



Eco, Golding's *Rites of Passage* and Breaching the Limits of Being

Eco, Golding'in Geçiş Ayinleri ve Varoluşun Sınırlarını Aşmak

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Abstract

William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage* (1980) explores the depths of human experience, absorbed in and struggling against the cognitive, ontological and referential limits inherent in its essence. By portraying Edmund Talbot and James Colley on an equator-crossing voyage to Australia, Golding emphasizes the fact that it is darkness that lies beyond the lines that systemize and limit human existence, which is manifested by Colley's death. In this way, *Rites of Passage* comports with Umberto Eco's theory of 'contractual realism', elaborated in *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition* (1999), in a sense that it asserts that within a framework of a cultural contract, there are certain things that we as human beings are vetoed from doing in our inquiry after the essence of Being. This article provides a thematic examination of William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage* in the light of Umberto Eco's theory of 'contractual realism'.

Keywords: Umberto Eco, William Golding, contractual realism, being, truth, limit

Makale Türü: Review

Öz

William Golding'in *Geçiş Ayinleri* (1980) adlı romanı, bilişsel, ontolojik ve göndergesel sınırlarla çevrilmiş ve bunlarla mücadele eden insanlık deneyiminin derinliklerini keşfetmektedir. Edmund Talbot'u ve James Colley'i Avustralya'ya bir ekvator geçiş yolculuğunda tasvir ederek, Golding, Colley'in ölümünün tezahür ettiği insan varoluşunu sınırlandıran ve sınırlayan çizgilerin ötesinde yatan karanlığın olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Böylelikle, *Geçiş Ayinleri* adlı romanı, Umberto Eco'nun "sözleşmesel gerçekçilik" teorisi üzerine yazıldığı *Kant ve Ornitorenk: Dil ve Biliş Hakkında Denemeler* (1999) adlı eser ile bağdaşmaktadır ve bir kültürel sözleşme çerçevesinde varlığın özünü sorgulayan insanoğlunun bazı şeyleri yapmaya yasaklandığı iddia etmektedir. Bu makale, Umberto Eco'nun "sözleşmesel gerçekçilik" teorisi ışığında William Golding'in *Geçiş Ayinleri* adlı romanının tematik bir incelemesini sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimer: Umberto Eco, William Golding, sözleşmesel gerçekçilik, varoluş, hakikat, sınır

Makale Türü: Derleme

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Introduction and Theoretical Premises

Umberto Eco (1932-2016), an Italian scholar and an educator, a philosopher and a historian, a literary critic and a novelist, is better known to the common reader for his literary works (*The Name of the Rose* (1980) being one the most vivid examples), than for his scholarly writings. Nevertheless, as a man of unrivaled intellect dealing with problems of transmission and reception, relations between being and cognition, meaning and interpretation, “he placed under the sign of philosophy the vast semiotic theory that interlaces most of his oeuvres” (Stancati, 2017: 1). Indeed, with the publication of *A Theory of Semiotics* (1975), followed by *The Role of the Reader : Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (1979), *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984), *The Limits of Interpretation (Advances in Semiotics)* (1990) and *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition* (1999), Eco claimed that semiotics, which analyses signs and what they refer to in the world, “is quite literally the only legitimate form of philosophy today since it is the only one to have kept the relations between mind and reality intact” (Pacitti, 1999: 33), while conventional forms of philosophy seem to be mostly preoccupied with “technical questions concerning the logical consequences of true statements” (Pacitti, 1999: 1). Thus, Eco positioned semiotics as an equal of philosophy, envisioning it not as a branch of linguistics, but as a “theory and analysis of culture in all its forms, nuances, and degrees, be it literature, art, advertisements, comic strips, television, sports, humor and music” (Stancati, 2017: 2).

Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition (1999) serves as a symbolic culmination of Eco's life-long quest to determine the way signs are engendered. As Eco (1999) admits, “these essays spring from my feeling of not having honored certain debts incurred when I published *A Theory of Semiotics* in 1976; the debts concerned the problems of reference, iconism, truth, [and] perception” (2). Though the scholar humbly admits that

“out of prudence I decided to shift from the architecture of gardens to gardening, so instead of designing a Versailles, I limited myself to digging over some flower beds barely connected by beaten earth paths – and this with a lingering suspicion that all around there was still a romantic park in the English manner” (Eco, 1999: 4).

Eco succeeds to delineate the connection between ontology, signification and cognition by elaborating the concept of ‘contractual realism’, which postulates that we talk about an object (be it a familiar or a completely novel one) due to the fact that it exists in reality and according to the contract between “cultural interpretations and the limitations posed by the continuum of experience” (Di Martino, 2012: 201) - the “grain that bites our cognitive types” (Eco, 1999: 274). The contract acts as a categorical system, which allows us to interpret and define the object, and “can be continually adjusted in the light of new information” (Pacitti, 1999: 1). However, “there are certain restrictions in reality that veto inappropriate interpretations” (Pacitti, 1999: 1) and definitions constructed within the framework of a contract. As Eco (1999) puts it, “I try to temper an eminently “cultural” view of semiotic process with the fact that, whatever the weight of our cultural systems, there is something in our existence that sets a limit on our interpretations” (5). Hence, the multitude of various elucidations of Being have to comply with the “lines of resistance” (Eco, 1999: 40) to faulty and inadequate thinking. Eco thinks that this resistance is the manifestation of Being, which allows us to “aspire to absolute freedom by being conscious of its limits” (Caesar, 2013: 171). Though Eco seeks “to put these limits in a positive light, there are also darker notes” (Caesar, 2013: 172) embedded in contractual realism:

The problem is that it is not the case that if God did not exist then everything would be possible. Even before God, being comes towards us saying certain ‘Noes’, which is none other than the affirmation that there are certain things that we as human beings cannot say. We experience as Resistance this deep and hidden caution which exposes our every inquiry after truth and our every claim to freedom to continual risk, including the risk of evil (Eco, 1999: 391).

