CHAPTER III
"Recesses of Man's Nature"
In *Rites of Passage* Golding has produced a novel which both stuns and stimulates. *Rites of Passage*, is perhaps, the most 'commented-on-tale' of Golding, after *Lord of the Flies*. It is the mark of his perfect authenticity as a novelist, that he could produce the stunning self-exposures of *Rites of Passage*. This is to say that in his inspired discovery of the uses of language, Golding assembles not simply a novel, but an intelligible picture of our personality. This happens because of the intense visual imagination which Golding has. Golding recounts from his childhood: "... I had no doubt that if one frowned long enough at the page it would brighten and come alive. Indeed it did. The words and paper vanished. The picture emerged. Details were there to be heard, seen, touched."\(^1\) Elusive effects of words became subsidiary to vivid, dynamic and detailed imagination. This kind of attitude towards meaning rests in its turn on the whole approach of his books to experience. His genius seems to lie in pushing conceptualization back to the point where it is just experience. That is why, in *Pincher Martin* we read:

"Words and sounds were sometimes visible as shapes ... They did not vibrate and disappear. When they were created they remained as hard enduring things like the pebbles" (p.26).

A picture of life that is rich in significance is what Golding manages to convey in *Rites of Passage*. 
Rites of Passage was enthusiastically received, being more concerned with everyday life, especially that perennially popular activity - the journey by sea. One may unhesitatingly assert that Golding did not restrict his writing to the world of ships and sea-life in this novel. It contains in essence many ideas which Golding has focused upon and which are developed and reiterated in almost all his works. Human experience being the basis on which Golding builds this fictional world, it becomes a journey into the centre of man. At the least, Golding may be said to have established in Rites of Passage - together with his earlier novels - an explanation of his life's chief ambition and procedure: "What man is, whatever man is under the eye of heaven that I burn to know and that ... I would endure knowing." 

Lest, the simple narrative written, according to the conventions of the eighteenth century epistolary novel, be taken at its face value, Golding's own pronouncement on this work at the Booker Prize ceremony is pertinent. He stated that Rites of Passage is about "mercy, the brotherhood of man, the necessity of understanding each other, and the capacity for cruelty which we all have in us." 

Such truths about the nature of man and of moral behaviour cannot be easily stated, they must be perceived by the reader, just as they are perceived by Edmund Talbot, the questioning protagonist, in this novel:
"It seemed as if certain sentences, phrases, situations were brought successively before me - and these, as it were, glowed with a significance that was by turns farcical, gross and tragic" (p.276).

In Golding's world, therefore, "Life ought to be perceptive" (The Pyramid p.148).

Talbot perceives everything in terms of theatricality and the stage. To see things in such terms, impresses on us the sense that, he does not see things realistically, that, he is actually looking at the world through rose-coloured glasses. Indeed, he views the whole journal as "the record of a drama - Colley's drama" (p.264). The real drama of Rites of Passage is a subjective drama. Talbot's error and resolution are, it seems to me, crucial stages on a psychic journey, which forms the very heart of the novel. This journey, is the journey of an uncommitted, undefined self, seeking realization and identity. This is wholly in keeping with Golding's interests. Golding said that he "built the ship up in a sense as a kind of theatre in which the drama could be played out." In view of his growing awareness of the individual nature of all men, Talbot revises his early opinion of the parson Colley, after he has read Colley's own account of the events. He realizes that Colley experienced the events not as "farce" (p.104) but as "tragedy" (p.104) - "tragic trilogy" (p.266). To see Colley simply as "a sort of Punchinello" (p.104) is to simply see what the man appears to be rather than perceiving the tragic reality beneath the appearance. Farce and tragedy are fused in Colley's drama because man's nature consists of both,
the good and the bad. Virtue and vice are balanced in human nature: "the frightful fiend of man's nature treads hard upon the heels of the angels of light." To quote from Talbot's godfather's translation of Racine:

"Lo! where toils virtue up th' Olympian steep -
With like small steps doth Vice t'wards Hades creep." (p. 278).

The true nature of man must be seen in juxtaposition with a need for commitment and resolute decision to realize that, the outward form of man's life is a facade hiding deeper forces that can rise up to destroy him. Only Colley can know the price he paid for "stepping over the edge" of darkness - that last stride over "the threshold of the invisible." He alone took those "small steps" and thrust himself through all the hazy glows and "misty halos" ([Heart of Darkness](p.278)) which conceals from lesser men the complexion and meaning of their lives. It is the tragedy of [Rites of Passage](p.278) that Colley can offer no more efficient struggle against his terrible state than to take recourse in silence. Colley falls from the "heights of complacent austerity to ... the lowest hell of self degradation" (p.278), and finds out "how next to impossible is the exercise of virtue! It requires constant watchfulness, constant guard ... (relies) at every moment on the operation of Grace!" (p.220) because "the power of Grace is infinite" (p.247). The Brocklebanks "the last person to offend the susceptibilities. Custom. Habit" (p.57), can take those "steps" and "survive to attain a deboshed and saturated finality which disgusts everyone but themselves" (p.278).
One way of looking at this novel, therefore, is to see it as a voyage through all the contradictory possibilities man finds within himself, a quest for some form of coherence and consistency. It is from the basic reality of his own vision of life that Golding judges the rest of humanity to be either hopelessly deceived or deliberately blind -

