

H. M.

Ms. Fargo

Language and Literature

14 December 2018

### Piggy's Identity in the Conch

Few books give as strong an identity to symbols as *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding. Throughout the course of the book, symbols have a strong influence on the direction of the plot. Symbols include the island, the pig's head, and the fire, and one could even make an argument that the boys are also symbolic. The symbol of the conch, however, is more powerful and omnipresent than all other symbols in the book. From the beginning to the end, the conch has direct influence over the plot of the book. While few have read *Lord of the Flies*, without picking up on the significance of the conch, there is another side, to the conch's identity, that is often overlooked. This side, is the connection of the conch's symbolic identity, to the identity of the character Piggy.

Piggy's character is introduced near the onset of the book at which point, is given neither a determinable personality nor any importance over the following events. The point at which his significance becomes more profound, is the point at which he finds the conch. In the first installation of the conch being used, it is used by Ralph to summon the boys. Note that it is Ralph, not Piggy, who uses the power of the conch, but it is Piggy, not Ralph, who thinks of how it is to be used. In fact, at no point in the book, (aside from one specific instance, which will be returned to later) does Piggy utilize the power of the conch for his own means or purposes. At all times the conch plays a part in the advancement or removal of the power of another character, it

is never Piggy that it responds to, nor Piggy who attempts to control it. On the contrary, Piggy's reaction to the character is often in sync with that of the conch.

Some examples of this being in effect include the election of Ralph, at which point Piggy is "in Ralph's corner" so to speak, and thus Ralph appears to be competent, and capable of fulfilling a leadership role. At the point in the book when the fire goes out, Ralph has belittled Piggy, and contributed to separating him from the tribe. At the specific point when the fire goes out, Ralph loses power, and the boys begin not to bother with following him, as they no longer perceive him as a completely competent leader. A noticeable change occurs when the two tribes separate, because the conch's power becomes less important, as the boys don't idolize it as they did previously, and comes out of play for a considerable period of time. It only comes back into power for an extremely significant part of the story (which as was stated earlier, will be returned to later on.)

Piggy and the conch also have a relationship with Jack. Initially, the conch, at the time perceived as the most powerful thing on the island, rejects Jack as a leader, and does not allow him to come into power. At the same time, Piggy disavows Jack, and Jack attempts to cast him aside. But as Ralph begins to reject the conch, and subsequently Piggy, Jack is able to lure the boys away, and attain a semblance of power for himself. At the point when the group of boys rifts apart, the conch and Piggy's main purpose becomes maintaining order, and balancing the perceived power between the boys as not to create chaos. At some point during this period, the conch's power comes almost completely out of play, which allows things to escalate between the boys. Then, at a turning point in the story, it comes back.

This point is the zenith of the plot. Up until now, anything anticipated, or shown in the book has been an escalation, but at this point, the pivotal action of the plot occurs. Piggy, in an attempt to regain the support of the boys speaks, for, as, through, and with the conch,

addressing both tribes. To quote the text directly, “Which is better –to be a pack of painted Indians like you are, or to be sensible like Ralph is?’ A great clamor rose among the savages. Piggy shouted again. ‘Which is better –to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?’ Again the clamor and again – ‘Zup!’ Ralph shouted against the noise. ‘Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?’ Now Jack was yelling too and Ralph could no longer make himself heard. Jack had backed right against the tribe and they were a solid mass of menace that bristled with spears.” At this point, Jack kills both Piggy and the conch because he is intimidated by them, he is intimidated that they are power, and he is intimidated by power; he kills them because they are power and he is not. And once the power is gone Jack has his chaos, and he has what he wants, because if there is no power then he is not restrained and he can destroy, and control to no end. Jack is not motivated by power, he is motivated by fear. At this point, rules and society have been stripped away. Logic and order have been stripped away. And now power has been stripped away. All that is left is fear and violence. Jack acts with violence out of fear. Piggy and the conch die at Jack's hand, they are also killed because once they are physically murdered by Jack, then the idea of power, the presence of it also dies, and so there is complete chaos. Because if they are not ruled by power they are ruled by fear.

Piggy and the conch have a joint identity in the book. They play the same character, have the same impact, and lead to the same events. Their relationships with other characters are intertwined, as are what is done to them, what actions they take, and who they give power to. To conclude, the symbol of the conch in Lord of the Flies, and the character Piggy have connected identities.