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Araştırma-İnceleme

## WILLIAM GOLDING'S *rites of passage*: FRAGMENTS OF TRAGEDY IN POSTMODERN FICTION

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**Abstract:** William Golding, as an author deeply interested in man's evil nature, chaos and obscurity, is known for his novels that present an original account of man's experience. In his novels he tackles man's disillusionment with life, the concept of evil, social discrimination, multiple layers of truth and the difficulty of reaching a single and ultimate version of reality. *Rites of Passage* is one of such novels that is notably dense, dark and difficult to categorize due to its embodiment of different genres, techniques and elements. The novel is also rich with postmodernist strategies such as dialogic relations between different social classes and voices, double-voiced narration, self-reflexive allusions to other works of fiction, parodic use and abuse of different genres, and delays and gaps. These strategies invest the novel with playful yet at the same time tragic tricks that enable the reader to recognize reality as a human construct, life as a pathos and human condition as a tragedy. In this regard, this paper seeks to scrutinize postmodernist aspects in *Rites of Passage*, exploring the contribution of these aspects to the building up of chaotic and tragic atmosphere of the novel rather than to a playfulness that is expected to arise out of diversity observed both in characterization and in language and structure.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Parody, Intertextuality, Metafiction, Golding, Tragedy.

### WILLIAM GOLDING'İN *GEÇİŞ AYINLERİ*: POSTMODERN ROMANDA TRAJEDİ KIRINTILARI

**Öz:** İnsan doğasının kötülüğü, bilinmezlik ve kaos ile yakından ilgilenen William Golding, insan deneyimlerini özgün bir şekilde yansıtan romanlarıyla ün salmıştır. Golding romanlarında genellikle insanoğlunun hayata karşı duyduğu hayal kırıklığı, kötülük kavramı, sosyal ayırım, doğrunun göreceliği ve tek bir doğruya ulaşmanın zorluğu gibi konuları ele alır. *Geçiş Ayinleri* romanı da oldukça yoğun, kasvetli bir atmosfer çizen ve birçok farklı edebi tür, teknik ve özellikleri bir arada

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bulundurduğu için belli bir kategoriye yerleştirilmesi son derece güç olan romanlarından biridir. Bu roman farklı toplumsal sınıf ve sesler arasındaki diyalojik ilişkiler, çok sesli anlatım, diğer edebi eserlere özdeşünümsel göndermeler, farklı edebi türlerin parodik kullanımları, kasıtlı olarak yapılan anlatımsal geciktirmeler ve boşluklar gibi birçok postmodern stratejileri de içinde barındırmaktadır. Bu stratejiler romana postmodern oyunbazlık boyutu kazandırmakla kalmayıp, romanı okuyucunun gerçeğin yapaylıktan, hayatın acılardan, insan doğasının ise trajediden ibaret olduğunu anlamasını sağlayacak trajik aldatmacalarla donatmaktadır. Bu çalışma *Geçiş Ayinleri* romanındaki postmodern özellikleri incelemeyi ve bu özelliklerin romandaki oyunbazlıktan ziyade romandaki kaotik ve trajik atmosferin oluşturulmasına nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Postmodernizm, Parodi, Metinlerarasılık, Üstkurmaca, Golding, Trajedi.

## Introduction

Written in 1980 as the first book of Golding's trilogy entitled *To the Ends of the Earth*, *Rites of Passage* concentrates on the story of a young aristocrat named Edmund Talbot who sets off on a voyage by an old warship to join the colonial government during the closing years of the Napoleonic wars. The novel consists of the first person narration of Talbot through his journal that he keeps for his influential godfather at his request, and of the letter of Reverend James Colley, a Church of England parson, that is embedded in the main narration. In this respect, there are two narrators in the novel whose journals both supplement and deconstruct each other, which, in turn, foregrounds the multiplicity and relativity of truth. In line with Hutcheon's saying that "the real exists (and existed), but our understanding of it is always conditioned by discourses, by our different ways of talking about it" (1988, p. 157), Golding's novel displays the constructedness and versatility of truth by presenting it from two different points of view. Although Golding does not deny the existence of truth, he suggests that it is an utterly complicated concept that is "impossible to tie down with rational formulas and reductive solutions" (Redpath, 1986, p. 58). Regarding this view, he introduces double-narrative in his novel to "pre-empt the privilege of God by seeing the situation from the point of view of two people, and therefore— since no two people can ever see the same universe— undercut both of them. Once you start to see the universe from more than one point of view, all hell breaks loose: characters start turning over in a great wind-like one of Dante's circles" (qtd. in Haffenden, 1985, p. 104).