"Life is a formless business... Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it."
(p.265)

Rites of Passage, it must be noted, is a social comedy. William Boyd states that the novel "is a witty and solidly realistic account of life on a sailing ship at the beginning of the last century." It certainly, wryly observes, the warped respectability, the hugely conventional social norms, so as to make us question the viability of a world with the "cruelties and injustices of social stratification." There is also the fusion of the grotesque and the pathetic in the very portrait of Reverend Colley. But this social comedy, is accompanied by a sober vision of man as a moral being and a flawed one at that. In other words, we get a glimpse of Golding's myth of the "varied fabrics of the human tapestry" (p.258) removed from contemporary social and cultural structures. A close examination of the novel amply reveals "the oddities of behaviour, the perplexities of the understanding, in a word, the strangeness of this life in this strange part of the world among strange people and in this strange construction of English Oak which both transports and imprisons"(p.223).
The text is a fiction based on a true 'historical' event of which Golding explains: "There was a case of a convoy moving from India across the Bay of Bengal, there was an unfortunate clergyman who either went naked among the sailors or got drunk and was stripped by the sailors and came back and went into his cabin and never came out ... The man turned his face to the wall and died."\(^9\)

But the idea has perhaps never been so consummately concretized in a work of art as it is in Rites of Passage, where its presence is in all likelihood, almost entirely a product of Golding's life-long preoccupation with the true nature of his fellowmen. In this regard one dares to say that no other novelist could have ever invested so much in his work as Golding habitually does in his.

Safely anchored within society, living a so-called normal civilized life, where restraint has been institutionalized, Golding states that, it is easy to act in a civilized manner. But isolated from the surface routine of organized society, one can succumb to the disintegrative powers within oneself. According to Golding, isolation robs certain men of the 'conscience' of conduct which allows him to survive in a civilized society. When man is at an extremity he becomes aware of a dimension beyond the rational world of cause and effect, a world in which reasonable explanations are no longer applicable: "it was not just that the rules were unknown, but that they were non-existent" (The Pyramid, p.90).
In *Rites of Passage*, Golding sees this destructive potential 'within' as a threat, not only to the individual, but also to the very fabric of society. Most men, like Talbot, spend the greater part of their lives in a world where prudence and practicality are the measurements of what is. The quality of Talbot's vision is faulty, and what he does not see for some time, is that he is looking at life represented, rather than truly lived. Among other things, then, Talbot's error is the result of a radical failure of vision: idealizing too much, he has perceived all too little. He lived exclusively for the world. But to care so totally and uncritically for society is to be absolutely enslaved to mere appearance, never questioning essences or the intrinsic worth of things. It is only when confronted with the naked truth of existence, that one can understand, like the Parson Colley, "things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with the great solitude" (*Heart of Darkness* p.83). Against such a grotesque nightmare as his own contradictory self, the 'social' man within Colley is annihilated. He is overwhelmed by an unknown power, a devil within him, he commits, what Anderson describes as "beastliness" (p.253), with Billy Rogers. It seems that, like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Colley lets the devil, the Beast within him loose. It is a crucial moment in *Rites of Passage* as it reveals the story's grim climax of self-exposures. But, as we have already noted, such peak experiences in Golding's novel, exists in a sort of misty halo or hazy glow. We are
kept in ignorance of the truth of what happened to Colley. Once again, a Golding novel makes us realize how obscure, relative and multivalent truth is. Only Colley can know the price he paid for crossing the white line "into the great unknown part of the ship" (p.109). Seen in this way, his dying presents itself as his purest moment of authenticity and grace. We, like Talbot, cannot understand the whole truth of his act of self-destruction, as we have not looked over the edge of darkness as Colley has. Our knowledge of life must remain "still in the egg" (p.146). Golding increasingly supposes, that a human being, may be more appropriately judged by the quality of his consciousness, than by the propriety of his behaviour. Whatever Colley has done, "the thing is that," as Marlow puts it for Jim, "in virtue of his feeling he mattered." 10 It is not for us to try to interpret Colley's terrible disaster as an evidence of submission or failure. That would be like responding to certain features of the book as to be lured like Talbot into false understanding. That Colley was "a fool and had made a cake of himself was neither here nor there" (p.138). So much as this is never a question in Rites of Passage. The novel takes it as its first assumption, that life is terrible and we can't disagree with Marlow's sense of the world in Heart of Darkness:

"Droll thing life is - that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself - that comes too late - a crop of unextinguishable regrets" (p.100).
Golding does not think that Colley has managed to change all this, that he had made life merciful or congenial to men. He believes, it remarkable, rather, that his own largely empty experience of life, has in some way been "enlarged" that he had managed some form of self-recognition. He perceives the full significance of a "step" which he is about to take. But his experience, has given him such tremendous insight, that he cannot communicate with the bulk of mankind. It is largely the limitations of individual consciousness that Golding is exploring. According to Golding, when self-knowledge or awareness is attained, so is freedom - freedom to know the good and evil. This self-knowledge is ultimately an expression of some sort of belief - a moral victory, paid for by "abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!" (Heart of Darkness p.101). As Paul Tillich perceptively comments: "The act of accepting meaninglessness is in itself a meaningful act. It is an act of faith."11

