

**Where Are the Women?: An Ecofeminist Reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies***

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**Hawk Chang,**  
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**Abstract:** The absence of female characters and their voices in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) has been previously examined. On the surface, this fiction focuses on the struggle and survival of a group of boys who are left alone on a Pacific island against the background of nuclear warfare. The only presence of women in the story seems to be the aunt via a boy's narration. However, when approaching the fiction through the lens of ecofeminism, we can find a range of feminized entities which are metaphorically embodied in the natural surroundings of the secluded island. The boys' interactions with these feminized creatures in nature showcase a master mentality prevalent in human-centered and male-dominated discourses, a problem many ecofeminists manage to redress. Investigating Golding's *Lord of the Flies* from this angle, this paper discusses women's subordination, men's exploitation of nature, and the implications of reading *Lord of the Flies* from an ecofeminist perspective. I argue that an ecofeminist reading, which helps us complicate the interplay between men and women, women and nature, and the nature of patriarchal domination, contributes to our re-discovery of women's voices underlying *Lord of the Flies*.

**Hawk CHANG**

## **Where Are the Women?: An Ecofeminist Reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies***

### **I. Introduction**

The absence of female characters and their voices in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) has been previously examined (Reilly 178; Roy 174). In a sense, this exclusion of women makes good sense because, as Hector asserts in Homer's *The Iliad*, war is the concern of men. This close connection between war and males is endorsed by David Morgan, who argues that masculinities are often "constructed, reproduced, and deployed" along with "war and the military" (195). Therefore, this children-centered story, which is set against the backdrop of World War II, centers on struggle and survival of males. Nonetheless, Lysistrata's refutation in Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* that war should be the concern of women highlights the fact that women, who are invariably victimized in warfare, are the real sufferers.

Many academics have examined *Lord of the Flies*. Nonetheless, most of them focus on the literary, moral, theological, and philosophical implications embedded in the fiction. For instance, echoing Golding's acknowledgement that *Lord of the Flies* falls easily to instruction and moral education, James Gindin maintains that Golding's works "attempt to deal with the essential human condition," in which men are stuck, isolated, tested, and destructed (*William Golding* 16). Additionally, in "The Fictional Explosion: *Lord of the Flies* and *the Inheritors*," Gindin discusses the connection between Golding's early fictions and western literary traditions, such as R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* and H. G. Wells's *Outlines of History* (11-12). Highlighting the educational value of *Lord of the Flies* for children, S. J. Boyd proposes that "Golding's concern is to present us with a vision of human nature and also of the nature of the world which we inhabit" (28). C. B. Cox approaches the fiction from an allegorical perspective, arguing that *Lord of the Flies* as well as Golding's earlier novels tackles "the depravity of man" and that Golding "cares deeply about the condition of human life, and shows great compassion for men who suffer and men who sin" (116). Refuting clear-cut boundaries between good and evil, rationality and primitivity, civilization and savagery, Keith Selby analyzes moral ambiguities in *Lord of the Flies* (57-59).

Additionally, Arnold Kruger's study focuses on the character of Simon, arguing that this saint-like character is less analogous to Jesus Christ, as most critics claim, than an analogy of Simon Peter, one of Christ's apostles (167-69). Moreover, John Fitzgerald and John R. Kayser highlight the influence of ancient Egyptian myth on Golding and do an inspiring reading of the fiction via the perspective of the Osiris myth (79-85). In "Absence of Bikini, or the Cold War Boyology in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*," Ryuichiro Miyanaga alerts us to the fiction's "notorious absence of femininity" (499). With reference to John Carey's biographical study of Golding in *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies* (2009), and relevant textual examples from the story, Miyanaga's research on the homoerotic relationships among the boys is groundbreaking because it signals a less well-known aspect of the fiction and its creators (502-04). However, notwithstanding the wide varieties of research, how and why women are absent in the fiction and its implication are not clearly illustrated. Taken together, these studies help illustrate some fundamental questions in *Lord of the Flies*.