It is this “risk of evil” (Eco 1999, 391), encountered in the attempt to breach ontological limits and to grasp the truth of existence by shaking the contractual tenets established by the culture, that permeates William Golding’s *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (1991) in general, and its first novel *Rites of Passage* (1980) in particular.

The fiction of William Golding (1911-1993) is somber, complex and “can appeal in ways that are simpler than the complexities it reveals” (Gindin, 1988: 7). *Rites of Passage* is no exception, as it explores the dirt and depths of human experience, totally immersed in and struggling against the cognitive, ontological and referential limits inherent in cultural contracts and Being itself. The novel emphasizes the fact that “what is important about human beings goes beyond any social system or construction that can be articulated by or reflected in literary form” (Gindin, 1988: 74). However, any attempt to breach the limits in order to catch a glimpse of Being in all its grandeur results in the untimely demise of major characters, as it happens to the feeble parson Robert James Colley, who dies of shame at the end of the novel.

Rites of Passage is written in the form of a journal, containing a first-person narrative account of Edmund Talbot’s adventures during his sea voyage to Australia to be appointed as a British colonial commissioner through the efforts of his aristocratic godfather. As the novel develops, Talbot’s entries in the journal give way to a long letter from Colley with a different version of the events on board, which is read after his death, and to Talbot’s subsequent decision to engage in one more letter-writing, this time to explain the reasons of Colley’s death to his sister. The novel portrays Talbot’s “maturation away from a rather stiff Augustan rationalism and classicism into an appreciation of a more romantic, irrational forces at work in the world” (Crawford, 2002: 193), made possible by Colley’s death by shame as a result of the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79) ceremony, where he was victimized and submitted to buggery and fellatio, as a symbolic punishment for an attempt to ascertain his self by breaking the limits set by culture. Colley’s demise “undermined the religious authority invested in him, interrogated Talbot’s [gentlemaness], and exposed a seething pit of class bigotry and hypocrisy in the English class system” (Crawford, 2002: 193). As a consequence, Colley’s destiny echoes Eco’s theory of contractual realism in a way that it affirms that there are certain things that we as human beings cannot do in our inquiry after the essence of Being and one’s inner self, which is always concealed in the infiniteness of ever-evolving cultural contracts.

Language is one of the major manifestations of an Ecoian contract based on the counterbalance of two antinomic strives: to interpret Being in all its grandeur and to guard it from direct cognition and false interpretation. According to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (2016) “without words Being is neither is, nor is not” (55). Language sets the limits on what we can say and infer about Being, restricting the knowledge of Being *per se*. Hence, according to Eco (1999), Being “manifests itself right from the outset as an effect of language” (22). We cannot talk about Being, if not in reference to us, because it arouses interpretation, “the moment we can speak of it, it is already interpreted” (Eco, 1999: 22). As a consequence, humans are born into the universe of human-made definitions, which is impossible to escape. As Aubenque (1962) observed, “not only can we say nothing about Being, but Being tells us nothing about those things we attribute it to” (232). Hence, pure Being, or Being devoid of language, stands for pure nothingness, as “without speech there is no more entity: as the entity flees, there arises the nonentity, in other words, nothingness” (Eco, 1999: 27).

The “*furor scribendi*” (Golding, 1980: 45), or the act of writing, narrating and organizing the facts into a story by means of language, forms the basis of *Rites of Passage*. The novel is permeated with instances of writing and linguistic exercise, be it journals, letters, references to or citations from literary works, all used with one aim of rendering the truth about the sea voyage to Australia. “Tell all, my boy! Hold nothing back!” (Golding, 1980: 11), were the strict directives given to Talbot by his godfather at the beginning of the novel. Nevertheless, the instructions prove impossible to carry out, as the very act of narrating and writing a story is “itself an act of interpretation and necessarily a biased one at that, which necessarily distorts the truth” (Boyd,

1990: 159). Talbot's journal and Colley's letter serve only as an outline which helps the reader to make sense of what happened on board, but it "does not catch the ocean upon which it is cast" (Boyd, 1990: 159). Indeed, towards the end of the novel Talbot admits with discontent that he failed to give an objective account of Colley's demise: "All was to 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" (Golding, 1980: 264). Thus, Golding's consideration that literature and writing in their various forms only "feebly and partially represent the condition of human being" (Gindin, 1988: 80) coincides with Eco's theory of contractual realism, which envisions language as both, a means of cognition and one of the major "lines of resistance" (Eco, 1999: 40) that limit our understanding of the "continuum of experience" (Eco, 1999: 5).