### 1. Multiple Narrative Voices

The first and the main voice of the narrative belongs to Talbot, a young snob having attained by nature a particular status in the social hierarchy that he enjoys constantly boasting off. Talbot is the embodiment of Enlightenment values, representing "typically modern, with an eighteenth-century cynicism and an overview of life firmly centred on man and his institutions" (Crompton,

1985, p. 128). In keeping with the Enlightenment thought, he tends to scatter “the darkness of superstition, prejudice and barbarity” (Abrams, 1999, p. 75), which is clarified when he ridicules the cleric who is the agent of the Romantic view and ignores the sailors’ rituals which he regards as superstitions. He continuously strives to find a scientific explanation for the events happening around him and talks with literary references to classical authors and figures such as the Aeneid, Plato, Aristotle, Theocritus, Servius, Lucullus, Pan, and Circe. Upon seeing Willis, one of the shipmen, measuring the angle by watching the movement of the sun, “shooting the sun” ritual, for instance, he gives a lecture on Galileo and his “Eppur si muove” (Golding, 1982, p. 36) to him, calling the ritual a “Middle Age” practice. In this sense, his observations and evaluations composing his journal are subjected to his limited knowledge, perception and subjectivity that are shaped according to Enlightenment values and worldview.

Unlike Talbot who attaches great importance to social status and manners, Colley, the second narrator given voice in Talbot’s narration, is a naïve man who represents Romantic ideas by valuing the power and beauty of nature. Colley’s perspective, as opposed to the rationalist philosophy abound in Talbot’s journal, reflects the irrational and the sensible. The nature overlooked in Talbot’s narration is celebrated in Colley’s. While Talbot describes the environment around the ship stinky and puky, Colley considers it as “an earthly paradise, nay, an oceanic paradise!” (Golding, 1982, p. 187). Colley’s narration is like “the record of an emotional outlook seeing the whole voyage as a spiritual one and describing nature with a sense of feeling which Talbot’s journal lacks” (Yıldırım, 2004, p. 115). Hence, his thoughts cannot be claimed to have been purified from subjectivity since it is obvious that they are influenced by his Romantic tendencies.

Creating these two equally subjective narrators, Golding submits two different versions of the same events, through which the reader discovers the errors of judgment in each narration. Until Colley’s letter is given, the reader observes the ship and its inhabitants only through Talbot’s eyes, seeing the captain as “Noah”, the ship as “Noah’s Ark” (Golding, 1982, p. 8), Colley as “a drunken crab” (p. 15), and whatever happens on board the ship as “a play [...] [either] a farce or a tragedy” (p. 104). Talbot, throughout his journal, describes Colley’s tragic story with indifference, ignoring the cruelty of the captain and his crew against the poor parson. Rather than giving him a back, he uses him as a bait because he wants to tease the captain Anderson who hates the clergy. Although he is told that it is the only thing to sooth the parson on the verge of his death, he is even unwilling to visit him in his hutch, asserting that he will be “offended by the sights and smells of a sick-room” (p. 130).

Colley’s letter, however, brings a new perspective to those events narrated by Talbot, uncovering Colley’s misjudgments about Talbot and Talbot’s obliviousness of Colley’s deep trouble. In contrast to Talbot’s description, Colley is a sensitive, innocent and spiritual man who is aware of the captain’s

and its crew's hatred towards him, yet blames himself for this treatment and strives to recover his relationship with them. He regards Talbot as "a true friend to religion" (Golding, 1982, p. 211) and to himself, thinking that he is waiting the suitable moment to further their acquaintance. However, Talbot is not fond of either religion or Colley himself, admitting how much he "enjoy[s] these few weeks of freedom from the whole paraphernalia of Established Religion" (p. 65) and that he deliberately avoids the parson. Thus, everything told in Talbot's journal is deconstructed by Colley's letter. Moreover, by means of this double-narrative, the reader realizes how these two characters fail in understanding what is actually happening around themselves.

