WILLIAM GOLDING'S
RITES OF PASSAGE:
A CASE OF TRANSTEXTUALITY

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IF "books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told" (Eco 1983: 20), this is particularly true of *Rites of Passage,* a novel that expresses the determination of living inside the infinite text, rather than "the impossibility of living outside the infinite text," a statement that, in Barthes's view (1975: 35), defines intertextuality.

More or less consciously, all authors rewrite the work of their predecessors, since it is impossible to escape the influence of previous writings. Nevertheless, *Rites of Passage* uses and abuses the conventions of earlier works very overtly, flaunting its condition of postmodern literary artifact. This essay will show how *Rites of Passage* makes use of all the five types of transtextual relationships that Genette defines in *Palimpsestes* — intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and archtextuality— through which this novel foregrounds its postmodernist flavour. Thus, while noting the complex transtextuality of *Rites of Passage*, we will also point out its historiographic/metafictional character, since both features are closely related.

As is well known, Golding's fiction *en bloc* is a clear example of parodic transtextuality: thus, *Lord of the Flies* is, among other things, a reaction against Ballantine's *Coral Island* (1858), a Victorian adventure novel that anticipates many of the elements that, transformed, make up *Lord of the*

Flies. Similarly, *The Inheritors* reverses H. G. Wells's essay *Outline of History* and his pseudo-documentary story "The Grisly Folk."

Just as in *The Inheritors* Golding makes use of a prehistorical background to set the characters and the plot, *Rites of Passage* is also located in the past and takes both historical and literary sources as a point of departure. Nevertheless, *Rites of Passage* proves to be much more complex than any of Golding's previous novels in its handling of both historical and fictional sources. Quoting the terms that Linda Hutcheon (1988: 30) uses to define postmodernism, we could well say that *Rites of Passage* is "historically aware, hybrid and inclusive."

As I anticipated before, this novel can be taken as an example of historiographic metafiction, in virtue of its ingenious combination of history, parody and reflexivity. Thus, in *Rites of Passage* history is not presented as objective reality, but as a human construct which in turn is based on previous texts, which function as hypotexts of this novel: Scawen Blunt's *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914* (1919-1920) and Elizabeth Longford's *Life of Wellington* (1969). Significantly, these sources, in their twofold character of historical and literary works, intensify the hybrid quality of *Rites of Passage,* and point to a postmodernist postulate: that we have access to the past only through its textualized remains.

The historical sources of *Rites of Passage* refer to an incident that occurred in 1797 on board a ship bound for Manila, involving Wellington, then Colonel Wesley,[1] and a young clergyman. Golding sums up the episode as follows:

> the book [*Rites of Passage*] 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. (in Baker 1982: 132)

It seems that although Wellington kindly tried to cheer him up, the parson forced himself to die. Significantly, Golding's impulse to write the novel originated in his desire to recreate the past in a critical way, as postmodernism does. For Golding, the clergyman's attitude was so horrific

that "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 Baker1982: 132).

Apart from this particular incident, *Rites of Passage* seems to have originated in other similar strange deaths in literature and life, which again, enhances the postmodernist symbiosis of literature and history. Golding remarks:

> When you read nineteenth-century life and literature, it seems quite remarkable how many people suddenly died: Arthur Hallam, for instance lay down on a couch and just died. I don't understand it, but it is something that deeply interested me, and it seems to have occurred more often in the nineteenth century than at any other time. (in Haffenden 1985: 100)

In his study of *Rites of Passage*, Dick (1987: 113-14) mentions several characters which die strange, unexplainable deaths: Lucy in Walter Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*, Fiers in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*, Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde* (the three of them by Wagner) and Clarissa in Richardson's novel of the same name. It is logical to deduce that *Clarissa* is —among the preceding works— the closest influence on Golding, since the causes of both deaths —that of Clarissa in Richardson's novel and that of Colley in *Rites of Passage* have a great deal in common. Although Golding has not cited *Clarissa* as one of his sources, Richardson's literary features pervade the novel, as we shall see later.