Though the *belles-lettres* in the novel attempt to rationalize the events on board, none of them are able to render the full depth of the experienced drama. As a consequence, the novel "mocks the naïve belief that it can be successful in telling the truth and nothing but the truth" (Boyd, 1990: 158) about the events both past and present. This fact refers *Rites of Passage* to the abode of 'historiographic metafiction', which "contests the assumptions of the 'realist' novel and narrative history, questions the absolute knowability of the past [and] specifies the ideological implications of the historical representations" (Hutcheon, 1995: 71). At the same time, the novel corresponds to Robert Alter's definition of 'self-conscious fiction', which just like Eco's contractual realism "from the beginning to end, through the style, the handling of the narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on characters, the patterning of narration, the nature of characters and what befalls them" (Alter, 1975: xi) attempts to pass on to us an atmosphere of the fictional world constructed by a writer and limited by literary conventions and rules. Thus, *Rites of Passage*, with its playful arrangement of numerous oppositions, be it "sacred-profane, absolutism-democracy, upper class-lower class, art-reality, [Apollo-Dionysus], Augustanism-Romanticism" (Crawford, 2002: 188), and the inability to resolve them; extensive Augustan and Romantic pastiche and intertextuality, be it the works of Pope, Dryden, and Swift, or Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Byron, strengthens Eco's idea that the overabundance of human-made truths in the form of "dehistoricized" (Gasiorek, 1995: 101) texts is the manifestation of the hermeneutic activity imposed by Being. "Continuous questioning [and production of texts] appears reasonable and human precisely because it is assumed that there is a Limit placed by Being on the discourse through which we establish ourselves in its horizon" (Eco, 1999: 50). We as human beings may cognize something only through culturally constructed forms, concepts and truths. Being "instead knows no form and no concept, and therefore no genus either but only an *x*, for us unattainable and indefinable" (Eco, 1999: 45). Hence, humans have the fundamental experience of a limit that "language can say in advance (and therefore only predict), in one way only, beyond which it fades into silence: it is the experience of Death" (Eco, 1999: 51), death betiding parson Colley upon his attempt to breach the limits of Being.

As a consequence, written in the self-conscious manner as a work of historiographic metafiction, *Rites of Passage* explores the drama of human existence encircled by and grappling with the cognitive, ontological, and referential limits systematizing one's association with the Being. By portraying aristocratic Edmund Talbot and an upstart parson Robert James Colley on a voyage from "the top of the world to the bottom" (Golding, 1980: 244), resulting in their dramatic passage from innocence to experience, Golding lays emphasis on the darkness lying beyond "the white line that separates the social orders" (Golding, 1980: 235) on board and beyond the limits of human cognition set by Being, which is manifested by Colley's death. In this way, *Rites of Passage* comports with Umberto Eco's theory of contractual realism as it asserts that there are certain things that we as human beings are vetoed from doing in our inquiry after the essence of Being, as "the 'hard core' Being precedes semiosis and poses limitations even to the interpretations that can be negotiated by the community" (Di Martino, 2012: 201).

Method

This article provides a thematic examination of William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage* by means of "identifying themes, i.e. patterns in the text that are important or interesting" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 3) and utilizing them to address Eco's concept of contractual realism. The thematic analysis in the article inspects themes on the latent level. It "looks beyond what has been said" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 3) and makes an insight into the "underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84) that form the semantic content of Golding's novel and that can be used as an exemplification of Eco's conceptual realism.

Thematic Analysis

The Power of Art

The theme of an immense power of Art as a means of "sustaining and talking about Something" (Eco, 1999: 35) or Being permeates the novel. It does so by the agency of the continuous reference to language and writing, as an indispensable part of Art. The Artists, or the Poets (as Eco labels them), through the endless "reinvention of language, are inviting us to take up the task of questioning and reconstructing the World and the horizon of the entities in which we calmly and continuously thought we lived" (Eco, 1999: 35). Art is at once a "moment and a permanent corrective" (Eco, 1999: 35), as it encourages us to "talk about Something, to ask ourselves how we talk about it and if there can be a moment in which the discourse stops, [...] that discourse asks us to be taken up again in the work of interpretation" (Eco, 1999: 35). Indeed, *Rites of Passage* instigates the reader to observe an Artist, or several Poets (to use Eco's terminology), be it Talbot, Colley, Captain Anderson or Golding himself, constructing the illusion that their work of art claims to convey the truth of the adventures of "a young hero on a strange sea voyage" (Boyd, 1990: 158). By presenting Being as a text or art, they do not "say Being, they are simply trying to emulate it: *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*"² (Eco, 1999: 34). Hence, no resolution is achieved in *Rites of Passage*, and the reader is left with a sense of disappointment due to the fact that neither the literary works presented in the novel, nor the novel itself are able to articulate the Truth or to "convey all the complexities of Colley's experience – not Talbot's mannered and distant journal, not Colley's subterranean and ruminative letter" (Gindin, 1988: 78), not irascible Captain Anderson's entries in the ship's log. In this sense the novel emphasizes the constraints of the representative qualities of literature and Art, and echoes Umberto Eco's (1999) vision of Poets as individuals who "assume as their own task the substantial ambiguity of language, and try to exploit it to extract a surplus of interpretation from it rather than a surplus of being" (32), as it is only through chains of inference and restraints of language that one may realize that the "incognizable" (Peirce, 1983: 213) exists. Hence, rather than being able to cognize the essence of Being, "Poets can only talk of the unknowable, being the masters of metaphor (which always talks of something else) and of oxymoron (which always talks of the presence of opposites)" (Eco, 1999: 32). As soon as they draw closer to the limits of cognition set by Being, "the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable" (Sevier, 2015: 171).