In *Lord of the Flies*, the only presence of women seems to be Piggy's aunt, and readers' understanding of this invisible woman is entirely through Piggy's narration. However, when approaching the fiction from an ecofeminist perspective, we can find a range of feminized entities which are metaphorically embodied in the natural surroundings of the secluded island. Overall, ecofeminism, a combination of environmental philosophy and feminism which has been increasingly popular since the 1990s, features its critique of the close connection between the degradation of nature and the oppression of women. Notwithstanding their individual difference and main focus, many ecofeminists, including representative scholars such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Greg Garrard, Karen J. Warren, and Val Plumwood, castigate the reason/nature binary opposition prevalent in western culture. This binary values reason and downgrades nature, and a series of relevant dualisms, such as human/nature, civilized/primitive, white/black, man/woman, and masculine/feminine because these hierarchies are liable to legitimate oppressions in class, race, and sex. As Greg Garrard argues, ecofeminists are particularly opposed to anthropocentrism, which favors human over nature, and androcentrism, which prefers man to woman in that both constructs are based on a reasoning of domination (26). According to Victoria Davion, both dualisms are problematic because they showcase a master mentality that "women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional . . . while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaternal, the rational, and the abstract" (9). In the wake of such a biased mentality, men are rational and superior, while women are primitive and inferior. Based on this

hierarchal dualism, the close connection between woman and nature leads to their joint suppression. In other words, for ecofeminists, the domination of nature is only part of other patterns of domination and manipulation, such as the oppression of women. This prompts them to be committed to unsettling the underlying human-centered and male-dominated master mentality operative in diverse cultures (Mellor 68-69).

Investigating Golding's *Lord of the Flies* from ecofeminism, this paper discusses the hierarchal opposition between men and women, the exploitation of women and nature, and the significance and implication of reading *Lord of the Flies* via ecofeminist viewpoints. I argue that an ecofeminist reading, which helps us complicate the interplay between men and women, as well as women and nature, contributes to our re-discovery of women's voices underlying Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

## II. Masculinities and Male Dominance in *Lord of the Flies*

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is a fiction which is teeming with males and male-centered descriptions. The background itself is set against a war, which is traditionally a male-dominated enterprise. In addition, the story centers on a group of boys, who are evacuated from Britain and shot down over an unidentified deserted island in the tropical area, and how they manage to live by themselves, strive for their survival, and be rescued. As the story develops, what readers can find are generally a range of power struggles between some gentle boys led by Ralph and the violent hunters led by Jack. These boys' conflicts and compromises dominate the fiction, so much so that many readers forget about the existence of women. Notably, as Kevin McCarron points out, all the four novels Golding published in the 1950s "have war and masculinity as their central subject" (2). However, where are the women and their concerns?

In addition to the boys, the importance of men and masculinities are stressed in different sections of the story. We are constantly reminded of wars, fighters, and pilots in the surroundings. Piggy's reference to the atom bomb and the pilot who sent them to the island is a case in point (14). Intriguingly, in her research paper entitled "Who Made Nature Our Enemy?," ecofeminist Maria Mies asserts that in humans' (White Male in particular) exploration of atomic energy, women and children are the paramount sufferers (92-93). To a certain extent, Mies's notion helps explain the victimization of children and the invisibility of women in *Lord of the Flies*. In addition, in Ralph's conversation with Piggy, Ralph's father is presented as an athletic and heroic character: "I could swim when I was five. Daddy taught me. He's a commander in the Navy. When he gets leave he'll come and rescue us" (14). This image of male rescuers is further consolidated near the end when, after the strife and killing of the boys, a naval officer comes to rescue them (21-22). In other words, in addition to the boy-centered main plots that dominate the fiction, apparently *Lord of the Flies* not only starts with but ends in men's games. Additionally, the officer's comment near the end is illuminating. Witnessing the boys' wretchedness after their stay on the island, he tells Ralph, "I should have thought that a pack of British boys --you're all British aren't you?--would have been able to put up a better show than that--I mean--" (222). Obviously, certain hierarchal oppositions are embedded in the officer's remark. For instance, the word "British" is indicative of the officer's sense of superiority in terms of race and nationality. This racial pride and prejudice is evidenced early in Chapter Two when Piggy tells the other boys as follows: "We're English; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things" (47). Moreover, the officer's emphasis on "boys" alludes to society's higher expectations of males than females. Both asymmetries in race and sex signify the problem of a master mentality prevalent in our world.