From these references, it seems apparent that the network of hypotexts that support *Rites of Passage* —which is the hypertext, in Genette's terminology (1982: 11)— is more complex and varied than what could be expected at first sight, especially when we realize that none of the hypotexts mentioned so far is quoted or alluded to in the novel.

Although *Rites of Passage* does not indicate the exact dates in which the action is set (it was Golding who, in an interview, specified that the events of this novel take place in 1812-13 [in Baker 1982: 161]), it includes enough historical references to locate the story in time: at the end of the Napoleonic wars, an old British warship, loaded with passengers, emigrants and farm animals, sails to Australia, which had become a centre of attraction for British emigrants and adventurers who wanted to try their luck in the new colonies, at a time when convicts were also transported there.

As a travel narrative, *Rites of Passage* emphasizes its twofold quality: like historical novels, it displays characters that are representatives of a

specific period; as a postmodernist work, it rewrites the past in the light of the present, in this case by contemplating the historical events from the perspective of class divisions. In fact, the social discrimination is such that "the ship as traditional literary microcosm is here specifically a class structure," as Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor (1984: 270) have pointed out.

It is worth noting that although *Rites of Passage* cannot be regarded as a historical novel in the traditional sense of the term, its background and sources relate it to that genre, which points to another transtextual relationship, archtextuality. In Genette's classification, archtextuality is the most abstract and implicit transtextual connection, that which links texts by genres. Thus, it is only explicit when the name of the genre is incorporated in the title or subtitle of the text. In this novel, archtextuality is completely unobtrusive, since there are no indications whatsoever about its generic status.

The protagonist, Edmund Talbot, is a young man who is going to take up his new assignment as secretary to the Governor General in Australia. He is also the narrator of most of the book's events, as he records them in his journal for the entertainment of his aristocratic patron and godfather, who is its addressee. Robert Colley, the character who impersonates the historical parson, becomes another narrator of the story, since the letter addressed to his sister is included in Talbot's journal after Colley's death.

By using this technique, Golding achieves a twofold effect: on the one hand, *Rites of Passage*, following the historical trend of the 18th- century, uses the epistolary mode, one of the dominant types of the fiction of that time, and preserves the diarist quality of one of its sources: it is estimated that over a thousand epistolary fictions were written in the Augustan age (Rogers 1978: 68). Note also that in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, an 18th-century travel novel that uses the epistolary technique, the same event is narrated through letters from different points of view (Dick 1987: 115-17). If the use of the epistolary mode betrays another archtextual relationship, the features of *Humphry Clinker* make of *Rites of Passage* a hypertext of the former.

On the other hand, 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. Significantly, this technique is both a characteristic of historiographic metafiction —it emphasizes uncertainty (Hutcheon 1988: 117)— and a new version of Golding's recurrent structural device, which underlines the contrived quality of *Rites of Passage*. Thus, Golding's previous novels become hypotexts of *Rites of Passage,* since,

among other things, this work echoes their structure. Due to the close connection between the novels of the same author, we may well speak of *sister-text* relationship, a term recently coined by Ann Jefferson to describe "the relations between one text and another within the corpus (and more particularly between those texts which fall within the same generic category) of a given author" (1990: 110-11)

In this novel, the confrontation of points of view is particularly significant, since it symbolizes not only two approaches to the same events, but also the contrast between the values of Neoclassicism and those of Romanticism. From a transtextual perspective, this characteristic is of paramount importance, since it presupposes the use of neoclassical and romantic sources, which again takes us to the abstract realm of archtextuality. Needless to say, *Rites of Passage* abounds in concrete, hypotextual references to these movements, which will be analysed later on.

