

THE CONTESTATION OF THE OVERARCHING TRUTH THROUGH POSTMODERN TECHNIQUES IN GOLDING'S *rites of passage*

GOLDİNG'İN *GEÇİŞ AYINLARI* ROMANINDA POSTMODERN TEKNİKLERİN KULLANILARAK HER ŞEYİ KAPSAYAN BÜYÜK HAKİKATİN REDDİLMESİ

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Abstract

William Golding's *Rites of Passage* (1980) concretizes several postmodern tropes and contests the overarching truth by means of utilising the salient postmodern features. Golding employs multiple narrators to display the relativity and subjectivity of truth. Golding resorts to another postmodern technique of using gaps, omissions and delays to investigate the uncertainty of reality. Furthermore, the novelist draws upon intertextuality, another indispensable component of postmodern fiction, to demonstrate that a text always absorbs other texts and transforms them. Besides, *Rites of Passage* instantiates the postmodern parodic mode by ridiculing the eighteenth-century epistolary and picaresque novels. This novel also highlights its own status as a fictional construct by referring to itself. Taking its cue from postmodernism, this paper argues that *Rites of Passage* subverts grand narratives and their claims to absolute truths. Hence, Golding demonstrates that truths are not universal, but contextual, perspectival and socially constructed.

Keywords: William Golding, *Rites Of Passage*, Postmodernism, Fiction and Truth

Öz

William Golding'in *Geçiş Ayinleri* romanı (1980) birçok postmodern unsuru somutlaştırır ve postmodernizmin en çarpıcı özelliklerini işe koşarak, her şeyi kapsayan büyük hakikati reddeder. Golding hakikatlerin göreceliğini ve öznelliğini göstermek için birden çok anlatıcı kullanır. Golding gerçekliğin belirsizliğini incelemek amacıyla başka bir postmodern teknik olan anlatıda boşlukları, noksanlıkları ve ertelemeleri kullanma yoluna başvurur. Dahası, roman yazarı, bir metnin her zaman diğer metinleri de içerdığını ve onları da dönüştürdüğünü göstermek için, öncelikli postmodern özelliklerden biri olan metinlerarasılığı unsurundan beslenir. Bunların yanı sıra, *Geçiş Ayinleri* romanı, on sekizinci yüzyılın mektuplardan oluşan roman ve pikaresk roman türlerini hicvederek postmodern parodiyi de somut bir şekilde kullanır. Aynı zamanda, bu roman kendisine atıfta bulunarak kendisinin bir kurgusal yapı olduğunu gözler önüne serer. Bu çalışma, postmodernizmin izinden giderek, *Geçiş Ayinleri* romanının büyük anlatıları ve onların mutlak hakikat olma iddialarını altüst eder. Böylece, Golding hakikatlerin evrensel olmadığını, bağlama, bakış açısına bağlı ve toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş olduğunu açığa çıkarır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: William Golding, *Geçiş Ayinleri*, Postmodernizm, Kurgu ve Hakikat

Golding's novels defy easy categorisation. Accordingly, *Rites of Passage* (1980), the first volume of the sea trilogy, intermingles many issues at the same time. Not only is its content, but also its form is informed by multiplicity and polyvocality. Golding sets his novel aboard a converted British war ship, *Britannia*, whose passengers are bound for Australia. He locates the sea voyage of this ship in the nineteenth century. He dwells upon

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hierarchical rank, social privilege, snobbery, and true and false gentility. He also deals with subjects such as justice, moral responsibility, social class, and the uses and abuses of authority. The stratified ship functions as a microcosmic representation of British society. To elaborate on such themes through a sea tale of the nineteenth century written in the twentieth century, deconstruct taken-for-granted narratives and subvert agreed-upon conventions, Golding endows his novel with postmodernist features such as multiplicity of narrative voices, metafiction, intertextuality, deconstruction and repudiation of grand narratives, employment of gaps and delays, and parody. Therefore, this paper explores *Rites of Passage* as an emblematic work of postmodern fiction.

A “notoriously slippery and indefinable term” (Nicol 1), postmodernism can be broadly viewed as an intellectual phenomenon that has profoundly influenced a large number of fields ranging from cinema, architecture, painting, and music to literature. Hutcheon views postmodernism as a “contradictory phenomenon” that “uses and abuses, installs and subverts the very concepts it challenges” (3). Subversively resisting totalising definitions and rigid descriptions, postmodernism has fractured the established ways of living, feeling, and thinking. Brenda K. Marshall describes postmodernism as “a rupture in our consciousness,” noting that it “has everything to do with how we read the present as well as how we read the past” (5). Postmodernism refers to the non-traditional art and literature of the post-Second World War period. Indeed, it implies a movement away from modernism and an extension of it. Nicol points out that postmodernism is regarded as “a ‘new sensibility’ in literature which either rejected modernist attitudes and techniques or adapted and extended them” (1). Postmodernism emerges as a reaction against the notion of the ultimate truth, unity, and order designed by master narratives. While “modernist art forms privilege formalism, rationality, authenticity, depth, originality,” postmodernism “favours bricolage or pastiche to original production, the mixing of styles and genres, and the juxtaposition of ‘low’ with high culture” (Nicol 2). In other words, being aware of the fragmentation in the world, postmodernism avoids seeking unity and order out of this fragmentation and disorder. Instead, postmodernism explores the fragmented world as it is and does not strive to morph it into unity and order. Hans Bertens maintains that the postmodern approach rejects “the transcendent truths that modernism was supposedly after” and favours “provisional, socially constructed truths” (10). For this reason, postmodernism contests essentialist and foundationalist centres of meaning. In response to modernism, postmodernism overthrows the elitism of high art. Instead, it upholds the multiplicity of diverse points of view. Postmodernism weaves together the sublime and the trivial, the sober and the playful, the tragic and the comic. It subverts the traditionally established modes of thinking. It deconstructs what has been conventionally built in ways of living, feeling and contemplating the world. It also claims that truth is irreducible to a grand narrative. Postmodernism challenges master narratives that attempt to present an overarching truth; therefore, it contests the “desire for a unitary and totalizing truth” (Lyotard 12).

