

*Literary Exploration: The Fictive Sea  
Journals of William Golding, Robert Nye,  
B. S. Johnson, and Malcolm Lowry*

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I

BECAUSE BRITAIN is an island and the British a seafaring nation, the sea journal has always been an important part of the British diary-writing tradition. Tracing a line back to the earliest of captain's logs, sea journals have been kept by navigators, scientists, ambassadors, and emigrants; and even today many a British holiday diary begins with the crossing of the English Channel. Such diaries have, however, not only been written but read, and have thus provided subsequent diarists with a model to copy and adapt. Since the late seventeenth century they have also provided fiction writers with a recognizable nonfiction form to imitate.

There are, of course, complex historical reasons why writers of fiction imitate the forms of other types of writing and one might cite the use of the diary in the early novel as a link between the development of a new form of realism and the growing habit of diary-keeping among the novel reading public. In any historical analysis one would also have to consider the rise of diary publishing, somewhat surprisingly post-dating the use of the diary in fiction. But my main concern is with the use of the sea journal in modern fiction and here we can observe more clearly its attractions for the writer. The modern writer is in general concerned with a psychological examination of character and the first-person of the diary form provides a way of stressing changes in perception, of analysing present states of mind and contrasting them with subsequent reflections. More specific to the sea journal, a sea

voyage provides a hazardous environment in which character can be tested, a hazardous and often alien environment which correlates typically with a crisis in the diarist's life. The sea voyage also provides a solitude in which the diarist, removed from his or her daily routine, can reflect upon the way of life left behind and mentally prepare for a return. And a voyage has the advantage to the writer of consisting of a discrete series of events with a beginning, middle and an end, although novelists in practice tend to concentrate on either the start of a voyage or its conclusion.

The present paper will compare four such fictive sea journals, William Golding's *Rites of Passage*, Robert Nye's *The Voyage of the Destiny*, B. S. Johnson's *Trawl*, and Malcolm Lowry's short prose piece, "Through the Panama." Of course comparison tends to stress difference rather than similarity and it should be pointed out that it is not my purpose to outline a definition of the sea journal as a sub-genre of diary fiction, even were such a definition tenable.<sup>1</sup> More importantly I should stress that, whilst my four authors may have been greatly influenced by the possibilities of the sea journal form for the examination of character, my own concern will be to place character analysis second to an examination of the different ways these authors explore the use of a nonfiction form for the purposes of fiction. This approach has been partly determined by the methodology adopted, all four texts showing more similarities in respect of character analysis than differences, but also because to restrict oneself to, say, Golding's notion of good and evil or to B. S. Johnson's obsession with isolation would be to ignore the important way each of these texts explores a certain limit of the sea journal form. In short, my approach will be more strictly formal and will concentrate on the text as a fictive document, that is, as a fictional framing of a nonfiction mode, looking at such matters as the diarist's consciousness of the act of writing or, an unavoidable concern of the journal form, the dating of the entries.

## II

To begin with Golding's *Rites of Passage* would suggest that of all four texts Golding's is the most conservative, a model from

which the others depart. Certainly the central concern of this novel is a traditional one, the hero's growth into maturity. The rites of passage alluded to in the title are not only the rites performed on the sea voyage at the crossing of the equator but also the painfully necessary testing of the young hero in his passage into adulthood. Edmund Talbot, a young man of high birth, sets sail in the early nineteenth century for Australia to take up a position as assistant to the Governor of the new British colony. His ship is an obsolete man-of-war and his daily account records how he becomes embroiled in the stormy relationship between the autocratic and anti-clerical Captain Anderson and the grotesque yet dedicated Parson Colley, a relationship which results in the parson's death. Talbot's initial assessment of both captain and parson dramatically collapses along with his previous rationalist certainties on the posthumous discovery of a confessional letter written by Parson Colley. Good and evil are recognized as so entwined that they cause Talbot a harsh, if still provisional, reassessment of not only the individuals concerned but of the nature of a society for which the ship acts as a microcosm.