Indeed, *Rites of Passage* constantly alerts us about the delicate relationship between the Art of literature and reality, and all its major personae 'exist' only as characters on paper making continual references to "endless examples of textual production and the falsifying status of representations, not least historical ones" (Crawford, 2002: 197). William Golding (2013) admits in the foreword to *The Ends of the Earth* that he "should be happy if she [the ship] were to be known as a *Good Read*" (xii). In this way the writer puts an emphasis on the fictionality of the world aboard the ship and its purely textual nature, instilled with Ecoian excess of interpretation, rather than excess of reality and truth. This idea is manifested in multiple instances throughout

² Here the reference is made to Aquinas who said that "art imitates nature in its manner of operation" (Eco, 1988: 166).

the novel. Thus, Colley compares the bowsprit of the vessel to a pen symbolically 'writing' the reality: "I could almost rejoice in that powerful circling which the point of the bow-sprit [...] ceaselessly described above the sharp line of the horizon!" (Golding, 1999: 64). In a similar manner, Talbot writes to his godfather that "our passage has begun" (Golding, 1999: 10), playing on the double meaning of the word "passage" as both a journey and a text. "This ludic concept of 'passage' greatly enhances metafictional aspects of *Rites of Passage* [...] suggesting rituals [or rites] of text – a passage being a piece of writing" (Crawford, 2002: 199). The novel is pervaded with numerous references to writing passages and rituals performed on them, be it "journals, papers, letters, books, bookishness, printing and publishing" (Crawford, 2002: 199). Captain Anderson presides over the ship, which is "ballasted with paper" (Golding, 1980: 167), and records all events on board: "We record almost everything somewhere or another; from the midshipmen's logs right up to the ship's log kept by myself" (Golding, 1980: 167). Colley's appearance is presented as a "skimped and jagged line like the faces of peasants illustrated in medieval manuscripts" (Golding, 1999: 58), while the sunrise and sunset at sea as "that indefinable air of Painted Art" (Golding, 1999: 122). Colley writes a letter to his sister, which nevertheless never reaches her, attempting to provide his own answer to a question "Who killed cock Colley?" (Golding, 1980: 248). Talbot, sailing to undertake an administrative position in Australia, is obsessed with "*furor scribendi*" (Golding, 1980: 45) and might spend the rest of his life in "offices paved with paper" (Golding 1980, 167), while the journal, or "Talbot Manuscript" (Golding, 1980: 1984), that he keeps is as "deadly as a loaded gun" (Golding, 1980: 184), ready to air the details of bestiality happening on board. Talbot's subsequent distortion of truth in his letter to Colley's sister, explaining the parson's death, is aimed to limit the destructive effect that language can have on people's lives. Nevertheless, Talbot's attempt at "this redemption of Colley from the [committed] bestiality highlights the difficulty or non-resolution of truth" (Crawford, 2002: 200) in the novel, in which the use of such epithets as "deep" (Golding, 1980: 184) and "liquid profundity" (Golding, 1980: 194) with regards to the "intimidating vastness [and] luring majesty" (Golding, 1980: 195) of the sea "become metaphors for unfathomable meaning" (Crawford, 2002: 200) impossible to perceive through language. Thus, to employ Eco's terminology, literature or Art can simply emulate Being, rather than pronounce it, while its overwhelming essence remains protected by the curtain of endless interpretation and contractual limits set both, by language and by culture.

The "discursive battles between versions of reality" (Crawford, 2002: 199) presented in Talbot's, Colley's, Anderson's and even Golding's pieces of literary art reveal that there is no general resolution possible in the novel, apart from the textual, paper-based, subjective and temporary solutions, making it impossible to give a truthful answer to the question underlying the work: "Who killed cock Colley?" (Golding, 1980: 48). Talbot reflects: "What a language is ours, how diverse, how direct in indirection [...] as I write these very words the pattern of our wooden world changes" (Golding, 1980: 8), as change the rules of cultural contracts determining the limits of what we can say and infer about Being. The "substantial polyvocality of Being" (Eco, 1999: 34) usually encourages the poet or the artist to "give form to the formless, to reconstruct the formless original, to persuade us to reckon with Being" (Eco, 1999: 34). However, the poet offers us only "an ersatz and does not tell us anything more about Being than Being has already told us or than we have had it say, in other words, very little" (Eco, 1999: 34). As a consequence, *Rites of Passage* makes us realize how "relative, multivalent, and obscure the [contractual] truth is" (Redpath, 1986: 71), and what might be the punishment for breaching the limits of the omniscient and impenetrable Being.

The 'Passage' from Augustanism to Romanticism

Since ancient times there exists an idea that Being, which is

neither body, figure, nor form; which has no quality or quantity or weight; which is in no place; does not see or hear; is neither the soul, nor intelligence, nor number, order, or size; is neither substance, nor eternity, nor time; is not shadow

and is not light; nor error, nor truth, because no definition may circumscribe it – it can be named only with an oxymoron such as “most luminous soot”, or by other obscure dissimilarities, such as Lightning, Jealousy, Bear, or Panther, precisely to underline its affability (Eco, 1999: 32),