As Nadal (1995) points out, "the double narrative provides two opposed points of view, a device that Golding employs recurrently in his works because it undermines the assumptions built by the first perspective and forces the reader to see the events in a new light" (p. 88). In other words, the shift in point of view makes the reader reconsider what has happened, realize the versatility of perception and question the reliability of truths presented. Moreover, the existence of different versions of truth reminds Hutcheon's famous saying that "there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth" (1998, p. 109). By embodying such a typically postmodern strategy, Golding lays emphasis not only on the relativity and multiplicity of truth but also on its unreliability. "The main sources of unreliability are", for Rimmon-Kenan (2001), "the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement and his problematic value-scheme" (p.100). In this sense, both Talbot and Colley are equally unreliable narrators, presenting events from their subjective and limited points of view influenced by different value systems. Talbot begins to write his journal at the request of his godfather and promises to "hold nothing back" (Golding, 1982, p. 8), yet he recognizes the difficulty of keeping his promise, namely representing reality: "I was never made so aware of the distance between the disorder of real life in its multifarious action, partial exhibition, irritating concealments and the stage simulacra that I had once taken as a fair representation of it!" (p. 110). Revealing his purpose in writing a journal that is to "entertain" (p.18) his lordship, Talbot loses the reader's trust in whatever he will write from then on since the reader realizes that he will choose the events that interest him and omit the rest: "'In my case I find there is hardly time to record the events of a day before the next two or three are upon me.' 'How do you select?' 'Salient facts, of course –such trifles as may amuse the leisure of my godfather'" (p. 167). Similarly, Colley is also an unreliable character that misjudges people by attaching too much importance to his own emotions and people's attitudes towards him. In this regard, the presentation of facts is distorted in the journals of both narrators, which problematizes the very possibility of attaining a single and reliable truth.

## 2. Delays and Gaps

As Hutcheon (1988) suggests, "[p]ostmodern discourses both install and then contest our traditional guarantees of knowledge, by revealing their gaps or

circularities” (p. 127). In *Rites of Passage*, Golding deliberately inserts delays and gaps in the narrative so as to display the difficulty of representing the truth. Delays, as Rimmon-Kenan (2001) remarks, “consist in not imparting information where it is 'due' in the text, but leaving it for a later stage” (p. 127) while gaps are the intentional omission of information. Hence, delays and gaps in a text increase the suspense of the reader by turning the whole text into a riddle, preventing the reader from fully understanding it yet pushing him/her to be more inquisitive. Moreover, “[t]he novel's structure- with its partial concealments, oblique clues, delayed disclosures”, Tiger (1988) notes, “forces [the reader] to bring into focus” on both of the journals equally (p. 230). In the novel, Talbot provides the reader with a limited point of view whereby the reader cannot find the answer of various questions in his/her mind such as why there is a gloomy and distressing atmosphere on the ship, why the Captain hates the clergy, what the badger bag is, what the creeper plant in the cellar means and why Colley is so miserable. It is only when Colley and other characters are given voice that the reader gets to find out the meanings of these missing clues.

At the end of the novel, some of these clues are decoded as follows: The unhappiness prevalent on the ship results from the sharp class distinction which is, with Baker's words, “the classic disease of society in [Britain]” (1982, p. 136). Shipboard life is like a miniature of British class structure, dividing passengers into different parts of the ship assigned to different classes: the common people and the emigrants residing in the front of the ship are separated with a white line from the ladies and the gentlemen who lodge in the other part which only the sailors are allowed to enter in. The reason of Anderson's hatred towards the clergy is also explained later by Deverel: Anderson is actually the illegitimate son of an aristocrat yet his mother is married off to a clergyman, so Anderson hates religion and clergymen due to his stepfather's being a clergyman. The meaning of the “badger bag” is revealed as well: As Tiger (1988) points out, “the badger bag is defined in Glascock's *Naval Sketch Book* (1825) as a name 'given by Sailors to Neptune when playing tricks on travelers on first crossing the line.' The tars prepare for their 'equatorial entertainment' by filling a huge tarpaulin with filthy sea water, dung, and urine—a badger bag to end all badger bags” (p. 226). It is the first rite in which Colley is humiliated; he is chosen victim by Cumbershum and Deverel and dragged into a huge tarpaulin filled with sea water, dung and urine. As for the creeping plant the roots of which “buried in a pot and the stem roped to the bulkhead for a few feet” (Golding, 1982, p. 78), it is understood that sailors believe that this plant support the mainmast of the ship. However, for Tiger (1988), these plants “represent the strange unmanageable tangled undergrowth of human impulses in this wooden world” (p. 224). Finally, Colley's tragedy is clarified when he tells the cruel treatment that he is subjected to on the ship and Billy Rogers testifies what has happened during the “Make and Mend” ritual: the sailors do not content themselves by threatening Colley to drown in the disgusting water in the tarpaulin; they also give him a strong drink and make him wander around in