Piggy's auntie is the most striking example of women's presence. However, she is always introduced in passing and with sarcasm. Piggy keeps telling Ralph what his auntie advises him to do or not to do. For example, when explaining to Ralph about how his friend blows the conch, Piggy says, "My auntie wouldn't let me blow on account of my asthma" (17). Additionally, the negative image of Piggy's auntie is conspicuous in the following episode.

Piggy took off his shoes and socks, ranged them carefully on the ledge, and tested the water with one toe.  
"It's hot!"  
"What did you expect?"  
"I didn't expect nothing. My auntie--"  
"Sucks to your auntie!" (13)

Conspicuously, Ralph expresses his scorn at this invisible female character. Piggy's auntie is presented as someone who is nagging, obtrusive, and troublesome. As Paul Reilly contends, it is noteworthy that in *Lord of the Flies*, we have fathers and sons but no mothers and daughters (178). In a similar fashion, Paula Alida Roy maintains that the fiction "is peopled entirely by boys and, briefly, adult men" (174). According to Roy, the rare reference to girls late in the fiction, like the passing mentioning of Piggy's

auntie earlier, does not contribute to our better evaluation of women because it is only used for ridicule and strongly suggests that females are ineffectual and powerless (176-77).

### III. Women, Nature, and Ecofeminism

Over the centuries, most societies in the world have been dominated by certain hierarchal oppositions, such as men/women, culture/nature, white/black, humans/animals, civilized/primitive, to name but a few. These hierarchal dichotomies fostered by the privileged against the underprivileged widen the gap between the powerful and the powerless. According to Karen J. Warren, ecofeminists pay special attention to the strong historical, symbolic and theoretical connections between the domination of women and the degradation of nature ("The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" 126). They generally agree that "the way in which the logic of domination has functioned historically within patriarchy to sustain and justify the twin dominations of women and nature" (131). In other words, the domestication of women and the domination of nature, which seem to be irrelevant, are actually two sides of the same coin because the logic behind their disempowerment is identical. According to ecofeminists, it is the master mentality popular in Western thought that results in the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. Following this master mentality, some human beings (such as men) are superior to the others owing to their better reasoning ability. As a consequence, these powerful men should rule the world, while women, racial minorities, or animals in nature are inferior due to their lack of reason. Based on this Darwinian perspective, men, who are considered more rational and intelligent, rather than women, who are deemed more emotional and passionate, take the lead (Plumwood 46-47). By the same token, humans, who are supposedly logical and thus superior, rather than nature, which is supposedly inanimate and thus inferior, are entitled to dominate the world.

This patriarchal thinking about male domination is manifest in *Lord of the Flies*, in which the world on the island is dominated by either a group of rationalists led by Ralph or a band of violent hunters led by Jack. Early in the story, these boys demonstrate their ability to think and organize rationally. For example, it is Ralph who first spots the conch. Ralph's proposal to use the conch as a tool for the right of speech, in conjunction with his suggestion to use fire as a signal so that they can be rescued, signifies his intelligence and good leadership (16-17). Moreover, the thought of using Piggy's spectacles and the sunlight to make fire showcases Jack's quick wit (44). These examples exemplify Ralph's and Jack's abilities to act as leaders. In contrast to the dominant male characters such as Ralph and Jack, women are invisible. They are also silenced because no woman characters are allowed to articulate their own voices.