Although Colley suffered, he died gaining self knowledge. Better his pain and suffering, than Talbott's own docile repose, his own plaintive separation from selfhood and life. Talbot is European enough to suppose that behaviour matters, that what one does has at least something to do with who one is. This precisely makes him a dedicated inhabitant of the world of means. What 'is', is neglected, what 'seems' is paramount. That is why, in his quest for the truth, he cannot fully understand the complex reasons for his act. As he states:
"yet even while I was busy leading up to the events, the further events of his fall raced past me (p.119).

Therefore, we need to question the statement made by Talbot:

"In the not too ample volume of man's knowledge of Man, let this sentence be inserted. Men can die of shame" (p.278).

The reduction of the novel to an end-product of this condition, is as fallacious, as the view that holds Dostoyevsky's work to be solely "the eruptions of an epileptic." If we are accurately to assess Golding's total achievement, we must share individually and totally, both the simultaneous perspective of Talbot and Colley which Golding presents through their letter-journals. Golding thereby creates two vivid characters who are "brought together" through their private confessions. The "rites" of this passage as Golding has stated are the "initiation rites. Talbot is going through a rite of passage, he is 'growing up'. He doesn't realize it because he thinks he's grown up already, but he's not. And poor old Colley fails to make the grade..." The crossing of the white line, as the sailors describe crossing the equator, is symbolic of the plunge into the hidden recesses of the self, and therefore, marks "a crossing into guilt, darkness, death and self-knowledge." The knowledge that they gain is their "rites" (p.37) of passage.

Rites of Passage, as is mentioned earlier, is a social comedy with a difference, dealing with those "unbelievable gradations,"(p.168) in society, as Golding states in the
essay, "The Ladder and the Tree." The influences of the ghastly social structures are starkly displayed in the ship's compartment. Therefore, the ship as a model of a hierarchically structured society, where the people exist in a medium of social discrimination, is particularly appropriate. The quarterdeck above, the gentlemen passengers, the dividing line painted at the mainmast, the lower passengers, the crew—all significantly point to the class structure in society. Dining with the captain is a rare and special privilege and Talbot comments that "such gatherings are customary in packets and company ships and indeed, wherever ladies and gentlemen take a sea voyage" (p.46).

Talbot himself goes on this voyage acquiescing to his godfather's desire that he should further his career. The ship is bound for Australia where he is to take up his new assignment as the Secretary to the Governor-General. He therefore, occupies a position at the top of the social chain and regards these 'gradations', as necessary, natural and justified. His 'ambition' being 'boundless' (p.10), he proposed to "form an acquaintance with the better sort of officer if there be any"(p.9). He behaves with an insensitive arrogance that he imagines his social position allows. His manipulativeness arises mainly from his social position. The evil of manipulation is, as we have noticed, a major motif in Golding's fiction. Though it proceeds from varied and complex motives, it is finally an aspect of moral evil. There is a qualitative difference in the types of
manipulation in the novels. Talbot's, like Jocelin's, is inevitably the product of a powerful vision. Talbot is keen on preserving illusions, particularly the illusion that civilization is a benefit to man, though it is plain that most of its benefits are given only to people of his elevated station or class. Talbot makes arrangement for a service to be held only because he felt "the brooding captain should not dictate" (p.63) to him. In fact, the reason why he attended the service was because as he states "I do not choose to submit to tyranny" (p.70). He notes with pleasure how the mere mention of his godfather's name tames the Captain:

"What a silver-mounted and murdering piece of ordnance a noble name was proving to be among persons of a middle station"(p.31).

All his actions spring from the ideal conception he has of himself as the most well-born and well-educated person on the ship. He even shows off by speaking Greek to a midshipman.