a drunken and naked state. To further his degradation, the drunken parson urinates against the bulwark before the eyes of men and women on board. When he is brought to his hutch by Billy Rogers, his sexual feelings overwhelms him and he “commit[s] the *fellatio* that the poor fool [is] to die of when he remember[s] it” (Golding, 1982, p. 267). Ashamed of what he has done, the poor parson feels that he cannot face the world ever again and wills himself to death by withdrawing himself from outer world into his own shell.

Although Colley's letter and testimonies of other characters provide the reader with some information to find an explanation for the missing parts, there are still some gaps and uncertainties that remain unexplained in the text. As Rimmon-Kenan (2001) asserts, “[h]oles or gaps are so central in narrative fiction because the materials the text provides for the reconstruction of a world (or a story) are insufficient for saturation. No matter how detailed the presentation is, further questions can always be asked; gaps always remain open” (p. 129). First of all, why the officers have been specially gathered together for this voyage is an unanswered question. Even though the reader knows about the reason of Talbot's voyage, s/he does not have any clue of why other officers have chosen to travel on this old warship turned into a passenger vessel. Secondly, it is still a mystery who the purser is and why everyone is afraid of him and cowers whenever his name is mentioned. One another mystery in the text is the power of Wheeler and his sudden disappearance. Wheeler is portrayed as a man who has the knowledge of almost everything happening on the ship; however, it is unknown why he is so “omniscient” and “ubiquitous” (Golding, 1982, p. 184) and why he suddenly disappears during the inquiry of Colley's death: “The man has disappeared. He has fallen overboard. Wheeler! He has gone like a dream, with his puffs of white hair, and his shining baldness, his *sanctified* smile, his complete knowledge of everything that goes on in a ship, his paregoric, and his willingness to obtain for a gentleman anything in the wide, - wide world, provided the gentleman pays for it!” (p. 265). Above all, the central mystery of the story is what really resulted in Colley's death, with Brocklebank's words, “[w]ho killed Cock Colley?” (p. 248): Is it the act of *fellatio* as Billy Rogers suggests? Is there any other reason of his deadly shame? How did he die? Although alternative answers are offered to resolve this mystery, the truthfulness and reliability of these statements are questionable since neither of the journals mentions these last moments. “Golding's novels”, as Tiger (1988) remarks, “never conclude with one unequivocal meaning, however; they insist upon the intermingling of the visible and the invisible, the physical and the spiritual, the world of the burning candle and the burning bush, the cellarge and the spire” (p. 229) and so does *Rites of Passage*. In this sense, the novel illustrates such postmodernist qualities as randomness, discontinuity, open-endedness and fragmentariness through which it becomes impossible to realize the boundary between what is real and what is not.

### 3. Parody

As a postmodern text, *Rites of Passage* not only presents different versions of truth but also embodies parodies of different genres, literary figures and characters. Parody is, Abrams (1999) notes, an imitation of “the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre and deflat[ing] the original” (p. 36). The first established genre the characteristic features of which are imitated in Golding’s novel is the epistolary genre that inserts its narrative into various semiliterary genres such as journals, diaries and letters. In *Rites of Passage*, the narrative is conveyed completely through Talbot’s journal and Colley’s letter imbedded within this journal even though it is supposed to be done with “an exchange of letters” (p. 228). According to McCallum (1999), “[a] crucial aspect of narrative which diary and epistolary genres foreground is the construction within language of a speaking subject (the narrator or diarist), a narrated subject, and an addressee or narratee” (p. 216). Although the whole narrative is composed by means of a journal, it has, at least, the crucial aspects McCallum notes: a speaking subject that is Talbot; a narrated subject that is Colley’s tragic story; and an addressee that is Talbot’s godfather. Colley’s letter inserted in Talbot’s journal also includes the crucial features of the epistolary mode: written in the first-person narration by Colley; addressed to his sister; expressing inner feelings of Colley.

