
- Nodelman, Perry. “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children’s Literature.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 17, no.1. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 29-35.
- Plant, Richard. *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals*. Henry Holt and Company, 1986.
- Powell, Victoria. “Queer 50s.” *History Workshop Journal* (2010): pp. 283-286.
- Roy, Paula Alida. “Boys Club - No Girls Allowed: Absence as Presence in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954).” *Women in Literature: Reading Through the Lens of Gender* (2003): 175-177.

Sandilands, Catriona Mortimer and Bruce Erickson. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia University Press, 1985.

VoyantTools.Org

Zanghellini, Aleardo. *The Sexual Constitution of Political Authority: The ‘Trials’ of Same-Sex Desire*, Routledge: Oxford, 2015.

End Notes

¹ For context, Ralph is the moral leader of the bunch who tries to maintain order. Piggy is his loyal sidekick who, as a maternal figure, worries about every situation at hand. Simon is the shy boy who is distant and always seems to be off on his own. Jack is the rebellious antagonist who wants decisions to be his way or the highway.

² Picture from Chad St. James’s article, “Understanding the Pink Triangle”. Between 50,000 to 63,000 convicted prisoners from 1933 to 1944 wore downward-pointing pink triangles to show that they were homosexual men. Downward-pointing black triangles were used for homosexual women.