Postmodernism undermines the objectivity of the third-person omniscient narration and scientific objectivity. One of the most conspicuous features of postmodernism is that it favours the multiplicity of narrators and subjectivity in narration. According to McHale, a postmodern novel deploys strategies that foreground these questions: "What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10). Accordingly, Golding employs two narrators. Two worlds are in the confrontation in *Rites of Passage*: Talbot with his journal and Colley with his letter. As Redpath argues, *Rites of Passage* "begins twice and ends twice from the points of view of Talbot and Colley respectively" (58). Thanks to this double thread of narration, the reader is provided with the opportunity to evaluate the same events narrated from two different perspectives. Talbot's narration is marked by his personal prejudices and class snobbery.

In contrast, Colley's letter is characterised by his naiveté and humility. For instance, Golding explores the discrepancy between these two points of view by putting in dialogue Talbot's narration of his affair with Zenobia and Colley's misinterpretation of it. Talbot and Zenobia, the reader is told, "wrestled for a moment by the bunk, she with a nicely calculated exertion of strength that only just failed to resist me, with mounting passion" (Golding 86). However, Colley erroneously interprets Talbot's affair with Zenobia: "But the sounds were those of enthusiasm! ... These attacks of a too passionate devotion are to be feared more than the fevers to which the inhabitants of these climes are subject" (Golding 215). Talbot and Colley's descriptions of the ship are also opposed. Talbot's narration highlights the rottenness of the ship: "I climbed the bulging and tarry side of what once, in her young days, may have been one of Britain's formidable wooden walls" and he adds that he "stepped through a kind of low doorway into the darkness of some deck or other and gagged at my [his] first breath" (Golding 4). On the other hand, Colley upholds the magnificence of the ship: "It was, as it is, a terror at the majesty of this huge engine of war, then by a curious extension of the feeling, a kind of awe at the nature of the beings whose joy and duty is to control such an intention" (Golding 189). Golding utilises the technique of double narrative to evince the relativity and subjectivity of truth. Redpath argues that Golding deploys his fiction to investigate "the nature of truth and man's relationship to the truth" and he asserts, "obscurity lies in the very nature of truth itself" (58). According to Redpath, Golding makes us realise that the truth is "an extremely complex concept, impossible to tie down with rational formulas and reductive solutions" (58). By means of double narration, the reader can seize the opportunity to question the validity and credibility of both Talbot's and Colley's narratives. As Nadal asserts, "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" (88). Golding renders the truth multi-faceted and relative by foregrounding the shortcomings of these two narrators, who are supposed to be the agents through whom the reader is likely to attain the truth.

The narrative process is always partial and subjective, as Golding's postmodern novel

testifies. Nicol argues that narrators “select and interpret continually, deciding the order in which to place narrative events, how to describe them and the narrative world” (27). A postmodern novel lays bare the partiality of narrative. Therefore, both Talbot and Colley are unreliable narrators. The postmodern ambivalence is substantiated in their divergent narratives. The former’s pretentiousness, snobbery, and pomposity render his narrative unreliable and obtuse. The deep sensitivity and naiveté of the latter make his narrative questionable, too. Colley’s interpretation of Talbot’s noisy convulsions during the sexual intercourse with Zenobia as over-zealous prayers demonstrates that one should not rely on the credibility of Colley’s narration. Colley’s evaluation of Talbot’s personality is indicative of his unreliability as a narrator: “There is one true gentleman in this ship and I pray that before we reach our destination I may call him Friend and tell him how much his true consideration has meant to me” even though Talbot loathes him and avoids communicating with him (Golding 207). Talbot seeks to be a witty and wise narrator: “I have just now turned over the pages, ruefully enough. Wit? Acute observations?” (Golding 112). However, his supposedly witty and acute observations fall short of reflecting the truth. Talbot misjudges Colley, assuming that Colley is a hypocrite even though Colley is a man of deep sensitivity and genuine affection. Talbot is aware of his shortcomings: “Wrong again, Talbot! Learn another lesson, my boy! You fell at the fence” (Golding 112). The discovery of Colley’s letter prompts Talbot’s advance in the attainment of just a glimpse of the truth. Yet, he seeks to redeem himself from the deep sensitivity of Colley’s letter: “You will observe that I have recovered somewhat from the effects of reading Colley’s letter” (Golding 280). Having partially recuperated from the sickening influence of Colley’s narrative, Talbot seeks to proceed with his narrative, supposedly uncoloured by Colley’s letter.