As many critics have pointed out, Talbot embodies the characteristics of the Augustan age: he could be described as "a classist young man classically educated" (Boyd 1988: 158). He is not only an individualized character but a type, a representative of a historical period, a feature that Lukács (in Hutcheon 1988: 113) associates with the historical novel. As could be expected of a well educated, aristocratic, 18th-century man, Talbot's journal abounds in allusions to the classics. These correspond to the most concrete type of transtextual relationships according to Genette's classification: that of intertextuality. Thus, he mentions authors, works and mythological figures such as Martial, Theocritus, Servius, Lucullus, Pan, Circe, the *Aeneid*, Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle seems to be a favourite among Talbot's authors, since he refers to him repeatedly, emphasizing his agreement with the philosopher's doctrines.

For example, Talbot endorses Aristotle's theory of the orders of society, which he recalls when expressing his dislike of Colley's ridiculous appearance and obsequious manners; in Talbot's opinion, they betray the parson's low origin: "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" (*RP* 67). As 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 (1982:10).

In turn, this explicit allusion to Aristotle implicitly echoes Pope's *Essay on Man,* in which this author, as spokesman of the Augustan age and Aristotle's follower, expresses similar thoughts: "Order is heaven's first law;

and, this confess'd, / Some are, and must be, greater than the rest, / More rich, more wise . . ." (1975: 207). Although Pope is not mentioned in *Rites of Passage,* Talbot's narrative is interspersed with frequent allusions to 18th-century authors and works, like Goldsmith, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Dr. Johnson and Sterne; his bookshelf contains texts such as *Moll Flanders, Gil Blas* and Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs,* which fall off the shelf at Talbot's comic attack on Zenobia. Again, these intertextual relationships become metatextual —and even hypertextual— in the case of Richardson and Sterne.

Evidently, Golding has used Richardson's and Sterne's literary technique as a basis for his novel. The parallels between Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Talbot's journal are inescapable: both include digressions, sudden starts and stops and share irregularities in the chapter headings. Precisely, these irregularities point to another type of transtextuality: paratextuality, which describes the connections between a text and the title, or subtitle, preface, epigraph, notes, illustrations... of another one. Similarly, both narrators are chronically self-conscious, "anticipating" the time-manipulating devices of modern literature: "Good God! 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!... I find that writing is like drinking, a man must learn to control it" (*RP* 29).

If these elements prove the hypertextual relationship, Talbot's comment on Richardson's and Sterne's works shows the metatextual one:

> 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! (*RP* 28).

> My entries are becoming short as some of Mr Sterne's chapters! (*RP* 72)

Strikingly enough, Talbot himself, as a Tristram-like narrator, is aware of the similarities and contrasts between his journal and its literary models. On the other hand, the parallels between *Tristram Shandy* and *Rites of Passage* are highly significant, since they reinforce the postmodernist quality of Golding's novel. It is worth noting that *Tristram Shandy* is regarded as the prototype for the contemporary metafictional novel (Waugh 1984: 23, 70).

Talbot also expresses his interest in Falconer's *Marine Dictionary* — intertextuality again— whereas his narrative shows a tendency to "*fine*

writing " (*RP* 67). He wishes to create "sparks of wit" (*RP* 18) and entertain his influential godfather with them, inserting terms of Tarpaulin language, in which Talbot takes great delight. Therefore, the tone of his journal is, in general, light-hearted, rhetorical and even theatrical, which enhances the metafictional character of the novel.

Against this neoclassical world of common sense and refinement, Colley prefigures the advance of Romanticism. Unlike Talbot, Colley is less a type than a contradictory, "ex-centric" individual, like the characters of many a postmodernist novel and historiographic metafiction in particular (Hutcheon 1988: 113-14). An analysis of the figure of Colley quickly reveals him as reflecting the tensions of a transitional world, but aggravated by his religious profession and his uncertain social status. Significantly, Colley's letter points out what Talbot's journal omits. Nature, which is ignored in Talbot's journal, or only mentioned in so far as it hinders his comfort, is now contemplated with awe and wonder. Nevertheless, these romantic traces may only be the sentimental overflow of a rather naïve —not to say silly— character.