It may be noticed that there is a striking resemblance between Golding's presentation of the civilized hypocrisy of Talbot and the existentialist term for that state of being as "bad-faith", being self-deceived; the deception being derived from accepting pre-given roles in which to present oneself to others. Golding denounces the false sense of security of such men, who believe in their superficial lives and thereby eludes the fundamental problems of existence. But Golding also holds the belief, that man has the capacity to transcend himself, turn to his inner self to comprehend life's significances and thus find a richer, meaningful existence.
Talbot scarcely permits conversation without perpetual overtones and intimations of authority. This veil of arrogance seals off real contact with his fellow travellers who share the voyage. In particular, his contempt is reserved for the parson Colley "a fledgling of the church" (p.67), who has stepped out of his station without any merit to support the elevation, and who is a "living proof of old Aristotle's dictum" (p.67), that man belongs by nature to a particular place in the social hierarchy. There are innumerable instances of his snobbery and class consciousness. In fact, the opening section of the novel presents the civilized ethos of Talbot - a feeling of unquestionable superiority. In his self-absorption, he fails to comprehend the feelings of Colley. He felt that Colley's friendliness towards him was the natural longing of the social climber. His perception at this point, is blinded to all, but what is explicable in rational terms. Like Jocelin, he is singularly imperceptive and we are warned of this fact as he fails to recognize that the "unfortunate character" (p.275) being criticized by two of the passengers is himself. Furthermore, he is complacent about the world he belongs to. "Complacency" being "next door to civilization" (p.60), he agreed with Lieutenant Deverel that, "there were few problems in society that would not yield to firm but perceptive government" (p.52). He is a man who lives for the image he presents to others. Since he feared that his reputation would be damaged, he even came up with a "hare-brained scheme" (p.120) to dump Zenobia on Colley if she
became pregnant after their loveless copulation. Soon after making love to her, Talbot "wished nothing so much as that she would vanish like a soap bubble or anything evanescent" (p.88). All his actions spring from his consciousness of the responsibility to live up to his reputation, that is why, he was "more concerned with what Wheeler may discover and pass on to his fellows than considerations of a kind of methodistical moralism!" (p.93). To his credit, however, Talbot realizes the folly of his ego-centered existence and is receptive to the lessons of experience. The events revealed in Colley's journal show him, how incomplete a man is when confronted with a crisis:

"I sat before this journal, upbraiding myself for my folly in my attempt to play the politician and manipulator of his fellowmen!" (p.146)

The diary shows him truths he has not earlier imagined. In fact he saw "such concepts as "duty", "privilege" and "authority" in a new light. They moved out of books, out of the schoolroom and university into the broader scenes of daily life. Indeed, 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." (p.38)

Talbot gradually learns that these social systems are artificial structures imposed on man and can therefore disintegrate with the "least confusion." The appearance of gentility was more important to him than human worth, that is why he felt more drawn to Deverel "the most gentlemanlike
officer" (p.47) and "an ornament to the service" (p.53). It was "a misjudgment on (his) part to esteem him" (p.268) and he eventually acknowledges the fact, when he states that Devereal "perhaps, illustrates the last decline of a noble family as Mr. Summers might illustrate the original of one!" (p.268). The letter further revealed the part Devereal played in victimising Colley in the traditional crossing-the-equator ritual, also termed as "Badger Bag" (p.79). His action was partly inspired by petty revenge since Colley had interrupted the officer as he fought with Cumbershum over Zenobia's letter. In fact, Talbot realised that his own absurd "half formed intention" was "so like Devereal's jest I came near to detesting myself" (p.269). Now that he is beginning to find out about the "overwhelming realities" (Heart of Darkness p.48) to which he has opened himself, he no longer embraces mere "surface truth" (Heart of Darkness p.30), but probes beneath the mere incidents of the surface, to discover who he is and what life is like. His voyage of discovery begins with his crucial but frank question:

"Here was I, who considered myself an honourable and responsible man, contemplating an action which was not merely criminal but despicable! How did that come about?" (p.102)

This, for Talbot and for us, is a crucial question. However, when he reconstructs Colley's drama, he is shocked by the "overwhelming realities" (Heart of Darkness p.48). He had not earlier supposed that extremes of existence could be so severe as this, nor had he guessed, at least in a conscious
way, that he was so unparticular a self, so nearly unactual a creature. Talbot had, it may be noted, all along laid emphasis on intelligence and intellect rather than sensibility and feeling. But after he gets a glimpse of the dark truth about human nature, he realizes the primacy of experience over intellectual analysis:

"Something more there must be, some distillation of experience, before a man can judge the outcome in circumstances of such quantity, proliferation and confusion" (p.146).

Talbot experiences a blow to all his preconceptions about order in his meeting with Summers "the person of all in this ship who does His Majesty's Service the most credit" (p.124). Summers played the role of the accuser making Talbot aware of his guilty role in Colley's persecution. When Talbot thoughtlessly invaded the Captain's quarterdeck, he was grateful to see Anderson swallow his anger at the mention of Talbot's influential godfather. Anderson, however, took out his temper on the defenceless Colley, whom he detested and made no secret of it. He allowed Colley to be chosen as a victim for the "badger bag" (79) rituals. As Summers points out:

"Had you not in a bold and thoughtless way outfaced our captain on his own quarterdeck ... he would never ... have crushed Colley with his anger and continued to humiliate him because he could not humiliate you" (p.134).