The coexistence of the two narrators is predicated upon the dichotomy between Talbot as the concrete manifestation of the Age of Reason and Colley as the incarnation of the Romantic spirit. Talbot is “a classist young man classically educated” (Boyd 158), whereas Colley is indulged in romantic sensibilities. Rendering his two narrators unreliable, Golding suggests that neither Talbot, with his rational assumptions and reasonable perception, nor Colley, with his romantic conceptions, is able to get hold of the truth. Indeed, grasping the truth is almost impossible on such a shaky, floating old vessel. In such fluid surroundings, one is unable to fathom a solid truth. Therefore, *Rites of Passage* shows an integral component of postmodernism as it demonstrates that there is no one version of the truth, but a multiplicity of truths, and that the truth is perspectival. According to Harvey Brown, in the postmodern mode, the pivotal question is “no longer what the universal real, beautiful, or true is. Instead, the focus is on how reality and truth are constructed, both aesthetically and socially, in specific historical contexts” (135). The postmodernist promotion of the plurality of voices demonstrates how truth and reality are constructed.

Resorting to another postmodern narrative technique, Golding employs gaps and delays, emphasising the uncertainty of reality and the lack of linearly progressing order.

The reader is also incorporated into the novel through the gaps to reconstruct their understanding of the text while the text is deconstructing itself. Because of the novel's "partial concealments, oblique clues, delayed disclosures," the reader is allowed to participate in the construction of the meaning (Tiger 230). In relation to the gaps in *Rites of Passage*, Crompton maintains that the novel "throws up all sorts of mysteries as it progresses, most of which are resolved or partly resolved by the end of the book" (131). Since the gaps in the story persist, Crompton poses these questions: "Why is it not a happy ship? Why have the officers been specially gathered together for this trip? Why does the Captain hate parsons? Who is the purser, and why does everyone fall silent at the mention of his name" (131). Golding intentionally leaves these questions unanswered or partly answered. For example, as for the Captain's hatred for the parsons, Golding offers an answer mockingly: the captain loathes the parsons because his stepfather was a parson. This reply purposefully falls short of reality. Golding seeks to demonstrate that a work of fiction fails to represent the ultimate reality. This evinces the postmodern orientation of *Rites of Passage* because it challenges the classical faith of representations and the mimetic force of the realist novels, which take it for granted that the world is representable. A postmodern novel undermines "representational epistemology" and "unmediated objectivity" (Best and Kellner 257). Postmodernism does not regard representation as "a form of mirror-like reflection" but "a form of construction, making" (Grice and Woods 31). The postmodern consciousness problematizes the mirror image. Lilian Furst elaborates on the contested value of the mirror-like reflection in literary realism:

Because of its potential for distortion, the mirror is a most dubious emblem with which to validate this concept of the novel as a human document, based on observation and verifiable data, in which "all is true." A mirror image has its parts reversed by an intervening axis or plane. "Mirror" is also etymologically connected to "mirage," through their common derivation from the Latin mirare, which means "to wonder" at as well as "to look at." So the word may connote to an optical illusion rather than the true picture that the realists claimed in their usage. Their attraction to this image serves to bring out their confusion of illusion and truth, their desire to pass illusion off as truth. (9)

Furst's explanation of the mirror image shows that it does not represent a seamless reflection. The postmodern novelist plays with the idea of the commingling of illusion and truth inherent in the etymological roots of the word mirror. Truth is presented as a fictional abstraction in a postmodern novel. Truth in postmodern fiction is regarded as a mirage rather than a mirror-like reflection of truth and reality. The factual merges with the fictive. Therefore, postmodern fiction explores reality as a self-conscious mode of writing and employs gaps and delays to deconstruct the illusory totality of a narrative, which passes off as truth.

The central mystery in *Rites of Passage* is what happened in the fo'castle, which caused Colley to die of shame. Golding cunningly delays the answer to this question twice

throughout the novel. Since Talbot is having a sexual affair with Zenobia during the Badger Bag ceremony, he cannot witness what happens in the fo'castle. He thus cannot tell the reader in his narrative. Nevertheless, Talbot does not offer an answer even when he learns what has happened in the fo'castle once he reads Colley's letter. The reader is informed about it when the narrative shifts to Colley's letter. In relation to gaps and delays, Redpath argues that "because we share Talbot's perspective, we also miss the Badger Bag and have to wait until we read the letter to discover what happened" (63). Redpath adds that the readers "have already read what the fatal results of the Badger Bag are before we read about the Badger Bag itself" (63). Redpath further points to the gap "when Colley takes to his cabin after his disgrace and before Talbot reads Colley's letter" (63). The reader, therefore, is presented with many gaps in Talbot's journal, which endows *Rites of Passage* with a postmodernist feature. However, the reader is offered Colley's letter to fill in the blanks in Talbot's journal as far as they can. Talbot comes to realise the holes in his narration once he reads Colley's letter; he acknowledges his own "omissions" (185). Redpath explains Talbot's encounter with Colley's letter:

The letter reveals to Talbot that what he had conceived to be the natural order of things was in fact only his own subjective view of them. Colley's version of the same events was totally different and Talbot's experience, a moment of disorientation after he has read the letter in which all certainties are revealed to him as uncertain: "Nothing is real and I am already in a half-dream." (63)

Not all the gaps in *Rites of Passage* are filled, although Colley's letter compensates Talbot's omissions. One should remember that Colley's letter has some missing pages, too. Thus, the reader cannot arrive at definite and solid conclusions and thus attain the truth since a work of fiction, Golding believes, cannot reveal the ultimate truth. Because of Colley's missing pages, the postmodern complexities of the novel are never wholly resolved. As Redpath points out, the reader is "left in doubt as to whether Colley actually desired to perform fellatio on Rogers or whether he did it solely to please Rogers" (72). Redpath emphasises that because "the desire to perform and the desire to please are two different things, the truth still lacks a satisfactory interpretation at the close of the novel" (72). At the close of the novel, a new and consciously false truth is offered concerning Colley's demise: "A low fever" (Golding 275). Thus, the truth recedes behind a falsehood. Talbot thinks of concealing the truth from Colley's sister by omitting some parts of Colley's letter. Talbot's omission of the truth is the final blow to the accessibility of the truth. In accordance with postmodernism, Golding closes his novel with an inconclusive end to demonstrate that the ultimate truth is unattainable. No absolute interpretation can be made from either of the two accounts, which evinces that *Rites of Passage* utilises the notion of undecidability, another salient feature of postmodern fiction. Bennett and Royle argue that this notion points to "the impossibility of deciding between two or more competing interpretations" (249). The principle of deducing a definitive, all-encompassing meaning from a literary work is thus dislodged. Golding creates this undecidable condition, making it arduous for the reader to make a final, single decision. Rationality to eradicate

ambiguity is decentred from its position of authority through the person of Talbot. By contrast, romantic conceptions to comprehend things are demystified in the person of Colley. Postmodern fiction delegitimizes the authority of one narrative that seeks to claim the all-inclusive truth. Hassan notes that the postmodern discourse relies on “deconstruction, decentring, dissemination, dispersal, displacement, difference, discontinuity, demystification, delegitimation, disappearance” (309). Therefore, narratives are displaced, perspectives discontinued, and truths dispersed in *Rites of Passage*.

The chronological sequence of events is shattered in a postmodern novel. Accordingly, *Rites of Passage* violates the linear chronology, moving forward and backward through prolepsis and analepsis. Talbot's narration reflects experimentation with the spatiality of time. The titles of Talbot's journal chapters are indicated by the numbers, which do not follow diachronically. Initially, his narrative follows a sequential order. However, later on, Talbot breaks away from the chronological order and thus begins to use symbols and names such as beta, omega and numbers, which may show the approximate date. In relation to this, Talbot states:

I cast back in my memory – could not remember what day of the voyage it was – took up this book, and it seemed to be the sixth, so I have confused your lordship and myself. I cannot keep pace with the events and shall not try. I have, at a moderate estimate, already written ten thousand words and must limit myself. (Golding 45)

This acknowledged flexibility and confession of the muddled narrator concerning time evinces that *Rites of Passage* subverts the supposed affinity between clock time and writing time and deconstructs the most common trope of the realist novel, which is to put events in chronological order.

Intertextuality is another indispensable component of postmodernism that *Rites of Passage* has. Abrams explains that intertextuality signifies “the multiple ways in which any one literary text is made up of other texts, by means of its open and covert citations and allusions, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts (317). Similarly, Kristeva defines intertextuality as “a mosaic of quotations” and she maintains that every “text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37). As a postmodern novel, *Rites of Passage* is loaded with allusions to other texts. There is an overt reference to Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in Talbot's narrative: “We were a single ship. We were as she said in thrilling accents, ‘- alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide, wide sea!’” (Golding 59). Dickson contends that the affinity between Colley and the Mariner corresponds to “the central conflicts between the eighteenth-century Talbot and Rev. Colley,” resonates with “the conflict between Christian and pagan forces,” and adds that the allusion to the Mariner foregrounds “the symbolic journey of a ‘soul,’ not only Colley's but also Talbot's” (121). Another textual allusion is to Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado about Nothing*: “Colley was so clearly épris with her, of having a Much Ado About Nothing and bringing this Beatrice and Benedict into a mountain

of affection for each other!” (Golding 120). There is another textual allusion to Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Redpath points out that “Tristram experiences the divergence of clock time and writing time when he discovers that it takes him longer to write about events than the events actually took to happen” (59). Talbot encounters similar problems when he understands that the events of day four take longer to describe than day four itself: “Look at the time! If I am not more able to choose what I say I shall find myself describing the day before yesterday rather than writing about today for you tonight!” (Golding 29).