In fact, Colley reflects the change of taste that occurred in England in the second half of the 18th-century, or rather, the split that appeared between "official culture" and actual taste. Whereas the institutions supported rationalism and the Enlightenment, many people began to feel attracted by the irrational and the cult of sensibility, as reflected for example in the success of Gothic fiction, Graveyard Poetry and Richardson's novels. As can be seen, these characteristics reflect a complex network of transtextual relationships that we may well call archtextual, rather than hypertextual, since they go beyond the influence of concrete works to embrace the literature and culture of two periods: Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

Colley, then, has a sentimental character, but his letter, like Talbot's journal, reveals his faith in the social pyramid. No doubt, Colley is depicted from an ironic perspective, since Golding undermines the respect and authority traditionally accorded the cloth. In the novel, this parson becomes a victim of his own magnification of class distinctions.

Thus, despite Colley's apparent simplicity and his sister's lack of scholarship —she is the addressee of his letter— Colley's writing also includes several instances of learned intertextuality: allusions to the classics and a quotation from the Bible. He mentions Sophocles, Hercules, Leviathan and the legend of Talos; he quotes from Homer and reads some "profane literature" (*RP* 209), *Robinson Crusoe,* a very appropriate reading, since Colley, like the protagonist of this book, is all alone on the island of the ship. On the other hand, his library includes Baxter's *Saints Everlasting Rest,* the

title of which ironically points to the circumstances of Colley's restless, unsaintly death.

Nevertheless, Colley's acts and feelings are more significant than the quotations of his letter. Thus, the episodes of his debasement and death are worth recalling. Given Colley's indefinite status —his being a *parvenu*[2]— his lack of social support and his grotesque appearance, it is no wonder that he should become the scapegoat, the fool: the officers Deverel and Cumbershum select him as the victim of the "Badger-Bag." According to Glascock's *Naval Sketch Book* (1825) (in Tiger 1982: 226), which Golding may have consulted, this naval term refers to a ceremony conducted by the sailors in honour of Neptune during the crossing of the Equator. Generally, it consisted in harmless tricks that the crew played on the passengers, but Colley is brutally abused and humiliated, ironically by the sailors he so much admired: obviously, this is one of the rites of passage alluded to in the title of the novel. Significantly, it recalls the ritual murders of Golding's previous novels like *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*. In fact, it is Summer's gunshot that stops what could have become another killing.

In turn, these scapegoat rituals have their antecedents in the Dionysian worship as reflected in the *Bacchae,* where Pentheus is savagely dismembered and killed. As can be seen, *Rites of Passage* rests on a far-reaching, almost never-ending framework of hypotexts that a brief study cannot exhaust. On the other hand, the title of the novel, *Rites of Passage,* points to the transtextual connection of paratextuality, since it is borrowed from Arnold Van Gennep's classic study of initiation rituals and ceremonies (*Les Rites de Passage*, 1909).[3]

However, the ceremony of the "Badger-Bag" is only a preliminary to the next rite —the climax— of the novel. Despite his public humiliation, Colley decides to pay a visit to the sailors, more out of a wish to restore his tainted religious authority —his badge of class— and his attraction to them, than out of Christian humility. Nevertheless, his well-meaning plans end up in his death: according to the information gathered by Talbot, who has not witnessed the event, it seems that Colley, made drunk by the sailors and in a state of frenzy, performs fellatio on his idolized sailor. Then, stripped of his wig and most of his clothes, he makes a spectacle of himself by urinating in front of the passengers, who have assembled on the quarterdeck. Colley's degradation thus constitutes an ironic reversal of his social and religious expectations.