It is however impossible to point an accusing finger at anyone for what occurs on the voyage. Apparently, as Colley himself
asserts, he was nobody's tool or scapegoat. But, it is precisely the obscure and muffled nature which makes his tragedy more ironic and also more terrible. For the type of deception practised by Anderson and the manipulation of the situation by him is all the more difficult to perceive, in that social appearance and forms are scrupulously maintained. As we shall see that Colley's situation is a "boundary situation" of which Karl Jaspers, an existentialist writer speaks of; explaining that it is a situation one can neither plan nor escape, one can just struggle with it, and in the end be shattered by it. Talbot learns about his responsibilities and begins to "take the only way towards justice - natural justice ... rather than that of the Captain or the law courts" (p.183). He thereby rejects the emphasis on rationality, and moves along an inward path towards rebirth, as a more caring, sympathizing and perceptive being. He manages to be joined with that half of himself he had denied and attempted to kill with his rationalistic outlook. He reflects upon himself and life, and tries to know the conditions of his existence. A form of wholeness is achieved as he loses his complacency and gains in compassion. However, the spiritual world finds no home in Talbot, which means that he remains incomplete. What he derives from his encounter with Colley's spiritual letter addressed to his God, remains obscure. Colley's letter begins in mid-sentence:

"... so I have drawn a veil over what have been the most trying and unedifying of my experiences" (p.186).
It does not present the whole truth, thus showing that the meaning of our 'experience' is finally unfathomable. Talbot visits Colley at Summers' plea, to try and persuade him to return to the life of the ship, but to no avail. He cannot save Colley and the ship remains "a Godless vessel" (p.227). Spiritually Talbot is still empty and realizes that he must live in a world of the "bitumen of blood and the smoke of tears." Talbot gradually recovers from the effect of reading Colley's letter. After all, as he states:

"A man cannot be forever brooding on what is past nor on the tenuous connection between his own unwitting conduct and someone else's deliberately criminal behaviour" (p.259).

It comes as a moral shock to us, then that Talbot responds to this often postponed crisis of consciousness, by still overestimating so radically, the authority of his hollow principles. Once again he has shied from reality to preserve a 'surface-truth' (Heart of Darkness p.30). He seems conspicuously unrepentant. This does not mean that his interior voyage has not been worthwhile. The nature of success and failure in human terms remain highly questionable. Talbot is simply more particularized at the end of this novel than before his voyage, but he is no more effective morally, and certainly he is less happy. His 'enlargements' yield him greater insight into the nature of man than before. Talbot has understood simply that Colley had broadened the range of human life, that, if he made an exhibition of himself, he had forced life to expand to the pressures of the self, against
the indifference of the universe and all the insipidity of men. We hear no nonsense about repudiation or repentance, for Golding's protagonists regret nothing about their conduct.

It is appropriate that after his confession and guilt -

"I might have saved him had I thought less of my own consequence and less of the danger of being bored!" (p.185)

- Talbot inserts Colley's letter into his journal, thus allowing the spiritual to come into contact with the material. He is delivered into a world changed to his perception but which is in reality unchangeable. Golding leaves us in doubt as to whether it is possible for any man to achieve complete wholeness.

Talbot's journal is very limited compared to Colley's perceptive journal. Talbot liked to "expatiate free o'er all this scene of man", but the wider world of nature leaves him cold: "I am so accustomed to the sight that I do not see it" (p.142). He regards nature from a peculiarly shallow perspective, whereas Colley regards nature with awe and marvels at the ship. According to Talbot, "only when the sun is high does the sea seem to lack that indefinable air of Painted Art which we are able to observe at sunrise and sunset." (p.142). He regards the ship as an explicable means working towards a desired end, comparable to Politics: "I found the ship and the sea comprehensible not merely in terms of her mechanical ingenuity but as a - a what? As a steed, a conveyance, a means working to an end" (p.16).
Though ill with sea-sickness, Colley, a man of feeling declares:

"how remiss I have been to repine at my lot! It is an earthly nay, an oceanic paradise! The sunlight is warm and like a natural benediction" (p.187).

The redemptive power of God and nature are invoked by Colley in his description of a thunder storm and a strange white mist that hangs round the ship. He perceives things in depth and questions about appearance and reality which are related to the truth of things. He wonders:

"How then can water added to water produce an opacity? What impediment to the vision can colourlessness and transparency spread before us? ... Yet here, what was glittering and black at night ... now began ... to turn blue and green under the sun that at last broke through the vapour!" (pp.196-197).

Attempting to probe beneath the surface truth, he notes "how the sailors make rope look like wood and can carve wood so that it looks like rope" (p.213). He even apprehends the harmony of the universe in a single vision, just before the baiting, which mysteriously warns him just as his servant Phillips had tried to do, that during the event, both he and his religion would be weighed in the balance of those "scales" (p.233) of God and would be found wanting:

"I began to understand. I began to tremble. I was alone! Yes, in that vast ship with her numberless souls I was alone in a place where on a sudden I feared the Justice of God unmitigated by his Mercy! On a sudden I dreaded both God and man!" (pp.233-234).
Golding holds the conviction that man's anguish is due to the original sin of his fall from grace. Man is, no doubt, a part of the universe, but he is alone in it. In his description of the ship as "motionless" (p.233) the balance between "sun and moon" (p.233) as symbols of "God's justice and His mercy" (p.234) we are shown the true nature of man and God in juxtaposition. As Colley states:

"What has remained with me apart from a lively memory of my apprehensions is ... a sense of His Awfulness and a sense of the majesty of His creation ... a sense of the splendour of our vessel rather than her triviality and minuteness" (p.191).