Yet to stress this aspect of the work is to mask a way in which the text represents a limit of the modern fictive sea journal. For *Rites of Passage* is an impressive recreation of the fictive journal as it had developed by the time in which the novel is set, even to the extent of imitating the literary language of the time. In *The Diary Novel*, Lorna Martens demonstrates how an intermediate form, some way between the epistolary novel of the early eighteenth century and the diary novel as it later emerged, developed in the later eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> We can see the beginnings of this form in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) which, though it is mainly an epistolary novel, moves towards the diary novel when Pamela is imprisoned in Lincolnshire; she continues to write to her parents at periodic intervals despite the fact she has no way of conveying her letters to them. Lorna Martens describes this intermediate form as the letter journal, a journal written specifically for someone other than the diarist, and in *Rites of Passage* we find Talbot addressing his journal to his "Honoured godfather":

“With those words I begin the journal I engaged myself to keep for you” (3). Strange as this may appear to the modern reader, in the eighteenth century the notion of a journal did not necessarily mean, as it does now, that the daily entries were written solely for the diarist’s own eyes and it was common practice to keep a journal as a form of correspondence, witness Swift’s *Journal to Stella* (1710-1713), written for Hester Johnson and her companion Miss Dingley, or Boswell’s *London Journal* (1762-1763), posted in weekly parcels to his friend John Johnston. The term “journal” referred merely to the transcribing of daily events, hence the term “journalism.”

Nevertheless, though the letter-journal novel incorporates a fictive addressee in the manner of the epistolary novel, the presence of such a figure, according to Martens, does not influence the style and content of the work to the same degree as in the multi-voiced epistolary novel. The epistolary novel can set different versions of events side by side in order to demonstrate a character’s insincerity or lack of self-awareness; the letter-journal novel by contrast does not presuppose a reply. Thus in *Rites of Passage*, despite the inclusion of some rather heavy-handed irony, Golding finds it necessary to include Parson Colley’s own letter journal to draw attention to the unreliability of Edmund Talbot’s account. Talbot inserts the “Colley Manuscript” in his own journal as an act of “natural justice” (183), as evidence of his own callousness and another’s sincerity. In so doing, of course, Talbot also demonstrates his own new-found sincerity.

Golding also keeps to his letter-journal model in his choice of character. According to Lorna Martens the central character in the letter-journal is a young, virtuous woman whose thoughts and emotions do not admit of much variation. Hence, “It is not her thoughts that are of primary interest . . . but rather the events that befall her” (Martens 79). The fictive letter-journal is concerned more with the past tense relating of events than with a present tense examination of thoughts. Of course Edmund Talbot is no virtuous young woman and much of the interest of the novel is in how he is shaken out of the naïve confidence he derives from his social position. Nonetheless, *Rites of Passage* is quite unlike

modern diary fiction in that there are few, if any, moments of self-reflection for their own sake. Talbot's moments of introspection are limited to those of the fictive letter journal, that is, they are what Martens describes as "either reactions to past events, or speculations about possible future events" (82). The result of this is that Golding, if he has to give a representation of heightened emotion, must, like Richardson in *Pamela*, have his hero somewhat awkwardly transcribe his thoughts in the midst of events. Immediately after reading Colley's letter, Talbot reaches for his journal:

Why Edmund, Edmund! This is methodistical folly! Did you not believe you were a man of less sensibility than intelligence? Did you not feel, no, *believe*, that your blithely accepted system of morality for men in general owed less to feeling than to the operations of the intellect? Here is more of what you will wish to tear and not exhibit! But I have read and written all night and may be forgiven for a little lightheadedness. (183-84)

Talbot must not only think such thoughts but write them as he thinks them, and the form of the novel pulls against the thrust of the message. If feelings are to be allowed to affect the intellect, Talbot the rationalist cannot go so far as to abandon the intellectual pursuit of writing.