In fact, the episode of Colley's debasement can be interpreted as a conscious parody of the romantic *topos*. It is no coincidence that before being

lugged to his cabin, and in expression of his rapture, he exclaims: Joy! Joy! Joy! (*RP* 117), words that bring to mind some verses in Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode":

> Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
> Safe to the pure, and in their purest hour,
> Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
> Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
> Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
> A new Earth and new Heaven. . . . (in Abrams 1986: 376)

Just as Coleridge's "Joy" expresses a feeling of vitality and harmony between one's inner life and the life of nature, and offers the experience of a renewed world, Colley's exclamation displays his exultation at the fulfilment of his inmost desires. But unlike Coleridge's joy, Colley's is not given "in [his] purest hour" and only offers him the transient pleasure of forbidden sexual satisfaction. Therefore, his euphoria is followed by feelings of despair and shame. Despite Talbot's and Anderson's half-hearted attempts at reconciling him to life, Colley, rigid and motionless on his bed, prefers to die. On the other hand, the name of Colley can be interpreted as a parodic transformation of that of Coleridge, whose works pervade the whole novel.[4]

Significantly, this intertextual and hypertextual relationship with Coleridge's poetry is not the only one. Thus, Mr. Brocklebank, one of the passengers of the ship, claims to have painted a portrait of Coleridge, whereas his would-be daughter, Zenobia, has met the poet and knows his verses by heart: *"Alone, alone, / All, all alone, / Alone on a wide, wide sea!"* (*RP* 59). It is precisely the recitation of these lines from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* that initiates a discussion between Prettiman —the archrationalist— and Brocklebank about the killing of an albatross. Whereas Brocklebank says that he would never shoot one, Prettiman plans to kill one himself in order to disprove all superstitions, though he has never fired a shot in his life. His obsessive determination offers Talbot the opportunity of writing a witty statement that is also metafictional, since it suggests the contradictions of the novel's plot: "He [Prettiman] demonstrates to the thoughful eye how really irrational a rationalist can be!" (*RP* 73).

As in the previous case, the references to the Ancient Mariner are highly parodic, since they point out both the similarities and contrasts to the episodes in this novel. Thus, both the albatross and Colley are victims, though the latter is not so innocent as the former. Like the Mariner, Colley is

"all alone" ("I was alone! Yes, in that vast ship with her numberless souls I was alone. . ." [*RP* 233-34]) and his description of the landscape and the motionlessness of the ship echoes that of Coleridge's poem:

> Our huge ship was motionless and her sails hung down. On her right hand the red sun was setting and on her left the full moon was rising, the one directly across from the other. . . . Here plainly to be seen were the very scales of GOD. (*RP* 233)

In the corresponding passage of Coleridge's poem, the same astral images are used : "The bloody Sun, at noon, / Right up above the mast did stand, / No bigger than the Moon" (in Abrams 1986: 339). Note, however, that in the poem the sun and moon do not symbolize the divine scales, at least explicitly: it seems obvious that Coleridge's verses have been rewritten in order to emphasize Colley's religious bias. Significantly, though, it is in Colley and Colley's letter that the closest affinities between both works are to be found, which enhances the romantic associations that this character evokes.

Besides, Colley is directly involved in an affair which recalls another romantic work, Melville's *Billy Budd* (hypertextuality again): Billy Rogers — Colley's "Young Hero" (*RP* 227) and Zenobia's "Sailor Hero" (p.101)— is an ironic inversion of the former. If Billy Budd stands for innocence, Billy Rogers represents corruption. In fact, Rogers resembles Claggart, the depraved officer of Melville's story. Both sailors play a decisive role, because their beauty sets in motion the tragic events in both works. Note also that Golding has replaced Budd by a surname that brings to mind one of the most wicked boys of *Lord of the Flies,* Roger.

Golding's parody of Melville's story proves to be particularly metafictional, since it mixes history and fiction in more ways than one. Like *Rites of Passage, Billy Budd* is also based on a historical event, the Somers mutiny case, which took place in the American Navy in 1842. Like Golding, Melville modified both the date and the place of the historical events, setting his story in the British Navy in 1797, the period of the Napoleonic wars and, strikingly enough, the year in which the historical parson chose to die.