In *Rites of Passage*, Golding parodies not only the language but also the conventions of the epistolary genre. Talbot starts keeping a journal at the request of his godfather, promising him to record everything that happens on board the ship everyday; he places numbers at the beginning of each entry written each day; however, after the third day, he realizes the impossibility to write an exact record of all events by giving a hint of his future parody of Samuel Richardson’s epistolary mode: “But come! I cannot give, nor would you wish or expect, a moment by moment description of my journey! I begin to understand the limitations of such a journal as I have time to keep. I no longer credit Mistress Pamela’s pietistic accounts of every shift in her calculated resistance to the advances of her master!” (Golding, 1982, p. 28). In the following chapters, thus, the order of time which is a crucial convention in the epistolary mode is self-consciously parodied. He places “4” at the top of his entry on the fifth day of the voyage, following which he completely loses his track: “I *think* it is the seventh—or the fifth—or the eighth perhaps—let ‘X’ do its algebraic duty and represent the unknown quantity. [...] Where was I? Ah yes! Well then—” (p. 46). After “X”, he elapses to “12”; and the next chapter is numbered as “17”. In this tangled mode of ordering, Talbot also utilizes different marks such as alpha, zeta, omega and question mark, which brings the novel the playful mode that is prevalent in almost all postmodern texts.

Another mode determining the structure and language of the novel is the picaresque. The picaresque is traditionally defined as the story of a rogue, who is of low class either by birth or by social-economic-political misfortunes, and

who experiences a number of adventures and situations that lead him to understand the society. His adventures end up either with a fortune and high social ranking or with misfortune and exclusion from the society. Thanks to his traveling, he is able to display a “*social panorama of his age*” [emphasis in original]; the rogue is usually “lonely, self-reliant, his response to this hostile world is to travel, to wander from one place to another, alone, unattached, isolated, and very often, confused” (Tomoiaga, 2010, p. 10).

Golding uses the picaresque plot as the novel's plot compositional base since the novel is set in a sea journey taking place towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He introduces an eighteenth century gentleman, Talbot, on his way to an administrative post in the colony of Australia. Considering the characteristics of a rogue, however, it can be asserted that Colley is the picaresque character in this sea journey rather than the main narrator Talbot. It is Colley who comes from the margins of society, looks for a new status in the society he has recently joined in yet fails in his attempt while Talbot who is of a higher rank successfully completes the “literal passage from an old world to a new one” (Dickson, 1990, p. 123) which is also suggested in the title of the novel, “*Rites of Passage*”. While describing the rites of passage both characters experience, Crompton (1985) makes an analogy with Van Gennep's three stages that are “separation, transition and incorporation” (p. 153). Both characters are separated from their familiar environments –Talbot from his parents, Colley from his sister-; both strive to be accepted in the new society; yet only Talbot achieves “the symbolic completion of the process of transition” (ibid. p. 153), which is made clear in the scene where Talbot enjoys his meal at the Captain's table while poor Colley is waiting for his death, alone and isolated, at his cabin.