In *Rites of Passage*, then, Golding not only imitates the language of Augustan and Romantic literature, he also imitates closely the form of the fictive letter journal, both in his use of a fictive addressee and in his stress upon intrigue rather than character depiction. Or to put it more exactly, although Talbot within the novel writes a letter journal, Golding himself does not so much imitate the nonfiction letter journal as imitate the traditional letter-journal novel, a tradition appropriate to the time in which the story is set. There is thus a hidden depth to the form of *Rites of Passage* paralleling the hidden depths which scupper Talbot's perceptions and by using a fictional rather than a non-fiction model Golding produces a work which is both traditional and yet pushes the fictive sea journal to a new limit. How this limit differs from the historical novel will be discussed in my next section.

## III

At first sight Robert Nye's *The Voyage of the Destiny* would seem, like *Rites of Passage*, to be modelled on the eighteenth-century letter journal. Sir Walter Raleigh, sailing home from his final abortive search for gold in Central America, records daily events for the benefit of his young son, Carew. Yet despite the use of an addressee the work is set in the early seventeenth century, pre-dating the development of the letter journal. At the same time Nye's novel employs many of the resources of modern diary fiction. Having kept a journal of the voyage out, Raleigh scraps it because it avoids his true thoughts and feelings. He begins afresh:

I wrote that journal to and for myself. Now I write to you. For you, Carew, my son. And what I write will not be exactly a Journal. What will it be? I don't know. I am writing it partly to find out. It will have to be something like the truth. But more than a Journal, and less. No giant or god stuff. But some kind of confession. The story of my days past and the story of my days present. What I was and what I am. What and who. For you, Carew, who do not really know me. (9)

As we have seen, this use of an addressee in diary fiction is not new, though it is a novel enough departure from the modern expectation that a diary is written for the diarist alone for Nye to need to justify such a departure early in the narrative. Of more interest, however, is the notion of Raleigh's journal as a confessional, a recounting not just of days present but of days past, and Raleigh goes so far as to call this retrospective aspect an autobiography: "I turn again to examine my own mortality by autobiography" (150). Such a statement is both anachronistic (the term "autobiography" dates from the late nineteenth century) and not part of the letter-journal tradition (autobiography is notably absent from Talbot's journal in *Rites of Passage*). Moreover, the other side to the notion of a confessional, the statement of a present state of mind, is likewise a modern development in diary fiction and Nye's use of a modern English prose to represent an introspection which derives not simply from the events of the immediate past, as in Golding, is typical of the way he employs the resources of the modern diary novel to write a historical

novel. *The Voyage of the Destiny* is a work very different in its conception from Golding's faithful recreation of a past language and a past narrative form.

Such a difference can also be seen if we compare the two novels as fictive documents. Both works show a concern for the text as a book, as a physical and potentially subversive document. Edmund Talbot's diary ends: "The book is filled all but a finger's breadth. I shall lock it, wrap it and sew it unhandily in sailcloth and thrust it away in the locked drawer" (Golding 278). Talbot will continue his record of the voyage, but in a book kept less secret from prying eyes: "Of course my journal will continue beyond this volume — but in a book obtained for me . . . from the purser and not to be locked" (Golding 264). Raleigh's journal is similarly dangerous and also has to be kept secret, being hidden prior to his imprisonment in the Tower of London: "I shall not write down the present provenance of all that I had written formerly. . . . Sufficient to say that those papers were safely secreted *before* I left Broad Street on my way to be betrayed . . ." (361). The diary as fictive document has a potential to influence the plot.

Yet whilst both *The Voyage of the Destiny* and *Rites of Passage* are clearly concerned with the diary as a physical document, they differ in two respects. The first concerns dating. The diary entries in *The Voyage of the Destiny* begin on 13 February 1618 and are dated throughout the text, the last entry being for 28 October, the day before Raleigh's execution. In *Rites of Passage*, on the other hand, the entries are denoted according to the days of the voyage and neither the year nor the day of the month are given. We can thus posit that the dateline in the fictive sea journal has an important function in categorizing the kind of text we are reading. The exact dating of *The Voyage of the Destiny* functions not only to set the period in which events of the story occur but to offer a degree of historical authenticity to the journal itself. Only to a degree, of course, since much of the tale is fabricated, but it would seem that the inclusion of a historical figure as diarist places an imperative upon the novelist to date accurately known historical events. *Rites of Passage*, however, has no such imperative since no historical figures are involved and though Golding is scrupulously accurate as regards his period setting the vagueness

of the dating in the diary is an indication that the novel is a fiction with a historical setting rather than a historical novel.