Golding had no intention either to show us or to preach to us what was right or wrong. What he does express through all his works, is that, right and wrong, good and evil co-exist, both being irrevocable factors of life. It comes as a moral shock to us that Colley wanted not only to be "a man of God", but to be "seen to be a man of God" (p.226) in his "adornments of the Spiritual Man" (p.225). He naturally assumed that since "people ... judge a man by his uniform" (p.225), so they would "recognise that raiment ... and respect it" (p.245). But "the uniform does not make the man" (p.154) and events prove to him that he has wrongly laid emphasis on outward observance of rites and canonicals, thereby, obscuring the dark centre within or the well inside. Both his and Talbot's tales show how formal religion can, in the name of order, mislead one as much as any other outward systems adopted by man.
Colley has had, no doubt, "a momentary contact with reality" (Heart of Darkness p.61), but these "certainties of the Great Truths of the Christian religion" (p.241) is quickly dissipated by his experience of the absurd in the rituals of the 'badger bag' (p.79).

Unlike Talbot, not social heirarchy but community is the ideal for Colley:

"a man (even if he makes the fullest use of the consolations of religion that are available to his individual nature), that a man, I say, requires human companionship" (p.193).

Search for security is basic to human nature. Like Hobbes, Golding too, advances an argument about our instinctive insecurity. Colley like Simon, occasionally breaks away from the group to go off on his own, but when he does so, like Simon he tries to think not just about the universe but also about people. His social sense never lapses. "Long live illusion". That is what society has provided mankind "with all the other benefits of civilization" (p.123). Golding celebrates the inviolable, sacred independence of the human mind to seek truth. Golding had commented once that "any great spiritual deed in human history has come through the mind of man." 20 The final requisite for success in the quest for truth, is to be able to "see without any disguise what happened." Colley perceptively comments:

"There is much health in that phrase what happened. To clear away the, as it were, undergrowth of my own ... indignation, clears a path by which I have come to exercise a proper judgement" (pp.239-240).
Apart from reference to Christian ceremonies that accompany important human events, the word 'rite' (p.37) is also used to refer to the Captain's "Standing Orders" (p.201) in which are inscribed all the rites, practices and taboos relating to ship procedures. It is Colley's misfortune not to understand or heed such orders, and thereby to become "an object to be humiliated." (p.202). His social sense is so strong that he has "tears of shame" (p.203) after being publicly rebuked by Anderson. He states with feeling:

"On shore a man is punished at the last by the Crown. At sea the man is punished by the Captain who is visibly present as the Crown is not. At sea a person's manhood suffers. It is a kind of contest - is that not strange?" (p.203)

_Rites of Passage_ examines the central mystery of what actually occurred in the fo'castle which resulted in Colley's death. An occurrence which in turn affects Talbot and allows him to "pierce the mist so complacent, so self-satisfied" (p.158). The rites which are usually observed in a jovial spirit turn out to be most cruel and brutal: "It was horseplay and insolence at liberty in the fo'castle" (p.113). The report that Colley had written about the event where he is brought before the pagan god Neptune to be judged, condemned and punished, is a mirror of the moral deterioration of mankind. Golding presents the primary, unadorned realities of existence, in describing the lack of restraint displayed by people. The predominance of emotion in the absence of self-control is a principal theme treated by Golding in all his
works. According to Golding, human beings have repudiated traditional checks on human nature without acquiring self-control and therefore the rise of unleashed madness, whenever the thin, dangerously fragile veneer provided by civilization crack. Whenever that happens man becomes one with the beasts again, falling back into the slime of the primeval abyss he prided himself on having climbed up from. And we too can question like Conrad's narrator in *Heart of Darkness*: "And why not? - the mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future" (p.52).

It seemed to Colley that he had entered the gloomy circle of some inferno, an unnatural and absurd world, where men had become inhuman. Even in such a situation his "fear is swallowed up in shame at appearing before the ladies and gentlemen, not to refine upon it half-naked" (p.237). What appalls him is, as he comments:

"What I felt more nearly was the opinion of the ladies and gentlemen in regard to me" (p.240).

He is still living in an illusory world since he states:

"It could not be so, of course. They were, it may be, hot with the devil's brew-they were led astray - it could not be so!" (pp.237-238).

But as he is eventually thrown with extreme violence into the paunch of filthy water, he gets to see

"more of what was strange and terrible to (him) ... I had not harmed them. They had had their sport, their will with me ... nothing that men could do to each other can be compared with that snarling, lustful, storming appetite" (p.238).
The incident gives us an intensified awareness of how for Golding, the kingdom of Heaven and Hell is ultimately, experience stripped of illusion. There is no doubt that at this point, Colley is "more sinned against than sinning." (p.240). It was not the indignity during which Colley was bathed in ordure, that led him to hold fast the 'ringbolt' (p.127) and will himself to death. For he rightly states: "what a man does defiles him, not what is done by others." (p.235). He falls not because of Talbot's or "someone else's deliberate criminal behaviour" (p.259) or because he failed to observe the rituals of social class, but because of the division within the human psyche. He failed to unite the antagonistic elements within his self - the sensual and the spiritual. He had initially concealed from himself his true interest in Billy Rogers "a narrow waisted, slim-hipped yet broad-shouldered Child of Neptune" (p.216). He considered him as his "Young Hero ... whose boyish heart has not yet been touched with Grace." (p.227). He "yearned to kneel before him. My whole heart went out in a passionate longing to bring this young man to Our Saviour, first and surely richest fruit of the harvest I am sent forth to garner!" (p.218).