Another picaresque convention included in the novel is two-dimensional characters: “the ‘notorious free thinker’ and ‘inveterate foe of every superstition’ (Mr Prettiman); the tough-minded governess who has come down in the world (Miss Granham); the grotesque and bibulous portrait painter and pander (Mr Brocklebank); the ageing and histrionic whore (Zenobia); the lieutenant with the heart of gold (Summers); the cheerful and amoral jolly jack tar (Billy Rogers)” (Crompton, 1985, p. 124). Although the novel embodies various conventions of the tradition, as a parody of the picaresque voyage, it presents a sea-story “with never a tempest, no shipwreck, no sinking, no rescue at sea, no sight nor sound of an enemy, no thundering broadsides, heroism, prizes, gallant defenses and heroic attacks!” (Golding, 1982, p. 278). In this respect, Tiger (1988) states that the novel “parodies the voyage literature of [18<sup>th</sup> century] which so tiresomely gives us so many of the unvarnished facts and so little of the living spirit of the journey” (p. 220). Hence, by parodying the language and conventions of both epistolary novel and picaresque voyage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century novels, Golding incorporates hybridity into his novel, which is “a perfectly suited analogue to late-twentieth-century postmodernity [...] [that] is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand



narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation” (Morace, 1989, p. 8).

#### 4. Intertextuality

Along with the presentation of the playful imitations of long-established literary genres, namely with the “use and abuse [of] the conventions of earlier works” (Nadal, 1995, p. 85), Golding also makes parodic references to various literary works and authors, which is actually another postmodernist technique called “intertextuality”. Intertextuality, as Kristeva (1986) defines, “a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity” (p. 37). Accordingly, there are many explicit and implicit references to not only works of other authors but also Golding’s earlier works. In the very first page of his journal, Talbot states that he intends to write like “lively old Fielding and Smollet” rather than “sentimental Goldsmith and Richardson” (Golding, 1982, p. 3). However, his journal turns out to be like neither that of Fielding nor that of Smollet, rather echoes Lawrence Sterne’s style. Concerning this resemblance, Tiger points out that “Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* exerts an appealing influence on Golding, for Talbot, like *Tristram*, is both chronically indisposed and when it comes to the art of storytelling chronically self-conscious” (p. 220). Along with chronological irregularities and self-consciousness, both novels contain a “digressive narrative”, “sudden starts and stops” (Tiger, 1988, p.220), which is something Talbot has already realized: “My entries are becoming short as some of Mr. Sterne’s chapters!” (Golding, 1982, p. 72).

In addition to this structural analogy between Talbot’s journal and Sterne’s novel, there are also several allusions to other classical, romantic and modern authors such as Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Milton, Coleridge and Conrad. While describing the passengers on the ship, Talbot draws an analogy to Milton’s “*Lycidas*” by even quoting the poem as follows: “until I saw these fellows like Milton's hungry sheep that "look up", I had not considered the nature of my own ambitions nor looked for the justification of them that was here presented to me” (Golding, 1982, p. 38). Thus, he resembles the sailors to “[t]he hungry sheep look up and are not fed” in Milton’s famous pastoral elegy (*Milton* 127). Similarly, he refers to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle on several occasions. While telling how Colley has climbed the social ladder although he has come from the margins of the society which, for Talbot, he still belongs to, Talbot makes a reference to Aristotle’s theory of order: “Colley was a living proof of old Aristotle's dictum. There is after all an order to which the man belongs by nature though some mistaken quirk of patronage has elevated him beyond it” (Golding, 1982, p. 67). According to Nadal (1995), “[a]s this allusion to Aristotle includes a comment on his work, the relationship involved is not only intertextual, but also metatextual, that is, “la relation de 'commentaire’,” “la relation *critique*,” in Genette's definition” (p. 98).

As for Homer, the sea voyage during which Talbot’s and Colley’s transition to self-knowledge reminds the great sea journeys in the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. When

the contrast between Talbot's situation and the heroes' situations in these epic poems is concerned, the novel's irony comes into view, which can be clarified with Dickson's following comment:

[Talbot] invokes a conventional Homeric metaphor when they begin their journey "over the broad back of the sea" (p. 34), as he cites the Greek to a stupefied crewman, Willis, who replies that he does not know French (p. 35). Every time Talbot waxes literary, whether referring in Greek to the fear of Pan (p. 75) or the "meaningless faces" of the passengers (p. 122), we are reminded of a heroic classical literature of sea journey that dwarfs the presumptuous Talbot and his journal at every turn (1990, p. 121).