Documents included in the fictive journal have a function similar to that of the dateline. Sir Walter Raleigh includes many documents likely to be of use to his son in judging the actions of his father; for example, the warrant for his arrest, an insincere apology to the King for the failure of his expedition, and a lying letter to the Privy Council written by the ship's chaplain. Edmund Talbot, by contrast, includes only one document, the letter journal written by Parson Colley. Of course in both Raleigh's and Talbot's journals the documents are framed by the diarist's entries and reasons are given in both narratives for the inclusion of such documents. Their main difference lies in their formality — the parson's letter in *The Voyage of the Destiny* is one of a series of formal documents concerned with the public life of Raleigh, such documents being a way in which Nye can draw attention to the contrast between the man and his fame. The parson's letter in *Rites of Passage* is a private document, a document in fact more sincere than Talbot's preceding diary entries. Both parsons' letters serve to contrast the sincerity of the framing narrative but in the case of *The Voyage of the Destiny* the public nature of the documents has the additional function of reinforcing the factual authenticity of the tale. Again, as in the case of the exact dating, what the historical novel surrenders in formal authenticity it gains in historical authenticity and compared with *Rites of Passage*, *The Voyage of the Destiny* as a historical novel marks a very different limit to the fictive sea journal.

#### IV

To categorize B. S. Johnson's *Trawl* as a sea journal will need some initial justification for, unlike *Rites of Passage* and *The Voyage of the Destiny*, *Trawl* has no dated entries. Instead the action of the voyage is narrated in a form of stream-of-consciousness, a mental recording of sights and sounds as they occur:

I sit in the wireless room, with Molloy. He says little, Molloy, but what he does have to say is interesting. Of being shipwrecked on a desert island, yes, in the Pacific, in the war, and being rescued



by a negro. The chair I sit in rocks and slithers to the limits of its restraining tether. Apart from this movement, being in the wire-less room with Molloy is not like being on a ship at all, here is the place on the ship least like being on a ship. (113-14)

Of note here is the simple present tense "I sit" and "he says" and the close adverbs "here" and "this," markers that the action is concurrent with the narration. *Trawl* makes no mention of the act of writing and the notion of the text as a physical object, noted in both Golding and Nye, is absent.

Nevertheless there is a case to be made for *Trawl* as a journal, at least in part. In formal terms the narrative of *Trawl* is divided fairly strictly between a first-person present tense description of the narrator's voyage on board a fishing vessel and a past tense recollection of events in the narrator's life, events recalled whilst he lies seasick on his bunk. The sections concerning the voyage occupy roughly two-fifths of the text and from information supplied in the text we can calculate the date of most of these sections—for example, the voyage begins on Thursday 13 October and hence the final day of fishing, given as the fifteenth day of the voyage, can be dated as Thursday 27 October. Thus although no full day is described *Trawl* shares the periodic narration of the diary.

Lorna Martens calls this type of narration "quasi-diary fiction" (Martens 136), a type of narration which allows the author to concentrate on the psychology of the protagonist without being encumbered by the conventions of writing. If we can see the development of the letter journal in Richardson's *Pamela* as a means by which the consciousness of the isolated protagonist can be externalized, then the movement from the fictive diary to a stream-of-consciousness technique, as occurs between the diary ending of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, marks a development in the same direction. In other words, the transition between the epistolary novel and the diary novel marked by the letter journal, and the transition between the diary novel and the stream-of-consciousness novel marked by Marten's quasi-diary were both attempts to discover new ways of depicting a character's thoughts. By retaining periodic narration, however, the quasi-diary can examine psychological changes over

a longer period of time than is usual in the stream-of-consciousness novel.<sup>3</sup>