Moreover, there are allusions to *Robinson Crusoe*: “That done, to trifle for a moment with profane literature, like some Robinson Crusoe, I set to and considered what part of the vessel remained to me as my – as I expressed it – my kingdom” (Golding 209). This reference to *Robinson Crusoe* places *Rites of Passage* in the context of an eighteenth-century realist narrative, which has been critically discussed in relation to imperialism, objectivity, and rationality. The stratified warship bound for Australia, aboard which opposed forces impersonated by the main characters are in clash with one another, resonates with the myth of the shipwrecked Robinson who embodies the Western white man that strives to find a replica of his civilisation on the foreign shores. However, once disconnected from the ideological narratives that fabricate their beings and thus denuded of their identities, both Robinson Crusoe and the two narrators in *Rites of Passage* flounder in their confrontation with the other. Likewise, Billy Rogers is also another intertextual element since his name refers to Herman Melville’s fictional character Billy Budd. By means of this allusion to Melville’s nineteenth-century novel, Golding highlights the homoerotic overtones of his novel. All these references evince that *Rites of Passage* is a postmodern novel as it displays that it is also a mosaic of allusions to other texts.

A “meditation on the literatures and texts of the past” (Dipple 9), parody is another prominent postmodern aspect in *Rites of Passage*. Parody is a literary element employed to imitate other works to ridicule the text, and thus, to distort and deconstruct what is well-established in the parodied text. Parody resonates with the postmodern mode of writing as writers critically imitate texts or genres to draw attention to their shortcomings. David Roberts notes that parody is “a paradox well suited to the postmodern state of mind” (183). Similarly, Calinescu argues that the postmodern critical consciousness redefines parody and makes “of the parodic mode the most salient, distinguishing feature of cutting-edge contemporary (postmodern) literature and art” (245). Through Talbot’s journal and Colley’s letter, Golding parodies the epistolary and picaresque novels of the eighteenth century. It is of utmost significance that Golding chooses to parody the genres of the Age of Enlightenment because Andrew Stott argues that postmodern parody is utilised “in the service of serious critiques of Enlightenment philosophy” (2).

An epistolary novel is written in the form of letters. The epistolary form is believed to add realism and verisimilitude to the story because it chiefly mimics real-life details. However, the narrators of epistolary fiction are unreliable or biased due to their subjective vision of events. Golding’s aim of parody is to demonstrate that minute-by-minute narration

in epistolary form is of no consequence and cannot be achieved. The over-personal perception and conception of the narrators concerning the happenings in the novel disrupt the author's purpose to create verisimilitude. Accordingly, Talbot declares:

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 no 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! I will get myself up, relieved, shaved, breakfasted in a single sentence. (Golding 28)

Golding ridicules Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, published in 1740, and thus problematizes the claim of verisimilitude in eighteenth-century novels. Golding mocks eighteenth-century literary realism which puts forward that "there is a positively determinable world" and fiction is "the material transcription of the empirically verifiable data" (Nash 8). *Rites of Passage* demonstrates that life, in its indefinable complexity and indeterminable diversity, cannot be fully represented in a journal that claims to transcribe whatever happens in one's life daily. As a postmodern novel, *Rites of Passage* critically refers to Mistress Pamela as parody, "the critical quotation of performed literary language with comic effect" (Rose 59). By means of mocking the persistent effort to describe one's journey moment by moment, Golding subverts the eighteenth-century realist tradition that hankers after verisimilitude. Thus, parody allows the pre-existing discourses to be "called into the readers' minds and then placed under erasure" (Phiddian 13). Golding lays bare the limitations of an epistolary novel and thus contests the pre-existing novelistic discourse of the eighteenth century. Hence, the pre-existing texts are questioned, and their authority is undermined. Being subversive, the postmodern parody "points, not to the possibility of a better way of saying things, but to the possibility that all ways of saying are equally arbitrary" (Dentith 91). Thus, Golding shows that the urge to represent the world and its ineffable diversity in realist fiction is bound to fail. The impulse to contain the ever-expanding, endlessly suggestive, constantly shifting, and perpetually metamorphosing images and impressions of life in a supposedly truthful account always ends in frustration.

Alongside the parodic use of the epistolary novel in the postmodern sense, Golding plays with the picaresque novel that presents the adventures of a light-hearted rascal. The narrative in a picaresque novel focuses on one roguish character who deals with tyrannical masters and unlucky fates but who usually manages to escape these miserable situations by using his wit. In picaresque novels, the rogue is portrayed as "lonely, self-reliant" and confronted with this "hostile world," he decides "to travel, to wander from one place to another, alone, unattached, isolated, and very often, confused" (Tomoiaga 22). In *Rites of Passage*, the ship's captain can be regarded as the tyrannical master in a picaresque novel, as Talbot notes that there is "evidence against our tyrant in the case of Colley versus Anderson." He refers to the captain as a tyrant (Golding 157). Nevertheless, Golding parodies this genre in the postmodern sense by distorting the picaresque novel in two ways. Firstly, Colley cannot escape the miserable situations by using wit, but he dies of

shame. Secondly, the novel is not loaded with adventures and happenings, as Talbot points out: “It has become, perhaps, some kind of sea-story, but a sea-story with never a tempest, no shipwrecks, no sinking, no rescue at sea, no sight nor sound of an enemy, no thundering brood sides, heroism, prizes, gallant defences and heroic attacks!” (Golding 278). Hence, *Rites of Passage* breaks away from the traditional picaresque novel where the roguish events and adventures are narrated throughout the voyage. Yet, Golding dwells upon the spiritual journey of his characters.