may be talked of in a dual manner. Eco (1999) admits that, on the one hand, one may apply to the discourse “capable of naming the entities univocally” (32) that represents theoretical knowledge, while, on the other, one may adhere to the discourse “of negative theology that allows us to talk of the unknowable” (Eco, 1999: 32) that stands for Poetry or Art. From Plato onwards there occurred a kind of depreciation of artistic as opposed to theoretical thought, “from the idea of imitation of an imitation to the idea of *gnoseologia inferior*”³ (Eco, 1999: 32), culminating in the advent of the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century Europe, celebrating reason and judgment as the guiding principles of human activity. The neoclassic spirit of Enlightenment laid background for the rise of the Augustan Age in the 18th century English literature, advocating rational, methodized and moral order in the universe represented in literary works of Pope, Dryden and Swift. Yet, with the onset of the 19th century, or the century of Positivism, elevating scientific knowledge to the god-like status, the validity of this knowledge started to be questioned. “The darkness of consciousness, and consciousness of darkness, was beginning to play against Enlightenment ideas of rational progress” (Crawford, 2002: 192). Therefore, there emerged the possibility of an “area of certainty that would definitely come very close to the Universal but through a quasi-numinous revelation of the particular” (Eco, 1999: 33). Thus, English Literature saw the rise of the Age of Romanticism, propagating individualism, emotion, mysticism, the marvelous and the exotic, while the Art, or, to use Eco’s terminology, *gnoseologia inferior*, “became the instrument of privileged knowledge” (Eco, 1999: 33), as represented in the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake and Byron. As a consequence, the 18th and the following 19th century are marked by the deep split between ways of talking about Being. On the one side, there is the Augustan Age, based on the “perfection of a generalizing knowledge, revealed through the discovery of laws” (Eco, 1999: 32), and on the other, the Age of Romanticism, marked by the “perfection of a knowledge that is predominantly individualizing” (Eco, 1999: 32). Yet, though seemingly irreconcilable, Augustanism and Romanticism function as two grand socio-cultural contracts within Ecoian theory of contractual realism, joined together by a common goal of empowering us with means of “talking about Something, asking ourselves how we talk about it and if there can be a moment in which the discourse stops, taking it up again in the work of interpretation” (Eco, 1999: 35) within the limits of cognition imposed by Being.

The theme of the ‘passage’ from the “ordered, social, pro-hierarchical world” (Crawford, 2002: 191) of the Augustan period, embodied in Talbot, to the Romantic period, celebrating the irrational, “nonconformist, demotic outcast, [using] popular language” (Crawford, 2002: 191), personified by Colley, pervades William Golding’s *Rites of Passage*. The vacillation, suspension and clash between Augustanism and Romanticism become visible from the very first pages of the novel in Talbot’s description of the ship carrying its passengers to the shores of Australia:

I climbed the bulging and tarry side of what once, in her young days, may have been one of Britain’s formidable wooden walls. I stepped through a kind of low doorway into the darkness of some deck or other and gagged at my first breath. Good God, it was quite nauseous! (Golding, 1980: 4)

The inclusion of two antinomic descriptions of the ship into one sentence, the first one describing the ship as “one of Britain’s formidable wooden walls” (Golding, 1980: 4), standing for rationalism, solidness, progress and “urbanity” (Abrams, 1981: 113) of Augustan era, and the second one presenting it as “quite nauseous” (Golding, 1980: 4) vessel, instilled with “the stink, the fetor, the stench, call it what you will” (Golding, 1980: 4), standing for the dark, irrational,

³ Here the reference is made to aesthetics, known as “lower gnoseology [or] the science of sensory cognition” (Eco, 2012: 256).

chaotic and disparaging nature of Romanticism, foreshadows the oscillation of the conflict between characters, representative of the diverse cultural-historic epochs trapped within the floating shell of Ecoian contractual reality. Talbot describes the ship as a “harmony that has more strings than a violin, more than a lute, more than a harp, and under the wind’s tuition she makes ferocious music” (Golding, 1980: 17). Indeed, the ship resembles a harmonious cacophony of diverse sounds and voices representing various epochs: the ‘sane’ and skeptical Talbot together with “the sternly atheistic captain [Anderson] in total command of ship” (Gindin, 1988: 74) stand for Augustanism, while the “self-indulgent artist [Mr. Brocklebank], the provocative and painted whore [Zenobia], the feeble and emotional parson [Colley], the handsome, adaptable, and totally amoral seamen” (Gindin, 1988: 74) together with the mysterious and subterranean purser “who lived apart and was seldom seen” (Golding, 1980: 18) represent the age of Romanticism. As the voyage progresses the degree of sanity, order and “rigid demarcations” (Gindin, 1988: 76) on board changes, and the ship turns into a microcosm ruled by the pandemonium of passions and irrational and insane inclinations, culminating in the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79) bacchanalia. The situation on board is reminiscent of Foucault’s treatment of the idea of insanity in the Age of Reason, when madness was not endured and was subject to confinement in the Ships of Fools, which stood for “an early pre-asylum example of silencing and taming of madness” (Foucault, 1971: 38). At the same time, it brings us back to the concept of the Ships of Fools, which can be traced back to Book Six of Plato’s *Republic*, works of Socrates and Adeimantus, Sebastian Blant’s *Narrenschiff*, and Katherine Anne Porter’s novel *Ship of Fools*, which, just like Plato’s analogy of the cave, where cave-dwellers cannot see the light without proper guidance, suggests that any order may descend to dysfunction and chaos if not led by a wise captain. In Umberto Eco’s terms the notion of the ‘wise captain’ can be treated as an analogue of the ‘cultural contract’ concept - the categorical system, which allows us to form our understanding and definition of reality within the limits set by Being. As a consequence, William Golding makes use of the Ship of Fools concept to carry out his own “Foucauldian debate on the [limiting,] incarcerative practices of language and class, and to emphasize the opposition between fantastic romanticism and Augustan classicism that in contemporary terms gestures toward the irresolution and uncertainty” (Crawford, 2002: 193).