Another instance of intertextuality in Talbot's journal is the reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The poem is not only mentioned by Talbot but also quoted by Zenobia when she says: "*-alone, alone, All, all alone, Alone at a wide, wide sea!*" [emphasis in original] (Golding, 1982, p. 59). References to Coleridge's poem help the reader to make an analogy between the fate of Colley and that of the Mariner. Just like the Ancient Mariner, Colley is an unfortunate man who is victimized due to his sentimentality and romantic notions of the sea. As Dickson (1990) asserts, the resemblance between Colley and the Mariner draws attention to "the central conflicts between the eighteenth-century Talbot and Rev. Colley" as well as "the conflict between Christian and pagan forces", and more importantly "reinforce[s] the symbolic journey of a 'soul', not only Colley's but also Talbot's" (p. 121).

Beside these explicit allusions, there are also some implicit literary references in the novel. For instance, after finding out the details of Colley's miserable story, the cruel treatment he had to bear, his deep feelings towards him and the reasons of his death through his letter, Talbot decides to write a letter to Colley's sister that will be "all lies from beginning to end [...] a letter that contains everything but a shred of truth" (Golding, 1982, p. 277). This reminds us of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which Marlow does the same thing to Kurtz's fiancée. Furthermore, "[a] symbolic sea voyage, the look into the face of evil, a destructive personal withdrawal ending in death, the narrator's decision to lie about what happened—all of this makes a strong identification with Conrad" (Dickson, 1990, p. 121-122).

Although Golding echoes Conrad's novel in his *Rites of Passage*, he expresses that he is tired of being compared with him in one of his interviews: "I think I'm pretty much tired of being asked which story of Conrad I got which of my stories from. I'm pretty much tired of always being told how much I owe to *Heart of Darkness*. [...] I admire Conrad immensely for his word painting of sea-scapes and sea scenes and his shipness" (qtd. in Baker, 1982, p. 162). Rather than being influenced by Conrad's, as he states, Golding actually picks Colley's story out from a real incident "that occurred in 1797 on board a ship bound for Manila, involving Wellington, then Colonel Wellesley, and a young clergyman" (Nadal, 1995, p. 86). Golding reveals the sources of his story as

follows:

The book is founded on an actual historical incident. There was a man, a parson, who was on board a ship, in a convoy that was going from the east coast of India to the Philippines [...] there was a regiment of soldiers going, and there was a parson . . .a very respectable man. And one day... either he got drunk and went wandering naked among the soldiers and sailors, or else he went wandering among the soldiers and sailors and got drunk and naked, put it whatever way you like. But he came back, he went into his cabin and stayed there and no matter what anybody else said to him he just lay there until he died, in a few days (qtd. in Baker, 1982, p. 132).

This mysterious death of the parson out of shame impresses Golding so deeply that he decides “for [his] peace of mind, to invent circumstances in which it was possible for a man to die of shame” (Baker, 1982, p. 132). Accordingly, in his *Rites of Passage*, he successfully creates a character, Colley, who wills himself to death out of shame, which is crystallized in the last words of the novel: “[Colley] was the exception. [...] a gill or two of the *fiery ichor* brought him from the heights of complacent austerity to what his sobering mind must have felt as the lowest hell of self-degradation. In the not too ample volume of man's knowledge of Man, let this sentence be inserted. Men can die of shame” (Golding, 1982, p. 278).

## Conclusion

Apparently, Golding rewrites a historical material with a postmodernist twist and turns it into his own narrative, which makes the novel “historically aware, hybrid and inclusive” (Nadal, 1995, p. 85). Due to these characteristics, the novel can be placed into the category of what Linda Hutcheon coined “historiographic metafiction”, in other words, “fictionalized history with a parodic twist” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 53). Historiographic metafiction, according to Hutcheon, “incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (*historiographic metafiction*) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (1988, p. 5). Golding's rewriting of *rites of passage* properly fits Hutcheon's definition, displaying narrative self-reflexivity and accommodating real and historical realities and personages along with fictional ones.

In the light of these aspects, the novel proves to be an overt postmodernist text through which the reader realizes the blurring boundaries between fact and fiction, questions the reliability of narratives and recognizes the relativity and multiplicity of truth. Rather than that bringing about an atmosphere of mirth and hope in most postmodernist texts, however, this relativity of truth presented as that which is at times displaced and delayed, at times constructed and contradicted quintessentially becomes “the record of a drama -Colley's drama” (Golding, 1982, p. 265).

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