Golding also parodies the Romantic man and the man of the Enlightenment in Colley and Talbot, respectively. Reality “appears as rationality to classicism,” embodied by Talbot, whereas it appears as “irrationality to romanticism,” embodied by Colley (Hauser 720). As the suggestive title of the novel recalls to one’s mind, *Rites of Passage* deals with the transition from the Age of Enlightenment to the Romantic Age. In accordance with the postmodern pastiche of the eighteenth-century genres of the epistolary and picaresque novel as elements of parody, Golding purposefully avoids portraying Colley and Talbot as the true Romantic or the genuine man of the Augustan Age, thus achieving his aim of parody by portraying the shortcomings of his two main characters. At first glance, Colley appears to be the concrete embodiment of Romanticism since he represents the liberation of instincts, passions, and sexual urges. His love of nature complements his Romantic image. Yet, Golding’s parodic aim works out in the novel in the sense that Colley is forced to experience the Romantic idea of liberation of instincts and impulses, rather than choosing to experience them for himself.

Similarly, Talbot becomes short of his supposed image of the Enlightenment because of Golding’s employment of parody. Ironically, he is never very enlightened although he represents the Enlightenment man. His narrative, and subsequently, his conception of events is full of gaps and omissions. Golding parodies Talbot’s image as the man of Enlightenment by the following metaphor: “We wrestled for a moment by the bunk, she with a nicely calculated exertion of strength [...] I with mounting passion. My sword was in my hand [...] I attacked once more and the hoop collapsed [...] We flamed against the ruins of the canvas basin and among the trampled pages of my little library” (Golding 86). Talbot’s sexual encounter with Zenobia is accompanied by the collapse of his bookshelf, which metaphorically stands for the collapse of his image as the representative of the Age of Reason. Golding furthers his parody with Talbot’s premature ejaculation. Redpath summarises Golding’s use of parody:

To all appearances, Golding has written an eighteenth-century novel. The eighteenth-century novel merely adopts the conventions of the day. *Rites of Passage* adopts the conventions of the past to illustrate epistemological problems in the present. *Rites of Passage*, although appearing to be an eighteenth-century novel, is in reality a twentieth-century fiction. (75)

By parodying the double narrators and pitting them against one another, Golding subverts the tendency to understand perspectival truths by tying them up to a master narrative and thus

foregrounds the epistemological problem of pinning down history to a bifurcated understanding of the time. *Rites of Passage* contests the either-or approach to history and proposes an attitude of not only-but also that may capacitate us to explore reality comprehensively.

In tune with the novel's themes of passages and transitions, Mr. Summers's remark about "translation" is crucial: "In our country for all her greatness there is one thing she cannot do and that is translate a person wholly out of one class to another. Perfect translation from one language to another is impossible" (Golding 125). To slightly twist Mr. Summers's statement, one can apply this notion of translation to the situation of Colley and Talbot; their characters are translated into the historical eras that they represent, namely the Augustan Age and the Romantic. Yet, they fail in their attempts or are made to fail. Thus, one can argue that they are lost in translation. Golding's interest in his characters stems from his preoccupation with "man at an extremity [...] man isolated" (in Crompton 127). This mentioning of extremity brings forth one of the characteristics of the Romantic spirit; extremity evokes the Romantic desire for the attainment of the transcendent and the infinite, the Faustian quest for the unattainable, and the Byronic longing for the inaccessible beyond the limits of human clay. This Romantic yearning is in stark contrast with the Age of Enlightenment that views human beings as limited. The Romantic hankering after extremity defies the moderation of the Age of Reason.

Moreover, the Romantic violator of conventional boundaries remains proudly unrepentant, as does the Byronic hero Manfred, who even defies the demons that have come to drag his soul to hell. Manfred's defiance resonates with Colley's final remark: "What a man does defiles him, not what is done by others" (Golding 276). Despite the affinity between Colley's utterance and the Romantic Manfred's rejection of the demons, Colley becomes short of a true Romantic since he is forced to experience the state as mentioned above of extremity rather than choosing to do so, which is an outcome of Golding's parodic aim. Colley experiences the Romantic state of extremity during the Crossing-the-line ceremony. The fact that this rite takes place when the vessel is becalmed on the belly of the earth that is, the equatorial belt, which divides the earth into two hemispheres, strengthens the Romantic violation of the conventional limits and defiance of moderation. Through this rite, Colley's latent homosexuality surfaces as he commits fellatio on Billy Rogers. Thus, he personalises another Romantic element: the liberation of repressed instincts and desires. Colley's initial response is to cry, "Joy! Joy! Joy!" with his "head up and with a smile as if already in heaven" (Golding 117). His joyous exclamations during this *jouissance* evoke the defiant Romantic spirit. Yet, his subsequent repentance spoils this Romantic image. Through the ceremony, the clash between the Romantic man and the man of Enlightenment lends itself to the conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian spirits. Colley represents the former as he experiences the Dionysian ecstasy. In contrast, Talbot embodies the Apollonian urge since he is supposed to be the concrete manifestation of the Enlightenment. The Dionysian spirit embodies "contrasting unconscious forces of instinct and passion, individualism and excess;" on the other hand, the Apollonian spirit stands for "conscious forces of logic and rationality, order and control" (MacMurrough-Kavanagh 103). Yet, Golding disrupts the association of the crossing-the-line ceremony with the Bacchanalian spirit to achieve his parody aim. The Bacchanals of the Dionysian festivities aim to dissolve into immateriality through the exercise of human materiality; in other words, besides the physical sensations, the Bacchanalian ritual provides a sort of divine ecstasy through which the soul is freed from the body by dint of an ironic use of their embodied existence to transcend the material existence itself. However, Golding twists the Dionysian feast with farcical