The Romantic Age urges one to “be thyself” (Wilde, 1973: 30), whereas the Augustan Age motivates one to “know thyself” (Wilde, 1973: 30). Though on the outside parson Colley presents a typical embodiment of Romanticism, while Talbot that of Augustanism, Golding purposefully avoids portraying the two characters’ inner selves as true, ideal symbols of the epochs. Instead, *Rites of Passage* deals with the transition or ‘passage’ from one epoch to another. This fact corresponds with Eco’s idea that any categorical system, which allows us to understand and define the object, “can be continually adjusted in the light of new information” (Pacitti, 1999: 1) and new cultural negotiations. Hence, both characters seem to be in the process of incessant transition from ‘knowing thyself’ to ‘being thyself’. The first lieutenant Mr. Summers mentions that “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 into another is impossible” (Golding, 1980: 125). This statement is true of Talbot and Colley, who are entangled, or lost in “translation” (Golding, 1980: 125) between Augustanism and Romanticism. Colley’s lyrical and poetic diction, reminiscent of Romantic Coleridge, is contrasted with the dry, dull and prosaic Swift-like Talbot’s diction. Yet, the fact that the pragmatic “Talbot Manuscript [...] deadly as a loaded gun” (Golding, 1980: 184) gets locked away, while Colley’s “unattractive, subterranean, emotionally vulnerable and ruminative letter” (Gindin, 1988: 79) never reaches his sister, being replaced by Talbot’s softened version of the events on board, emphasizes the idea of characters’ entanglement in between the epochs.

The novel contains numerous manifestations of the shortcomings of Colley’s Romanticism. Colley is a man of cloth and he attaches great significance to his clerical garments. The parson seeks to gain respect through his ecclesiastical robes: “You have your uniform, Captain Anderson, and I have mine – I shall approach then in that garb, those ornaments of the

Spiritual Man” (Golding 1980, 244). Yet, Colley’s attaching importance to his uniform mars his Romantic image. In a similar manner, the parson interprets Talbot’s noisy convulsions and involuntary groans during the sexual intercourse with Zenobia as over-zealous prayers: “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, 1980: 215). Similarly, he believes Zenobia to be a “young lady of great piety and beauty” (Golding, 1980: 194). Thus, Colley mixes the ‘holy’ and the ‘indecent’ due to his Romantic naïveté engrossed in the “convenient and civilized lies” (Gindin, 1988: 77) of Augustanism. The Romantic tradition glorifies the humble rustic life in opposition to the Enlightenment Age, which favors urban life, as it is manifested in the character of Talbot. Colley, who has a face of peasant, belongs to the Romantic ideal way of leaving; yet, he tries to ‘translate’ himself into the urbane class through his clerical position, which is manifested in his desire to be allowed into the quarterdeck. This desire to divorce himself from his peasant origins and to commit a class change harms Colley’s Romantic image. Ironically, it is Talbot who realizes Colley’s rusticity: “his schooling should have been the open fields with stone collecting and bird-scaring, his university the plough” (Golding, 1980: 67). Unfortunately, the parson does not understand the evident and harsh demarcations of class: “Where you were born, there you stayed” (Crompton, 1985: 136). As a result, Colley is dragged “back towards his own kind” (Golding, 1980: 277), back “into the savagery of the fo’c’s’le” (Boyd, 1990: 157). Rendered a social misfit, or “not of Israel” (Golding, 1980: 227), Colley is ostracized by the passengers of the ship. Thus, the Romantic solitariness, allowing the Romantic outcast the chance to muse about the essence of existence, is brought forth in the novel. Yet, the Romantic loneliness created by his cloth and class does not tell Colley things about his inner self. On the contrary, it is the parson’s participation in the public and rigid in its brutal rules crossing-the-line ceremony that opens his eyes “on the fundamental knowledge of all existing things” (Nietzsche, 1913: 26). According to Romantic tradition, the violator of conventional limits remains proudly unrepentant as does the Byronic hero Manfred, who defies the demons that have come to drag his soul to hell: “I was my own destroyer and will be/ My own hereafter” (Byron, 1970: 299). Yet, Colley becomes short of a true Romantic since he is made to experience the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79) extremity, rather than choosing to experience it of his own will. Through the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79) rite, Colley surfaces his latent homosexuality by committing fellatio with Billy Rogers. Thus, the liberation of instincts and, sexual desires and drives is another Romantic element in Colley’s personality. The parson’s initial response is to cry: “Joy! Joy! Joy! [with his] head up and with a smile as if already in heaven” (Golding, 1980: 117). Yet, Colley’s repentance after the joyous experience of liberation and discovery of the truth about his real nature harms his Romantic image. The parson is torn between instinctive Dionysian drives full of “filth, darkness and devilry” (Boyd, 1990: 163) and forces of law and morality which repress him, pertaining to Apollo, “the god of bounding, of lines and limitations” (Boyd, 1990: 163). Out of inability to live with the agony of this inner struggle, Colley “passes judgment upon and punishes himself with death” (Boyd, 1990: 163).