Rites of Passage includes other tacit hypertertextual allusions to works written in a later period than that portrayed in this novel. As Crompton (1985: 134-35) has pointed out, Talbot's decision with regard to Colley's sister echoes that of Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* : Talbot decides to appropriate Colley's letter to his sister and write her another one, thus concealing the truth from her, as Marlow does from Kurtz's fiancée. Although

Golding (in Baker 1982: 162) has repeatedly denied the influence of Conrad's work on his fiction, some similarities between them are evident. Thus, Boyd (1988: 160) has studied the parallel between Conrad's "The Shadow Line" and *Rites of Passage,* emphasizing the passage from youth to maturity in both of them.

Evidently, the rites that Golding portrays in his novels should not be understood only in a literal sense, since they involve a journey from ignorance to experience which in the present novel affects both protagonists, Talbot and Colley. Unfortunately, "poor old Colley fails to make the grade," as Golding has remarked (in Baker 1982: 162). As can be seen, these recurrent elements in Golding's fiction provide further instances of hypertextuality and *sister-text* relationship.

However, it is in its anachronisms that *Rites of Passage* demonstrates its quality of postmodernist construct most openly. Wheeler, Talbot's servant in the ship, alludes indirectly —intertextuality again— to de Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, a work published in 1821, and therefore a later date than that fixed by Golding for his novel. On the other hand, Talbot mentions *Emma* to compare Zenobia's flirtations to those of Austen's heroine. Although Talbot could not have read *Emma* —it was published in 1816 and *Rites of Passage* is set in 1812-13— Austen's literary world of manners and class pervades Golding's novel.

Thus, while the structure of *Rites of Passage* can be seen as a parodic rewriting of Richardson's and Sterne's works, its central concern constitutes an ironic reversal of Austen's fiction. Needless to say, Golding goes far beyond Austen's limits, and for that reason, *Rites of Passage* becomes an ironic inversion of her fiction, since it shows the aspects of life that Austen conceals: as Boyd (1988: 156) has pointed out, it is impossible to imagine any Austen character vomiting or going to the lavatory, let alone commiting *fellatio* or urinating in front of an audience. In fact, Golding's manipulation of Austen's fiction represents the aim of historiographic metafiction: to rewrite the past in a new context, filling the historical blanks with new, subversive material. Evidently, Golding's treatment of class in *Rites of Passage* is deeper than any that might be found in an 18th- or early 19th-century novel; in that sense, this novel also reverses Austen's harmless classist world.

Above all, *Rites of Passage* is a novel about class: all the events in the book turn around it, particularly Colley's death. As we have seen, the characters are very much aware of it; Summers, for example, says to Talbot, "Class is the British language" (*RP* 125). In fact, Golding has always been worried about the rigidity of the British class system, which he calls "the

classic disease of society in this country" (in Baker 1982: 136). In this respect, *Rites of Passage* echoes Golding's previous works, particularly *The Pyramid,* which can be taken as another hypotext or *sister-text* of *Rites of Passage.* Golding stresses that *Rites of Passage* "[is] making some urgent statements about class. Unless we can get rid of it or at least blunt the pyramid or make it a little less monumental, we're done, we're finished, and it had better happen quickly" (in Baker 1982: 160).

This "endogamic" transtextuality becomes apparent when recalling Golding's early autobiographic essay, "A Touch of Insomnia" (*The Hot Gates,* 1966: 135-39). In it, Golding refers to his memories of a voyage in a liner crossing the Atlantic. Shipboard life in that ship seems to be only a 20th-century version of our historical vessel:

> Here the class system was axiomatic. You could not invade a plusher bar simply by readiness to pay more. Nor could you descend to a comfortable pub if you wanted to pay less. Where you were born, there you stayed. At the beginning —a sort of privileged babyhood— you could glimpse the other worlds. You could pass through doors marked First Class and see the wide bedrooms, the stupendous still lives of sea food on the side tables of the dining-room. Perhaps this was a concession to our brief stop in republican France —for after that, the doors were locked. We had to be content with our middle station, right aft, where you got any vibration that was going. And I supposed there was some sealed-off hold where the base of our social pyramid rested; where tourists were chained to the kelson under the whips of savage taskmasters, while their flesh was subdued by a diet of weevily biscuit and stale water.