moments, which are more inclined to arouse pity for human folly than a carefree laughter. Golding expels Talbot, the embodiment of reason, from the ecstasy scene. Yet, ironically, he is also engaged in a sexual encounter with Zenobia. This sexual encounter is accompanied, one should remember, by the collapse of the bookshelf, which symbolically stands for the collapse of the man of reason. Talbot's engagement in this sexual encounter and being tempted by his instincts seems to mar his image as the man of reason. At the same time, his premature ejaculation may indicate that he is not a man of passion, but a man of reason floundering in sexual matters.

Postmodern novels experiment with metafiction, which means beyond or about fiction. Metafiction is "the technique by which a text highlights its own status as a fictional construct by referring to itself" (Nicol 16). Thus, postmodern novels play with the idea of their self-reflexivity. Waugh defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). In metafiction, the narrator often jumps out of their narrative to comment upon the writing process and directly addresses the reader. Metafiction allows one to "examine fictional systems, how they are created, and the way in which reality is transformed by and filtered through narrative assumptions and conventions" (McCaffrey 5). Thus, metafiction allows one to view the process of writing as a construction of a fictional system. Metafiction points to "the assimilation of critical perspective within fictional narrative, a self-consciousness of the artificiality between language and the world" (Currie 2). Postmodern novels do not seek to create the illusion of reality, so they often foreground the fictionality of fiction. The narrator draws attention to the process of the text's creation and the writing's self-reflexive nature. Accordingly, Talbot reflects upon his writing throughout his narrative: "For we come to an end, there is nothing more to be said. I mean – there is, of course, there is the daily record, but my journal, I found on looking back through it, had insensibly turned to the record of a drama – Colley's drama" (Golding 264). Furthermore, Talbot explores the nature of his own writing: "Is it farce or a tragedy? Does not a tragedy depend on the dignity of the protagonist?" (Golding 265). Likewise, Talbot perceives everything in terms of theatricals and the stage, which foregrounds the fictionality of fiction. For instance, Zenobia appears to him to be "an habituée of the theatre if not a performer there" and he describes Zenobia's behaviour as "stagey" (Golding 58, 93). Talbot announces that the meal in Anderson's cabin is turned into a "farce" by a drunken character (Golding 166). He even calls the ship "our floating theatre" (Golding 145). Thus, the reader is reminded of the fictionality of the text, which earns *Rites of Passage* a postmodern feature.

Golding explains the genesis of *Rites of Passage* from an incident recorded in Scawen Blunt's diaries:

There was a man, a parson, who was on board a ship [...] there was a regiment of soldiers going ... 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 this cabin and stayed there [...] he just lay there until he died, in a few days ... I found that it was necessary for me, for my peace of mind, to invent circumstances in which it was possible for a man to die of shame. (in Crompton 127)

Golding takes a historical event and fictionalises it; thus, historical authenticity is

subverted. Postmodernism stages “a confrontation between the world of the text and our,” “enacts a disturbingly sceptical triumph over our sense of reality, and hence also over the accepted narratives of history” (Butler 70). Historiographical metafiction “mixes historical and fictional material and thereby implies or states a postmodernist critique of the realist norms for the relationship to fiction” (Butler 70). Accordingly, Golding both reconstructs the historical event and deconstructs it through fictionalisation. Golding’s mention of his urge to invent appropriate circumstances in which to unfold the story is significant since it reflects how a real event mutates into a fictional event. Hence, the distinction between the supposed historical reality and fiction is blurred. Golding steers the historical account, as he likes, which endows his novel with another postmodern dimension.

Postmodernism repudiates grand narratives, totalising cultural narratives that order and explain knowledge and experience. Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (xxiv). Disbelief is no longer suspended in postmodern fiction. The reader no longer drifts into the stream of realist fiction. Moreover, the disenchanted reader is invited to question the suspension of disbelief. Kennedy argues that the postmodern writer is cognizant of the master narratives’ “totalizing and universalizing impulses which either seek to homogenise difference, or, simply, to exclude it and, consequently works against these impulses” (82). As a postmodern novel, *Rites of Passage* contests grand narratives and their claims to absolute truths. Talbot notes, “nothing more can happen – unless it be fire, shipwreck, the violence of the enemy or a miracle! Even in this last case, I am sure the Almighty would appear theatrically as a *Deus ex Machina*!” (Golding 104). Since Golding associates theatricality with fictionality throughout the novel, the would-be appearance of the Almighty is just a theatrical reality, and a performance put on stage.