The modern writer of diary fiction thus has a range of options for combining events and narration, with the protagonist tied to the writing desk and recounting recent events: "I have just come from the passenger saloon, where I have sat for a long time with Summers. The conversation is worth recording, though I have an uneasy feeling that it tells against me" (Golding 124); with the protagonist still at the desk but recording events occurring simultaneously: "The swabbers out there are cleaning our decks of the blood. I can hear the brutes singing. Singing! They like their work, evidently. (Better than I like mine. Who can clean these pages? . . ." (Nye 201); or with the protagonist abandoning the desk altogether and going up and about on deck:

So up, up the companionway, the ladder, holding the handholes in the teak sides tightly, through the hatch hanging on to the vertical brass bar, right: what's this on the cream walls of the alleyway, brown, smearing the painted surface? . . . Blood, yes, it's blood, it can't be human, can it, no, it's where they brush, from the gutting, where their bloody smocks smear against the sides. . . . (Johnson 32)

In *Rites of Passage*, then, the narrator reflects as he writes of the past; in *The Voyage of the Destiny* the narrator writes of the present as he reflects; and in *Trawl* the narrator just thinks, without the acknowledgement that what we read is a written representation of thought.

But if *Trawl* is working at the quasi-diary limit of the fictive sea journal, it is also exploring the limit of diary fiction as autobiography. The sections framed by the journal sections are autobiographical reminiscences, are attempts by the narrator to analyse the events of his past. He has undertaken the voyage "to shoot the narrow trawl of my mind into the vasty sea of my past" (11), to try through a physical isolation to understand the causes of his emotional isolation. His voyage is both physical and emotional, the green bile of his sea-induced vomit symbolizing the purging of his past. As he is told by the old trawlerman when he first comes on board: "You'll be sick. I told him I had tablets for seasickness. They'll be no use to you, he said, You'll be sick until

you bring up your green bile, you've got to bring up the green bile that's been there maybe since you were a child. And once that green bile's gone, you'll be all right . . ." (118).

Sir Walter Raleigh in *The Voyage of the Destiny* is similarly seasick: "I threw up every gobbet of my self-esteem, the bitter-as-wormwood dregs of my life and my hopes, whatever secretions remained of a long feast on nothing" (Nye 204). Indeed, the intertwining of past and present in Raleigh's journal produces a medley of voyages paralleling those in *Trawl*:

This book, I see now, is the log of three voyages.

The first: The Voyage of the *Destiny*. Set in the present time.

. . .

The second: The voyage of my history. The tale of my life and fortunes. . . .

The third voyage is the most difficult to define. . . . "*The Voyage of the Destiny*." That's my third voyage. The true task. (Nye 254)

In this third voyage, the novel *The Voyage of the Destiny*, Nye has Raleigh briefly break out of the naturalistic mode to signal a kind of metaphysical, metafictional awareness. Raleigh in *The Voyage of the Destiny* is, after all, in the uncomfortable position of being both fact and fiction. But although such an awareness is absent from Johnson's narrator, its absence is a product of a more radical approach to the dividing line between fiction and autobiography.

To begin with, Johnson's narrator is far less certain of the facts of his past than Nye's Raleigh whose problem is precisely that he can neither forgive nor forget (Nye 127). For the narrator of *Trawl*, the problem of making sense of his past is compounded by a struggle to remember what his subconscious has suppressed: "I must think of it all, remember it all, it must be everything, otherwise I shall certainly not understand, shall have no chance of understanding, that I most desire, that I am here for" (17). The bringing up of the green bile.

Nevertheless, a biography does emerge and it is in respect of this that *Trawl* most strongly explores the frontier between fact and fiction. For unlike the narrator of *Rites of Passage* or *The Voyage of the Destiny*, the narrator of *Trawl* is unnamed. To be