In both ships, there are demarcation lines that cannot be crossed. In *Rites of Passage,* the "gentry" are the only ones who have individual cabins and live in the stern of the ship, whereas the emigrants and the sailors are huddled together in the prow. Finally, the quarterdeck is the domain of the captain and the officers: passengers only have access to it by invitation. Although both Talbot and Colley visit the quarterdeck without permission, the different treatment they receive is a proof of the tyranny of class, exacerbated in this novel by the captain's anticlericalism, which in turn, has its origin in class problems.

In agreement with Ann Jefferson (1990: 110-12), we think that this kind of transtextual relationship between novel and autobiographic essay by the same author could be called metatextual, due to the commentary role of the

latter. In fact, both Golding's autobiographic essays and public declarations should be considered metatexts of his fiction. Thus, in *Rites of Passage,* Mr. Oldmeadow's fear of the dead on account of his Cornish origin (*RP* 181) recalls Golding's essay "The Ladder and the Tree" (*The Hot Gates,* 1966: 166-75), and particularly his conversation with John Carey (1986: 177), in which Golding openly confesses his irrational fears: "I'm scared stiff of the uncanny —always have been. This is the Cornish coming out."

As I pointed out before, Anderson's behaviour is conditioned by class problems. In the last pages of his journal, Talbot records the "dénouement" (*RP* 266) of the drama. He has learnt from Deverel that captain Anderson detests the clergy as the result of having a parson for his foster father despite the fact of being the illegitimate son of Lord L__. His father, Lord L__, had arranged for his mistress (Anderson's mother) to be married off to a parson so that he could marry a rich heiress. As the lord had another son, Anderson's dreams of preferment in the social pyramid vanished. What Talbot fails to realize is that Anderson not only hates clergymen, but Talbot's lordly behaviour, too. Once again, we come across transtextuality: if the name Lord L__ is an echo of Richardson's Mr B. in *Pamela* (intertextuality), the story of Anderson's origin is the parody of many an 18th-century novel, and of Fanny Burney's *Evelina* in particular (hypertextuality).

Probably, one of the most significant influences on *Rites of Passage* is that of drama. As I noted before, Talbot narrates the incidents of the story in an overtly theatrical way, discussing also the characteristics of the play:

> It is a play. Is it a farce or a tragedy? Does not a tragedy depend on the dignity of the protagonist? Must he not be great to fall greatly? A farce, then, for the man appears now a sort of Punchinello. (*RP* 104)

In agreement with this class-ridden world, Talbot experiences Colley's affair not as a tragedy, but as a farce, due to the parson's low rank. Significantly, the text betrays its self-reflexivity by showing the narrator's awareness of this unorthodox "play": therefore, we could speak of a metatextual relationship of this novel with itself.

A further metatextual relationship can be seen in Talbot's comments on Shakespeare's and Racine's plays, and on the problems of translation. We can note, in passing, that Talbot includes in the last page of his journal a quotation from Racine taken from his godfather's own translation of this author, which constitutes the final instance of intertextuality[5] in the novel. Talbot seems to prefer Shakespeare's tragedies to those of Racine —his

godfather's favourite ones— because while Racine rigidly excludes the comic from his tragedies, Shakespeare freely combines the tragic and the comic in his. In this respect, *Rites of Passage* also reveals its metafictional character, since it mixes the dramatic features of these playwrights. Thus, whereas the circumstances of the parson's fall are tragicomic —"by turns farcical, gross and tragic" (*RP* 276)— like Shakespeare's tragedies, the novel's structure recalls that of Racine's plays, for the most crucial actions of the story take place offstage: Talbot witnesses neither the "Badger Bag" nor Colley's visit to the sailors.[6]