Moreover, Golding foregrounds the repudiation of the Almighty as a grand narrative by its absence in the Badger Bag ceremony, during which Colley, as a parson devoted to God, is not redeemed by God when he is most vulnerable and fragile. This subversion of the Almighty shows this novel’s postmodernist approach since postmodern theory tries “to destroy or deconstruct the very place and attributions of God” as a grand narrative (Infraggia 1). The concept of the Almighty is challenged as a transcendental signified. Another grand narrative rejected by Golding is the Bible. According to Stanley J. Grenz, postmodernism “denies that knowledge is objective,” and contends “all knowledge is historically, relationally and personally conditioned” (7). Golding contests biblical narratives in tandem with this postmodern refusal to accept grand narratives as universal. Golding parodies mass and baptism through the Badger Bag ceremony. Colley states in his letter: “As I opened my mouth to protest, it was at once filled with such nauseous stuff I gag and am like to vomit remembering it. For some time ... this operation was repeated; and when I would not open my mouth the stuff was smeared over my face” (Golding 237). In addition, Golding mocks the ten commandments of the Old Testament through Anderson’s ten standing orders and thus repudiates the Bible as a grand narrative once

more. Hence, *Rites of Passage*, as a postmodern novel, demonstrates that there are no universal truths applicable to all peoples of all times and places. Pursuant to this postmodern worldview, the Bible possesses no inherent truth or authority. Owing to this refutation of the transcendent truth, Golding undermines the taken-for-granted value of grand narratives by fashioning two worlds in the persons of Talbot and Colley whose truths are radically subverted and which “purposely ignore frameworks and distinctions agreed upon by conventions” (Ibsch 256).

In response to the elitism of modernism, postmodernism cherishes the commingling of high art and popular culture. Therefore, in *Rites of Passage*, Talbot speaks French and Greek words, which may be taken as the symbols of the highbrow culture. He tries to learn the tarpaulin language of the seamen, which might stand for the lowbrow culture. The stratified structure of the ship reflects the class-conscious British society, “the classic disease of society in this country” according to Golding (Baker 136). This warship represents “the class-ridden structure of British society” (Yıldırım 111). Accordingly, embodying the elite class, Anderson disapproves of Colley’s intrusion into the quarterdeck. Moreover, with his snobbery, Talbot undermines Colley’s peasant background: “his schooling should have been the open fields, with stone collecting and bird-scaring, his university the plough” (Golding 85). However, Golding achieves a fusion of the higher and lower classes during the Badger Bag ceremony, and thus eradicates the class distinctions. Since *Rites of Passages* is a postmodern novel, it brings together the urbane and the rustic, disregarding the seclusion of the so-called elites from the rest of the crowd.

Furthermore, Golding achieves a mixture of dual forces such as illusion and reality, farce and tragedy, truth and falsehood, and reason and emotion. As the title of this nautical novel suggests, there is a transition and fluidity between these dual forces: the transition from the Age of Reason to the Romantic period and the transition from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. Besides, the distinction between these opposites is blurred. For example, the Dionysian impulse, represented by Colley, is also experienced by Talbot, the Apollonian man, through his sexual affair with Zenobia. The dual forces are intertwined; the crossing-the-line ceremony induces exultation and repulsion. Colley interprets Talbot’s sexual encounter with Zenobia as enthusiastic prayers. Hence, the indecent and the profane are conflated with the decent and the sacred. As in Racine’s lines to which the novel refers, there is both vice and virtue in human nature. Even the ship has an “androgynous form” with its feminine sails swollen by the wind, and its masculine, phallic “forward-thrusting bowsprit” as Crompton argues (142). Thus, Golding entwines the opposite ends of the same spectrum in a postmodern fashion. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is characterised by an “inherently paradoxical structure’ (1). She insists that she does not mean postmodernism is oppositional or dialectical, but that it is *double* or contradictory, that is, comfortable with doing two opposing things at the same time or representing both sides of an argument at once (Nicol 16). The seemingly mutually negating worlds are placed in confrontation, which displays that they coalesce into one

another and demonstrates that supposedly opposing worldviews overlap with each other.

In conclusion, *Rites of Passage* is a novel that instantiates several postmodern features by dint of which the notion of the overarching truth is contested. Golding masterfully assembles a myriad of postmodern narrative components in *Rites of Passage* that stands as an epitome of postmodern fiction. This novel, immersed in postmodern aesthetics, cherishes the multiplicity of narrative voices, the subjectivity of narration, and thus the relativity of truth. It makes use of metafiction by foregrounding its fictionality self-consciously. It is full of gaps and delays, holes and omissions in both narratives. It is furnished with intertextual elements. It parodies the genres of epistolary and picaresque novels. It subverts grand narratives in a postmodern manner. By illustrating these postmodern elements, this paper argues that Golding challenges the authority of the all-encompassing truth that claims to be omnipotent and omniscient. He views himself as a novelist who flounders in “all the complexities of twentieth-century living, all the muddle of part beliefs” and thus displays the multi-layered, complex nature of truths that confound one if taken as overarching signifiers that apply to all ages and all places (in Redpath 76). *Rites of Passage* is a novel “suspended between the land below the waters and the sky like a nut on a branch or a leaf on a pond” (Golding 192). The sense of in-betweenness goes hand in hand with the juxtaposition of the oppositions, the collapse of rigid boundaries, and the dissolving of demarcations. This eradication of binary oppositions communicates the idea that the ultimate truth is unattainable, that there are multiple contextual and perspectival truths, and that the only truth is the obscurity of the truth.

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