Ill-at-ease and lonely in the voyage, abandoned both by Talbot and the Captain, Colley was tempted with the very "devil's brew" (p.216) which he wanted to prohibit from use. It awakened in him the desires he hardly knew he possessed. He got "drunk as the butcher's boots" (p.113) when he went among the crew "to deliver a rebuke" (p.241) for the
"insult... to (his) cloth and through it to the... Master Himself." (p.240). He even openly urinated in front of the passengers and crew and sang lewd songs which might "be heard in an alehouse" (p.115). The "Spiritual Man" (p.237) as he returns looks "like some pigmy Polyphemus, like whatever is at once strange and disgusting" (p.116). Separated from human solidarity, he cannot escape, and staggers under the weight of his secret knowledge of the mystery of the universe, and the shocking peccancy of the human mind, especially his own. What was frightening about the whole incident was, perhaps, what Talbot saw and heard. He had seen the Parson emerge from the fo’castle "in a state of extreme and sunny enjoyment." He had heard him cry: "Joy! Joy! Joy!" (p.117) and walk "head up and with a smile as if already in heaven" (p.184). Whatever had happened in the fo’castle to destroy him, Colley had paradoxically found it joyous. Golding has given us, if only by way of hints and guesses, a sexual explanation for Colley’s behaviour. For Colley, "Joy was the power to make the universe anew, and when that was desecrated, then the universe turned into something monstrous." The shame of his public denial of everything he hoped to be had broken his heart. He becomes conscious of his degradation. Colley discovers what he truly is and that experience is joyous, a liberation; but his true nature is something which both his society and his sober self rejects as vile. For, having broken the taboo, he passes judgement upon and punishes himself with death. The shock of the sudden, overpowering manifestation of what was repressed
in him is too great for recovery. No doubt, the awareness of the dichotomy within himself throws him into an abyss of despair. But it is not 'what happened' (p.239) which destroys his life. Colley cannot be easily categorized since he exists for us, and indeed for himself, more inwardly. He does not see the world, so much as sees through it. We are left looking at a hand clutching a ringbolt as he wills himself to die. He becomes almost literally paralysed. With his limited understanding of the complexities of self, he turns his back on the real world. The horror of the truth about himself puts him in a state of 'non-existence'. It is a "horror of bewildered life where he could understand nothing and nobody around him, where he could guide, control, comprehend nothing and no one - not even himself." 22

Language gives way to "uninterpretable gesture", 23 that mysterious kind of "knowing": "I perceived without seeing - I knew, but had no real means of knowing" (p.156). The mystery that attends his death, if it is to be expressed at all, perhaps, can be done through the shrill sound of the "... bosun's Pipe" (p.262) which accompanies Colley's dead body.

"Their very harsh and shrill unmusicality ... seemed to voice something beyond words, religion, philosophy. It was the simple voice of Life mourning Death" (p.262)

- a voice beyond language and explanation.
The novel ends with an inquiry, a public necessity for an explanation of Colley's death. Talbot's decision to hold a court of enquiry to examine Colley's case and to identify responsibility is ostensibly a social duty. But the feeling of guilt, through Colley's letter, forces him to probe his own values and those of the society in which he lives. We are appalled at the civilized hypocrisy involved in the court enquiry. The thought of a heritage in common with the savages stuns them with "a kind of convulsion of the understanding." Talbot states: "I do not know that I thought anything at all for minutes together" (p.251). The inability to imagine evil as a part of human nature, is a consequence of the optimistic picture of civilized human beings. As Golding maintains, "We suffer from a dangerous pride in our ant-like persistence in building a pyramid of information. It is entertaining information for the most part, but it does not answer any of the questions... We discount the possibility of the potentialities of the human spirit which may operate by other means in other modes to other ends" (Hot Gates p.81). Attention needs to be drawn away from such consoling dreams that "this is a happy ship" (p.250) towards the real "impenetrable human person" or that it was a "Godless vessel" (p.227).

Verdicts are sought where Talbot blames Colley's own nature. Summer favours an equivocal explanation 'Intemperance' (p.250). Billy Rogers throws the suspicion on the officers of the ship "criminal (and indecent) assault"
But by this time we are aware that no simple explanation is possible. Significantly therefore, the court inquiry brings no satisfactory results, a conscious lie is accepted as the official truth - "a low fever" (p.257).