What is more, *Rites of Passage* echoes the tragic structure of other Golding works (*sister-text* relationship) which in turn, originates in classical tragedy (hypertextuality and archtextuality). Significantly, although he has never denied his indebtedness to classical Greek literature, it was not until the publication of this novel that he discussed the structure of his fiction:

> I think of the shape of a novel, when I do think of a novel as having a shape, as having a shape precisely like Greek drama. You have this rise of tension and then the sudden fall and all the rest of it. You may even find the technical Greek terms tucked away in the book, if you like, and check them off one by one. So the Greek tragedy as a form, a classical form, is very much there. The idea of the character who suffers a disastrous fall through a flaw in his character, that you find there, I think. (in Baker 1982: 165)

In addition, Golding has defined *Rites of Passage* as black comedy (in Baker 1982: 164), declarations that corroborate the ambivalent characteristics that Talbot has noted.

If, as Foucault says, "the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut" since "it is only a node within a network" (Hutcheon 1988: 127), this statement is particularly true of *Rites of Passage,* a novel caught up in a system of endless transtextual references, among which those pointing back to 18th- and 19th-century literature and Golding's previous fiction are particularly conspicuous. Thus, *Rites of Passage* contains the typical elements that characterize Golding's works: a fixed and limited setting, the sea surrounding it, tragic structure, a shift in point of view, the scapegoat figure, the protagonist that matures through the experiences —rites— that he undergoes, the related themes of evil, guilt and social class, and, last but not least, the ironic rewriting of previous texts.

In characteristic metafictional style, Talbot sums up the features of *Rites of Passage* by commenting on his journal:

> Wit? Acute observations? Entertainment? Why —it has become, perhaps, some kind of sea-story but 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 defences and heroic attacks! Only one gun fired and that a blunderbuss! (*RP* 277-78)

As he notes, his narrative has little to do with conventional sea novels: in fact, it can be read as an ironic inversion of them. Contrary to this kind of fiction and traditional historical novels, *Rites of Passage* proves to be a complex, postmodernist text in which both history and fiction are rewritten. In accordance with its metafictional character, this novel problematizes the possibility of historical knowledge, and Talbot sounds like a new historicist when he records his awareness of it: "Life is a formless business. . . . Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it" (*RP* 265).

As we have seen, *Rites of Passage* contains the elements that characterize historiographic metafiction: use and abuse of the canon, irony, parody and multiform transtextuality. However, as Umberto Eco (in Hutcheon 1988: 39) has said about his own fiction, this "game of irony" has, despite appearances, a serious aim. Thus, in *Rites of Passage* parody has, apart from the teasing effect, an ideological purpose, for the manipulation of its historical and literary sources functions in such a way as to direct the reader to the moral and social concerns of the novel. a

NOTES

1. His original surname (until 1798) was Wesley. Later, it changed to Wellesley.

2. "[A] promoted peasant," in Golding's words (in Haffenden 1985: 103).

3. On this relationship, see Crompton's *A View from the Spire* (1985: 99, 151, 153).

4. Significantly, the term "colley" echoes "cully," which originally meant "one easily tricked or imposed on: DUPE, GULL." (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary,* 1986: 552).

5. Note that, throughout this paper, the term "intertextuality" is not used in its general sense, but in the concrete, restricted one defined by Genette in *Palimpsestes* and discussed previously in the text.

6. With regard to the theatrical characteristics of *Rites of Passage*, Golding notes: "It had to be theatrical because [Colley] had to make an exhibition of himself, and therefore the ship had to be turned into a theatre in which he could do it" (in Baker 1982: 132).

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