sure, an unnamed narrator is not unique to *Trawl* but in the absence of a name the text might be expected to indicate whether or not the narrator is the author — by, for instance, setting the narrative in a historical period or by giving the narrator a different gender. In *Trawl* there is no such indication and this leaves an uncertainty as to how the text is to be read as to whether or not we are reading the autobiography of B. S. Johnson. Recourse to other works by Johnson is inconclusive since they too share this uncertainty and in the absence of a biography we are left with an ambivalence. Johnson himself claims that *Trawl* is a nonfiction novel: “It is a novel . . . what it is not is fiction” (Johnson, *Memoirs* 14); but even the nonfiction novel must associate itself with the writer’s life for it to be read as such. And there is the additional problem that *Trawl* uses fictional strategies such as a vagueness of dating (as in *Rites of Passage*, no year is given) or the stream of consciousness technique. In short, *Trawl* cannot be read with ease either as fiction or autobiography: it is an indeterminate case and as such it explores the very basis of the fictive journal form, the embedding of a nonfiction form in a fictional frame. Unlike *Rites of Passage* or *The Voyage of the Destiny*, *Trawl* relaxes that frame.<sup>4</sup> It is left to Malcolm Lowry’s “Through the Panama” to shatter the frame completely.

## V

If B. S. Johnson creates a certain biliousness in the reader by refusing to name his narrator, Malcolm Lowry shipwrecks us in a whirlwind of identities. “Through the Panama” has the subtitle “From the Journal of Sigbjørn Wilderness” and a number of the entries seem to confirm that the diarist is indeed Wilderness: “Nov. 9. Primrose and Sigbjørn Wilderness are happy in their cramped Chief Gunner’s cabin” (31); “Was it, Sigbjørn thought, that he did not wish to survive? . . . Sigbjørn Wilderness (pity my name is such a good one because I can’t use it) could only pray for a miracle, that miraculously some love of life would come back” (40). Yet this speaking of himself in the third person suggests a certain distancing from himself, an inability to accept an identity:

Plight of an Englishman who is a Scotchman who is Norwegian who is a Canadian who is a Negro at heart from Dahomey who is married to an American who is on a French ship in distress which has been built by Americans and who finds at last that he is a Mexican dreaming of the White Cliffs of Dover. (96)

What seems to have occurred is that in making his voyage from Canada to Europe via the Panama Canal Wilderness has begun to see himself as Martin Trumbaugh, the hero of the novel he is writing and who is making a similar voyage: "I am becoming enmeshed in the plot of a novel I have scarcely begun" (27). To complicate matters further, Martin Trumbaugh himself is a writer who becomes caught up in his own novel: "the novel is about a character who becomes enmeshed in the plot of the novel he has written . . ." (27). It is therefore not too surprising that Trumbaugh not only also has a wife called Primrose but shares much of Wilderness's own personal history:

This, Acapulco, is the place that is the main scene of my novel that I have been writing about these past months: and this is where Martin Trumbaugh meets his nemesis. This is also where Primrose and Martin, in 1946, saw the digarilla [a bird of ill omen]. . . . Acapulco is also the first place where Martin ever first set foot in Mexico. November 1936. . . . I remember, going ashore, in a boat. . . . (38-39)

By making the narrator of "Through the Panama" a novelist, Lowry adds another dimension to the examination of past dealt with in both *The Voyage of the Destiny* and *Trawl* and this paralleling of authorial and fictional autobiography dramatizes the duality of the autobiographical element inherent in the fictive journal form.

Yet whilst Trumbaugh is to some extent an *alter ego* of Wilderness, there is an implicit suggestion that Wilderness himself is an *alter ego* of Lowry since the journal tells us that the novel Wilderness is working on is to be called *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid*, a novel published posthumously under Lowry's own name. Thus even the identity of Wilderness is questioned. The narrative of Sigbjørn Wilderness borders on nightmare: "I am not I. I am Martin Trumbaugh. But I am not Martin Trumbaugh or perhaps Firmin either, I am a voice . . ." (37).

Firmin is of course the central character of Lowry's *Under the Volcano*. We have again the problem of identifying the narrator, of telling the novelist from the fiction, and perhaps it would be better to call B. S. Johnson's unnamed narrator just a voice like Lowry's. Yet whereas *Trawl's* narrator seems to have an ego but is in search of a past to explain it, the narrator of "Through the Panama" has a past but is in search of a stable ego to affix to it. And because of this, the effect on the journal form in "Through the Panama" is all the more disruptive, throwing into crisis both the dating of the entries and the status of the text as a discrete physical object.