Talbot’s image as an embodiment of the Enlightenment Age also has its shortcomings. Although the Augustanism epitomizes ‘objectivity’ in opposition to ‘subjectivity’ of Romanticism, Talbot is highly subjective. Indeed, almost the whole novel depends on Talbot’s one-sided point of view: “I have just turned over the pages, ruefully enough. Wit? Acute observations?” (Golding, 1980: 277). His supposedly witty observations remain short of reflecting the truth about Colley’s character. Talbot assumes that Colley is a hypocrite, even though the latter is a man of deep sensitivity and genuine affection. It is only Colley’s death of shame that makes Talbot realize “the irony and hypocrisy in the lies he finally writes to Colley’s sister, the irony that he is representing a supposedly just administration of civilization” (Gindin, 1988: 79): “How is that for a start to a career in the service of my King and Country?” (Golding, 1980: 277). Talbot is aware of his shortcomings: “Wrong again, Talbot! Learn another lesson, my boy! You fell the fence” (Golding, 1980: 148). Thus, Talbot admits that he, with his rational assumptions, has been in “a half-dream” (Golding, 1980: 184): “With lack of sleep and too much

understanding, I grow a little crazy” (Golding, 1980: 278). In this way, Golding points out, in the Ecoian manner, that Talbot’s rationality, as an Augustan social contract, is not sufficient to get hold of the truth, guarded by the limits set by Being, which are represented in the image of the smelly, squeaky, and old vessel, carrying the passengers to Australia. Talbot attempts to reclaim his Augustan identity: “You will observe that I recovered somewhat from the effects of reading Colley’s letter. A man cannot be forever brooding on what is past, nor on the tenuous connection between his own unwitting conduct and someone’s deliberately criminal behavior” (Golding, 1980: 259). Yet, the fact that Talbot conceals ‘the truth’ from Colley’s sister, by modifying his letter and omitting some “nasty” (Golding, 1980: 81) parts, harms his image of the Enlightenment man that he has been trying to cultivate.

As a consequence, no resolution is reached in the novel. Neither the Augustan, nor the Romantic precepts are able to reproduce the true condition of human being. “Only Colley’s letter has come close to giving form to the unacknowledgeable depth of human experience, but at the price of clarity, control, and, finally, the form of human life itself” (Gindin, 1988: 79). Indeed, though the Romantic-Dionysian joy experienced by Colley at the “badger bag” (Eco, 1999: 79) ceremony seems to render “the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of all existing things” (Nietzsche, 1913: 83), the knowledge of the kind endangers, in the Ecoian manner, the very fabric of contractual existence led by humans, by breaching the limits set by Being. Hence, the shock of the “sudden, overpowering manifestation of reality is too great for recovery” (Boyd, 1990: 163), and makes Colley die and bury together with him the “essence of his quotidian self” (Boyd, 1990: 162), never truly reflected in any contractual schemata, be it Romanticism or Augustanism. In the light of the never-ending segmentability of eternity, both schemata are “faced with the risk of fallibilism, and become an accumulation of interpretations that are accepted after a process of discussion, selection, and repudiation in the Community” (Eco, 2000: 98). Being aware of the fallible nature of Romanticism and Augustanism, the society, nevertheless, does not deny their use, as it is not the lack of their “authoritativeness that convinces us or prevents us from falsifying [them]; it is, rather, the difficulty of calling [them] into question without upsetting the entire [contractual] system, the entire paradigm” (Eco, 1999: 98) that allows us to talk about Being without violating its boundaries.

God as the Ultimate Limit

The reality, or the “already given” (Eco, 1999: 54) imposes “restrictions [or limits] on our cognition” (Habermas, 1995: 251). The appearance of these limits

is the nearest thing that can be found, before any First Philosophy or Theology, to the idea of God or Law. It is God who manifests Himself (if and when He manifests Himself) as pure Negativity, pure Limit, pure No, that of which language cannot or must not talk. Which is something very different from the God of the revealed religions, or it assumes only His severest traits, those of the exclusive Lord of Interdiction, incapable of saying so much as ‘Go forth and multiply’ but only intent on repeating ‘Though shalt not eat from this tree’ (Eco, 1999: 54).

The theme of God, or the ultimate “line of resistance” (Eco, 1999: 40), imposing boundaries on our cognition and interpretation of Being, permeates *Rites of Passage*. The “man of God” (Golding, 1980: 228), James Colley, dressed “in a positive delirium of ecclesiastical finery” (Golding, 1980: 105) is possessed by various Gods at various stages of the novel. Apollo – the Greek god of “bounding, of lines and limitations” (Boyd, 1990: 163), honoring “limitation, freedom from the wilder emotions, the philosophical calmness of the sculptor-god” (Nietzsche, 1913: 24), and patronizing the upper classes of society, the belonging to which Colley ferociously attempts to prove all through the novel, keeps hold of Colley-the-upstart-gentleman. Dionysus – “the governing deity of madness and ecstasy” (Boyd, 1990: 162), the demotic god of joy, the “god of the people” (Dodds, 1951: 77), possesses Colley “under the influence of the narcotic draught” (Nietzsche, 1913: 26) at the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79) bacchanalia, enabling him to stop

being himself and setting him free, in order to be purified of socially-constructed lies, dogma and hypocrisy. Yet, Colley is, first and foremost, the mouthpiece of the Christian God, educated to administrate solemn religious rites, such as birth, marriage and death, and to preach sermons to “save the seamen, or beg them to repent, to disseminate universal salvation as a gift from the upper orders” (Gindin, 1988: 77) on a “godless vessel” (Golding, 1980: 227) heading for Australia. At the same time, Colley’s character functions as a symbol of Jesus Christ – the son of the Christian God, and His embodiment on Earth, as his initials, JC, suggest. Both Jesus and Colley can be characterized by their outgoing impulse of love towards all living things:

I gazed down into the water, the blue, the green, the purple, the snowy sliding foam! [...] It seemed to me then – it still seems so – that I was and am consumed by a great love of all things, the sea, the ship, the sky, the gentlemen and the people and of course our Redeemer above all! [...] All things praise Him!” (Golding, 1980: 247).