However, we are reminded of the existence of a woman, Piggy's auntie, indirectly via his recollection, although this female character is not very well presented. The first time Piggy mentions his auntie, she appears to be someone who is admonishing and bossy: "My auntie told me not to run," he explained, "on account of my asthma" (9). This impression is aggravated afterwards every time when Piggy refers to his auntie as someone who gives advice, takes command, and gains control (11, 13, 14, 17, 102). In a nutshell, as the only woman who appears in the story, Piggy's auntie showcases the downgraded status of women. This is mainly because of the belief that women can never be matches with men in terms of intelligence and leadership. As Warren asserts in *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (2000), in the male-dominated culture, this disempowerment of women is coupled with humans' domination of nature (2). As the opening pages demonstrate, creatures in the wilderness, which are poorly perceived or even demonized, are regarded as obstacles or threats to human survival. This is evident in the first paragraph when Ralph, exhausted and aimless after being abandoned on the island, "was clambering heavily among the creepers and broken trunks when a bird, a vision of red and yellow, flashed upwards with a witch-like cry" (7). In a similar vein, Piggy could "hardly move with all these creeper things," and his knees were "caught and scratched by thorns" (7).

People's fear of animals and the wild is also manifested in the boys' dreams and their constant talk about "a thing, a dark thing, a beast, some sort of animal" and "something moving among the trees, something big and horrid" in "Chapter Five: Beast from Water" (90, 93). However, as Simon, one of the most sensible boys in the story, indicates amid the other boys' speculation about the beast from water, the beast may only be a concoction. Instead of having a beast in nature, Simon suggests, "maybe it's only us" (97). This debunking of humans' demonization of nature is further accentuated in "Chapter Six: Beast from Air," which starts with a dogfight in the sky and a dying soldier dropping down in his parachute. Ironically, the corpse of the dead fighter pilot in the trees scares the smallest children such as Sam and Eric. In other words, while the beast from water or nature in the previous chapter is only imaginary, this human is a real beast from the air and the real cause of trouble. However, blinded by their ignorance and prejudice, the boys keep fantasizing the corpse as a beast from the jungle. According to Sam, "It was furry. There was something moving behind its head—wings. The beast moved too—"



(109). Urged by his master mentality to subdue and dominate this concocted enemy from nature, Jack calls on the other boys to join him for "a real hunt!" (110).

In stark contrast to the obtrusive creepers and the bird with a demonic sound, Jack, Piggy, and the other boys are superior men of reason and wisdom. The narrator summarizes these boys' good qualities early in Chapter One: "what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance" (24). Despite their different qualities, Ralph, Piggy, and Jack are entitled to explore and control. Due to their engrained master mentality, the moment they set foot on the island, they are determined about their authority over this wild nature. Therefore, these boys keep repeating words such as "we are explorers" (27), "This belongs to us" (31), "All ours" (32), and "This is our island" (38), acts which are indicative of humans' arrogance and their quest for supremacy in their encounter with nature. When Ralph, Jack, and Simon first go to the forest trying to find food, their encounter with nature is described as a violent attack and a daring adventure: "The assault on the summit must wait while the three boys accepted this challenge. The rock was as large as a small motor car" (30). Along with their exploration of the wild comes commotion and disturbance. For instance, when the boys succeed in heaving the great rock and throwing it away, it "moved through the air, fell, struck, turned over, leapt droning through the air and smashed a deep hole in the canopy of the forest" (30). Manifestly, these boys' intrusion to nature has caused troubles to this once-tranquil island, with its birds flying and dust floating riotously. However, to justify men's exploration and exploitation of nature, reactions from nature to man-made exploitations are often demonized because the forest is likened to "an enraged monster" (30).