The inconclusiveness of the court scene speaks of the ambiguity of life itself. The court inquiry simply makes it possible, perhaps, to see the sketch of what might have happened, bringing no significant result because "theory is a cold and lying tombstone of departed truth."25

Till the end, Talbot accepts one defined point of view as constituting the truth. He works out the facts about Colley's "fellatio" (p.277) from the meagre clues given by the gossipy Granham and Prettiman and their cryptic remarks. He thinks that when "pitiable, clownish Colley" (p.276) was "forced back towards his own kind" (p.277) he "made an equatorial fool" (p.277) of himself and "overcome by kindness and a gill or two of the intoxicant" (p.277), "infatuated with the king of my island" (p.276) "committed the fellatio" (p.277). "What a thing he stumbled over in himself." (p.278). Talbot places the blame much too squarely on Colley's shoulders and is lured into false understanding. To isolate Colley in this way, is to neglect the human nature all men share. It was Colley's error in thinking that life could be lived as pure spirit in contempt of things. In the appearance of living for the spirit in disregard of the material, he has in fact spiritualized the material - a typical modern malaise. Colley
died betrayed - whether by the evil in himself or by the circumstances beyond his control - Golding does not say.

When we reach a 'truth' at the end of the novel, we discover that we must accept it in an ironical light. All we can do is exclaim with Goodchild, a character in *Darkness Visible*:

"No one will ever know what happened. There's two much of it, too many people, a sprawling series of events that break apart under their own weight" (p.258).

Talbot has taken little heed of Brocklebank's discourse on the relationship between art and reality. The lithographer, skilled in reproducing the visual surface, can catch this 'reality' in his paintings, to perfection. But death is always hidden and alone. In reality "Lord Nelson died down below in some stinking part of the bilges," but "who... is going to make a picture of that" (p.169). Instead, a lithograph portrayed the "happy occasion "by depicting his expiry "on deck" with a "crowd of young officers ... kneeling round Lord Nelson in attitudes of sorrow and devotion" (p.169). Thus, the interplay between appearance and reality illustrates the great problems posed by the concept of truth. Therefore, too, the judgement on Colley passed by *Rites of Passage*, cannot be easily summarized, since Golding is concerned with the inner truth of experience. The act of narrating, of shaping the facts into a story, is one which necessarily distorts the truth, as Talbot hints in reporting with disappointment that he has failed to spin out the story.
so that it neatly fits the journal his Godfather has given him.

"All was of no avail. His was a real life and a real death and no more to be fitted into a given book than a misshapen foot into a given boot" (p. 264).

Talbot's narration or any narrative is a framework or net by which we may make some sense of what went on, but, once again, it does not "catch the ocean upon which it is cast."26 Although we are given hints as to what might have happened to the parson - his self-degradation and the anguish it has entailed is only hinted at. Although his act of self-destruction appears a pointless gesture, perhaps, Golding seems to suggest through this obscurity, that, so long as the emphasis is on the outward observance of rituals and not on the spirit, there can be no real understanding of the concept of truth. Unlike Matty in Darkness Visible, and the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Colley fails to embrace his fate. Perhaps, as M.H.Goldwyn asserts, "they perish from moral exhaustion, but, they manage at the end to achieve a kind of moral victory."27 The 'epiphany' in Rites of Passage is therefore one of existential despair. All Colley managed to achieve, is knowledge of the presence of the irrational in man. There can at best be a supreme serenity of indifference to this inescapable fact of guilt and suffering like Colley's. What the world needs, however, is a "Matty-like concern, a concern for the good of all, a reaffirmation of faith in the principle of Grace."28 But Talbot like Conrad's Marlow, goes back to being himself. His intention to
keep back the facts of Colley’s tragedy from his sister reminds one of Marlow’s lie to Kurtz “intended” (p.104) in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. In his habitual way, Talbot protests that to disclose the brutal truth about Colley, about human life, surely would have been “too - dark - too dark altogether” (p.111). Talbot takes cover in a lie, in an illusion, for the reality of existence is too menacing, too dangerous - “all that is monstrous under the sun and moon” (p.278). He fulfills his responsibility towards Colley and in telling a lie, he affirms those very simple ideas which give significance to human existence. The epigraph which Conrad chose for his novel Youth confirms this:

"... but the Dwarf answered
No - Something human is dearer
    to me than the wealth of all the world."

The characters still want to exalt what they take to be the protective powers of civilization against the unfixed powers of the human personality and of the natural order which governs the personality. Colley’s experience, however, will live on in Talbot, and in many others who seek to discover a potential hell in the hearts of all men. Perhaps, like Colley and Talbot “man’s intelligence and his passion” will be “swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith,” but the attempt at self-awareness must carry on since our knowledge of life is “still in the egg” (p.146). This world may be a hell, but perhaps the hell which we see for all its horror and ugliness is only a part of a whole which is quite unimaginable and is maybe - I hope it
is - a world filled with goodness, beauty and truth! Through this novel Golding brings his art to bear upon the 'evil' he perceives in human nature. He shows us that "beneath the surface of our accomplished rationality there is a seething cauldron of untamed desire."\(^{30}\)

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9. Golding on the South Bank Show, as quoted by Philip Redpath p. 75.


17. See Alexander Pope, Essay on Man, *Alexander Pope’s*

"...if each system in gradation roll...
The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the whole must fall."

18. Quoted by Suman Bala, A Study in Existential Humanism, p. 207.