Just like Colley, Jesus was an embodiment of a “pretty plain set of moral guidelines for life” (Boyd, 1990: 176), whose real life was also lost in a myriad of diverse interpretations, collected in the Gospels. One may apply the same lines from *Rites of Passage*, describing Colley’s fate, to characterize the life of Jesus: “It was real life and a real death and no more to be fitted into a given book than a misshapen foot into a given boot” (Golding, 1980: 264). This fact allows different analysts to evaluate the figure of Jesus Christ differently. Percy Bysshe Shelley, views Jesus as a “radical and subversive moralist” (Boyd, 1990: 176), while William Blake asserts that Jesus, “far from being an example of the importance of obeying rules and keeping within bounds, was a champion of rule-breaking in the cause of self-discovery” (Boyd, 1990: 176). According to Blake, Jesus would have supported Colley in his attempt to “break through the society’s repressive and absurd rules concerning what was natural and decent” (Boyd, 1990: 176). Just like Colley, who was declared the king of the “badger bag” (Golding, 1980: 79), and was subjected to profane questioning, “yelling and jeering and positively demonic laughter” (Golding, 1980: 203), was gagged at and “shampoo’d” (Golding, 1980: 204) with the foul contents of the bag, later to be decrowned by performing “public micturition” (Golding, 1980: 100) and fellatio with Billy Rogers, leading to his death of shame, Jesus underwent a similar series of humiliating rites, culminating in the pagan ceremony of crucifixion. Colley writes in his letter: “It is true I had been foolish and was perhaps an object of scorn and amusement of officers and other gentlemen. But then – and I said this in all humility – so would my Master have been” (Golding, 1980: 216). The inhabitants of the ship loathe, reject and abuse Colley, yet, by doing so they “re-crucify Christ” (Boyd, 1990: 173) in a manner reminiscent of Matthew 25:40 KJV: ‘Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’”

Yet, even Gods have limits. In *Kant and the Platypus*, Eco (1999) quotes Aquinas asking himself “whether God can remedy the fact that a virgin has lost her virginity” (55). Aquinas’s answer is quite plain: “Not even God can ordain that what has been has not been” (Eco, 1999: 55). As a result, God cannot surpass the limit, “set from the moment He is” (Eco, 1999: 55), to save both Jesus and Colley from death upon becoming aware of the real essence of Being, through joy and self-discovery via desecration, as in the case of Colley, and “the power to make the universe anew” (Kinkead-Weeks and Gregor, 1984: 277) via suffering on the cross, as in the case of Jesus. Death serves as a punishment for breaching the contractually-constructed limits of Being, and, hence, for trespassing the domain of the contractually-accepted God. At the same time, death opens the door to salvation and discovering oneself as a “thought, emotion, desire, and corporeality (otherwise one would not have to die), and finding oneself before the entity as that which sustains him, that to which he finds assigned to him, that which, with all his culture and learning, he can never fully master” (Eco, 1999: 30).

Conclusion

Impressed by the growing critical interest to his novels, William Golding once noted: "Right, this will give them something to think about!" (Haffenden, 1985: 9). Indeed, *Rites of Passage* provides both, the critic and the reader with an unlimited collection of the complicated, intertwined and assorted themes that encourage the surge of criticism and interpretation of all kind. Yet, this article presents an exodus from previous Golding criticism. It attempts to establish a bridge between the thematic complexity of Golding's *Rites of Passage* and Umberto Eco's idiosyncratic and masterful exploration into the vastness of cognitive theory and the philosophy of semiotics, culminating in the theory of 'contractual realism', elaborated in *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*. Both works explore the depths of human experience, besieged by the cognitive, ontological and referential limits inherent in language, culture and Being itself, and by the darkness situated beyond the margin that detaches Being from 'contractual reality'. By portraying the mix of characters, symbolically secluded from the omniscient Being in a wooden reality of a ship heading for Australia, as a "pack of hounds dragging down the hindmost Colley" (Crawford, 2002: 233) to imminent death for breaching the limits of Being by means of experiencing "Joy" (Golding, 1980: 117) from breaking the contractually-established social rules, Golding echoes Eco's theory of cognition. It postulates, that there exist some "lines of resistance" (Eco, 1999: 40) to activities aimed at cognizing the essence of Being, which shield the truth from direct contiguity with the help of ever-evolving cultural contracts, just like it happens in *Rites of Passage*, which disperses the truth of Colley's death in a mass of written versions of the tragic event on board. The article presents a number of intricate and salient propositions that William Golding and Umberto Eco construct in their works, touching upon difficult ontological and cognitive questions. On the one hand, Golding and Eco remind us of our finiteness and the danger of breaching the limits of Being, while on the other, they encourage us "to encounter Being with gaiety, to question it, test its resistances, grasp its openings and hints, which are never too explicit. The rest is conjecture" (Eco, 2000: 56).

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