Ralph's supremacy and authority are challenged soon by Jack and his followers, a pack of savage hunters who are characterized by outrageous and insolent violence, as their need for survival arises. However, notwithstanding their difference in appearance and personality, Jack and Ralph are not that different in terms of their haughty attitude toward nature. They only differ in the way nature is despised and dominated—whereas Ralph and his followers resort to mental capacities such as reason and logic as their means of exploitation, Jack and the other hunters capitalize on their physical forces in their exploration of nature. In the story, Jack is always ready to destroy any creatures in nature. Near the end of Chapter One, when making his way with Ralph and Simon to find some food, Jack shows his cruelty by destroying a bush. As the narrator puts it, "the bushes were dark evergreen and aromatic and the many buds were waxen green and folded up against the light. Jack slashed at one with his knife and the scent spilled over them" (33). This unjustifiable violence against nature is followed by a series of attempts made by Jack to kill a pig (33, 56), so much so that words such as "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood," "I cut the pig's throat," "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in," reverberate in different chapters (75, 81-82). As a matter of fact, the thought of stabbing a pig lingers on in Jack's memory all the time. Jack is obsessed with hunting for meat and catching things, insomuch that killing becomes his top priority (32). Consequently, the flora and fauna on the island fall victim to his violence. This is evidenced by the episode near the end of Chapter One, in which Jack, after failing to kill a piglet, "snatched his knife out of the sheath and slammed it into a tree trunk" (34).

Evaluated from an ecofeminist perspective, the climax and the most bloody episode in the fiction happens in Chapter Eight when Jack and his followers finally find and kill a sow in the forest. In contrast to the hunters' excitement about this attack, the sow is in tremendous panic. As the narrator puts in,

Here, struck down by the heat, the sow fell and the hunters hurled themselves at her. This dreadful eruption from an unknown world made her frantic; she squealed and bucked and the air was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror . . . Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife. Roger found a lodgment for his point and began to push till he was leaning with his whole weight. The spear moved forward inch by inch and the terrified squealing became a high-pitched scream. Then Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands. The sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her. (149)

This butchery scene brings to light men's cruelty. Notably, in addition to the boys' killing of animals, it alludes to their rape of women. This is evidenced by Jack being "on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife" (149). Although ostensibly describing Jack's killing of the animal, words such as "on top of the sow" and "stabbing" suggest Jack's position as a rape perpetrator, who attacks his victim with his knife, or, metaphorically, his penis. This reading is endorsed by E. L. Epstein, who maintains that "the killing of the sow is accomplished in terms of sexual intercourse" (206).

This interpretation of the hunters' killing of the sow as a sexual assault is echoed in many other episodes. Examples can be found not long before their final encounter with the sow. Depicting the wounded sow's efforts to run and survive, the narrator says, "the sow staggered her way ahead of them,

bleeding and mad, and the hunters followed, wedded to her in lust, excited by the long chase and the dropped blood" (149). Despite its direct association with the chase of the sow, words such as "bleeding," "wed," and "lust" are allusive of sexual connotations. Such a comment is echoed later when Roger commands to play with the sow's sexual organs, saying "Right up her ass!," which is followed by Robert's and Maurice's acting of the sow's "two parts" (150). Applying Julia Kristeva's theory of the maternal and the abject and Lacan's psychoanalytical theory to the interpretation of the boys' killing of the sow, Yasunori Sugimura contends that the boys have an unusual attachment to the sow or the mother because, while the law of the father loses its balance on the island, the desire for the mother surges (20-22). However, as Sugimura notes, since the connection between the infant and the mother is not necessarily harmonious but violent and aggressive, the boys attack the mother figure when they are mistakenly under the delusion of being harassed by her (23). Consequently, the boys' "outrage on the sow has a double meaning: incest and matricide" (Sugimura 23). This interpretation is illuminating, but it cannot relate the sow episode to the other plots in the fiction. When reading it from ecofeminism, with the killing of the sow, we witness not only human being's exploitation of nature but also men's subordination of women, both of which derive from the master mentality prevalent in our society. Although these exploitations come in different forms, they are two sides of the same coin, as ecofeminists such as Warren and Plumwood argue (Plumwood 47; Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" 131).

Problematic human interaction with nature is also evidenced in Chapter Four. It happens when a boy called Henry, one of the hunters following Jack, plays with some creatures by the water of a lagoon:

This was fascinating to Henry. He poked about with a bit of stick, that itself was wave-worn and whitened and a vagrant, and tried to control the motions of the scavengers. He made little runnels that the tide filled and tried to crowd them with creatures. He became absorbed beyond mere happiness as he felt himself exercising control over living things. He talked to them, urging them, ordering them. Driven back by the tide, his footprints became bays in which they were trapped and gave him the illusion of mastery. (66)

In this passage, typical of most hunter boys' interaction with their surroundings, Henry is preoccupied with manipulating the scavengers because it gives him the illusion that he is in total control of the inferior other. Key words such as "control," "urging," "ordering," and "mastery" specify the hierarchical positions between humans and nature. However, while relishing in this misconception, Henry's master mentality is manifested simultaneously.

In other words, for all their difference, the boys in *Lord of the Flies* share one thing in common—their customary impulse to subdue and dominate nature. This is obvious early in Chapter One, when they have just arrived on the uninhabited island and indulge in their superiority over the land collectively: "Eyes shining, mouths open, triumphant, they savoured the right of domination. They were lifted up: were friends" (32). Ironically, while these boys collaborate in their attempts for domination, nature becomes their subordinate and, conversely, their enemy and prey. In a similar vein, in Chapter Four, the narrator lays bare human beings' cruelty toward nature by depicting Jack's memories of killing a pig and his great sense of satisfaction: "His mind was crowded with memories . . . when they closed in on the struggling pig, knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taking away its life like a long satisfying drink" (76).

#### **IV. Symbols vs. Ecofeminism in *Lord of the Flies***

In addition to the characters, symbols in *Lord of the Flies* also help explicate the conflict between humans and nature. According to Jerome Martin, many objects in the story, such as spears, logs, and sticks, are phallic symbols that are used by Jack and the other hunters "to possess and to dominate, to kill and yet to have" (411). As one of the most striking symbols, the conch first found and subsequently used by Ralph as a medium for expressing one's opinions is an illustration. This tool, which is shaped like a man's sexual organ, symbolizes male authority because it guarantees and monitors one's right of speech. When it is associated with its finder, Ralph, and its function to ensure one's right of expression democratically, the conch becomes a symbol of absolute reasoning and intelligence. In contrast to the conch, which is used by Ralph to dominate rationally and intelligently, Jack utilizes his knife to conquer and subdue wild nature with violence. Just like the conch, Jack's knife, which is shaped like a penis, serves as another symbol of male violence and dominance. The hunters led by Jack keep chanting something like "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood" to celebrate their killing of a pig (75). Nonetheless, while this feminized animal is killed, it is not only nature but also women that are subdued, defiled, and destroyed.

In addition to the conch and the knife, fire is also a pivotal symbol in the fiction. Apparently, fire is highly valued by Ralph because it can help make smoke to signal passing ships and potentially contribute

to their rescue. However, as ecofeminist Plumwood maintains in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), women and nature have been undervalued in traditional philosophy, always being relegated to taking second place when compared with their counterparts such as men and humans (43-44). Evaluated from this ecofeminist perspective, fire in the story plays an important role in demarcating the hierarchal relativism between humans and nature as well as men and women. In Greek and Roman mythology, Prometheus steals fire and gives it to humans because Zeus has given many other strengths, such as running fast and flying high in the sky, to animals (Hamilton 87-88). Accordingly, fire signifies human's distinction from the other creatures in nature. Crucially, from an anthropological perspective, fire is a significant symbol which helps distinguish human beings from animals because in the history of world civilization, only humans are able to use fire to improve their lives and upgrade their way of life (Hough 403).

Approaching *Lord of the Flies* from this perspective helps us understand why fire is featured throughout the story. In appearance, it is used for the boys' rescue. However, metaphorically fire is also used to highlight human's difference from and superiority over other creatures in nature. Additionally, in the creation myth, Prometheus gives fire to men rather than women. In fact, women are not even created in the earlier periods of creation. Later on, when women are created, they are sent to men along with a box with many treasures from the gods. Plagues and troubles ensue after Pandora's box is opened out of women's curiosity and stupidity. In this creation myth, Zeus creates women as revenge for Prometheus's favor of humans. Women are regarded as "an evil to men, with a nature to do evil" (Hamilton 88). In other words, besides signaling nature's inferiority to humans, fire as a symbol connotes women's inferiority to men. Therefore, as fire is emphasized repeatedly for the continuity of the boys' lives in *Lord of the Flies*, simultaneously women and nature are subordinated and disempowered, inasmuch as the boys abandon themselves in the destruction of nature and their dismissal of women. As illustrated previously, the boys have no concern for nature, nor do they have respect for women. In Chapter Eleven, before going to Jack's camp to retrieve Piggy's spectacles, Eric scornfully refers to Piggy's suggestion as something "like a girl" if he ties his hair back (191). This contempt, in conjunction with the negative depiction of Piggy's auntie discussed earlier, testifies to women's subjugation on the male-dominated island.

In opposition to fire that alludes to men's exploitation of nature and women, water, normally gentle and feminine by nature, symbolizes the pristine purity of nature in *Lord of the Flies*. As the narrator remarks in the beginning of the story,

He [Ralph] picked his way to the seaward edge of the platform and stood looking down into the water. It was clear to the bottom and bridge with the efflorescence of tropical weed and coral. A school of tiny, glittering fish flicked hither and thither. Ralph spoke to himself, sounding the bass strings of delight. (12-13)

The sea and the water used to be crystal-clear and uncontaminated before the boys come ashore. The water, which abounds in living sea creatures such as weed, coral, and fish, is a thing of great joy that makes viewers ecstatic. This is echoed previously when the narrator first describes the beauty around the lagoon and the beach, saying "the lagoon was still as mountain lake—blue of all shades and shadowy green and purple . . . to Ralph's left the perspectives of palm and beach and water drew to a point at infinity" (10). This shining beauty of nature is also accentuated in the narrator's eulogy of a dark green beach pool in the beginning chapter (13). In other words, this uninhabited island, a virgin land nurtured by Mother Nature and rich in biodiversity, is primitive and spectacular before the arrival of human beings. However, the deterioration of water and its natural beauty is foreshadowed in Ralph's first visit to Castle Rock, where, out of his fear of nature, he regards the water as "some stupendous creature" and a "sleeping leviathan" (115). In other words, with the coming of the boys and their master mentality typical of humans, everything falls apart after a range of conflicts and violence devour different individuals until the catastrophic ending, where the majority of the boys are dead and nature devastated.

That the hierarchal opposition between man and nature is problematic is implied in *Lord of the Flies*. For example, in the beginning paragraphs of Chapter Seven when Ralph calms down, observes the surroundings, and meditates on what happens on the island:

Here, on the other side of the island, the view was utterly different. The filmy enchantment of mirage could not endure the cold ocean water and the horizon was hard, clipped blue. Ralph wandered down to the rocks. Down here, almost on a level with the sea, you could follow with your eye the ceaseless bulging passage of the deep sea waves . . . They travelled the length of the island with an air of disregarding it and being set on other business; they were less a progress than a momentous rise and fall of the whole ocean. (121)



Enchanted by the wonder of nature and the rise and fall of wave after wave, it dawns on Ralph that, compared with the power of nature, men are vulnerable. He gets to look on "the infinite size of this water" as "the divider" and "the barrier" (122). Overwhelmed by the vigor and vehemence of the water, Ralph becomes convinced of the invincibility of nature. As the narrator remarks, "faced by the brute obtuseness of the ocean, the miles of division, one was clamped down, one was helpless, one was condemned" (122). In a nutshell, men's absolute authority and their supremacy are questioned.

As discussed previously, Golding's *Lord of the Flies* abounds with examples highlighting human beings' exploitation of nature and males' disdain for their female counterparts. Nonetheless, neither the rationalists such as Ralph and Piggy nor the physically violent such as Jack and Roger prove to be successful. Many things associated with rationalism are destroyed by the end of the story. Jack takes away Piggy's spectacles. Piggy is eventually killed by Roger, who pushes a boulder down the mountain, and the conch is shattered under the weight of the boulder (200). On the other hand, those violent hunters under Jack's leadership often go out of control in their attempts to hunt and kill. Jack's interest in hunting and abusing pigs is an illustration. The hunters' insanity culminates in their revelry at the feast in Chapter Nine, in which the revelers are so indulged in their ecstasy that they fall on Simon and kill him when he emerges from the jungle, intent on telling them the real identity of the beast (168). Ralph's and Piggy's participation in the killing of Simon showcases the rationalists' degradation into atrocities. Consequently, human beings' rationality and their inherent superiority over animals are cast into doubt. In a sense, they are more brutal than animals because they kill not only for food and survival but for fun or due to their fear. This critique of humans' capacity for reason also echoes many critics' arguments that, as Golding demonstrates in this fiction, human beings are inherently evil as long as they are given time to reveal their true colors. As Michael Titlestad notes, *Golding's Lord of the Flies* is "generally read as both a portrait of the savagery of children and as allegory of humankind's tendency to moral decline" (36).

A further reflection on the model of oppression in the fiction contributes to our better understanding of Golding's critique of patriarchy. As Maria Mies maintains, in civil wars, Mother Nature, like women and children, is the victim because "the wars are also about bigger shares of the economic cake, therefore there will be further containment and destruction of the still remaining commons: air, water, the soil, forests, fields" ("Women Have No Fatherland." 129). Mies's argument reminds us of the hunters' exploitation of nature in *Lord of the Flies*, either for resources, for survival, or even for fun. Mies also draws our attention to the fact that the boys stranded on the island are also victims suffering from the aftermaths of male fighting, a theory endorsed by Vandana Shiva, also an ecofeminist, who argues that in human's development plans, women, children, and the environment have been marginalized (74-75). Crucially, the boys' change of roles from victims of violence to perpetrators of killing and destruction is indicative of human's, especially male's, instinct for evil. In his poem "My Heart Leaps Up," William Wordsworth proposes that "The Child is Father of the Man" (246). Unlike Wordsworth's idealistic conception of children's innocence and close connection with nature, the boys in *Lord of the Flies* prefigure an omen because they are no longer innocent as Wordsworth perceives but experienced. The boys' experience of subduing and dominating nature is so "successful" that they outsmart grown-ups in cruelty and violence. In addition, ironically, as time goes by, they will become male adults to wage war against women and nature.

## V. Conclusion

The absence of female characters is obvious in *Lord of the Flies*. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that Golding is a misogynist who is dismissive of women's importance and their contribution to the society. Kevin McCarron's comment that Golding is critical of "the aggressive ethos of masculinity" (2) is illuminating, though how and why Golding presents and criticizes the gendered world is not clearly expounded in his study.

Reading Golding's *Lord of the Flies* via an ecofeminist approach, this paper discusses the way women (or feminized creatures) and nature are subordinated and exploited. Ecofeminism helps shed new light on the mutual nexus between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women and the nature of patriarchal domination in *Lord of the Flies*. As ecofeminists such as Warren and Plumwood contend, to dominate nature is to dominate women, and vice versa. As a consequence, the exploitation of nature can implicitly relate to the negligence of and submission of women. Both dominations help highlight the problem of men's master logic and the essence of patriarchal violence. With the critique of the marginalization of women and nature in *Lord of the Flies*, it implies that Golding is not so much a chauvinist as a sympathizer of women's subjugation or even a rigorous supporter of women.

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