Like *The Voyage of the Destiny*, "Through the Panama" gives a definite date to the journal: "Leaving Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, midnight, November 7, 1947, S.S. *Diderot*, for Rotterdam" (26). Subsequent entries are also dated. In *The Voyage of the Destiny* I argued that the precise dating of the voyage served to add historical authenticity to the narrative; it denoted a factual accuracy that could be checked by the reader. In "Through the Panama" the initial effect is the same but the stability this seems to offer the reader is quickly undermined both by the problem of the narrator's identity and by a confusion in the dating of entries. The entry following 18 November is marked "Nov. 19 — or 21?" (36); the following entry is marked "Nov. 20 — or 21" (40). This is perhaps not so strange (even given the impossibility that both days might be 21 November) since losing track of the days seems to be a convention of fictive sea journals — only Sir Walter Raleigh of all four narrators keeps an accurate journal and that arguably because as captain of his ship it is one of his duties to keep an accurate log of the passage of time. But more disconcerting is the fact that in "Through the Panama" there are two entries for 27 November, one dealing with the ship's passage through the Panama Canal, the other with the following day. Since this discrepancy, which affects an entry central to the narrative, is neither commented upon nor corrected, the gain in authenticity which dating gives is undermined. In other words, the discrepancy could be the result of a factual inaccuracy on the part of Wilderness, but could equally be the result of a fictional

freedom to invent on the part of Lowry. The reader has no way of orientating the reading. As Lowry's narrator states: "*Dec. 12. Position Report. S.S. Diderot. There is no position report*" (92), a sharp contrast to Sir Walter Raleigh's regular and detailed position reports.

The third way in which the journal form is broken concerns the notion of the journal as a book. I have already pointed out the degree to which *Rites of Passage* and *The Voyage of the Destiny* are seen as physical objects, particularly in respect to the way in which other documents are appended to the manuscript. In *Trawl*, the narrative is thought rather than written so there is no reference to the text as an object, though this does not prevent the inclusion of documents such as a poem or the instructions on a fire-extinguisher (Johnson, *Trawl* 29). "Through the Panama" is again a document, a document the diarist struggles in a storm to keep up: "We stand, bracing ourselves and holding on. This desk thank God is strongly anchored, so I hang on with one hand to desk, write with other. Hope I can read this scrawl later" (93). There is also the framing of other documents within the narrative, poems, newspaper clippings, instructions in French for the abandoning of ship, and the questionnaire for the Quarantine and Immigration Officer to be completed by all passengers passing through the Panama Canal.

Yet gradually the documents begin to break free from the journal form. As Martin Trumbaugh (and/or Sigbjørn Wilderness) undergoes a psychological crisis, so annotations from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* appear in the margins of the journal: "Martin woke up weeping, however, never before having realized that he had such a passion for the wind and the sunrise" (38). Alongside this is quoted "The Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew." One might like to think of these marginal notes as ironical comments made by Wilderness upon himself. However, since they are not commented upon in the journal entries their status is open to question. We have no way of knowing whether they are being quoted by Wilderness or Lowry and thus whether they are inside the fictive document form (that is, made by Wilderness either at the time or later), or outside (as

comments by Lowry on his own fiction). What we have is a collision of texts, the authorship of both being in doubt.

The diary form is also questioned during the actual passage through the Panama Canal since the diary entries are paralleled by a second text to give a typographical representation of the banks of the Canal. From the arrival at the Canal in the evening to lunchtime the following day the diary entries are paralleled by an early history of the Canal taken, we are told, "from the diverting book I hold in my hands, lent us by the 3rd mate of this vessel and called *The Bridge of Water* by Helen Nicolay, published by, etc. etc." (52).<sup>5</sup> We can initially assume this reworking of Nicolay's book to be written by Wilderness, yet the writerly craft by which it covers two diary entries and then skilfully dovetails back into the journal text is incompatible with the artlessness associated with the diary form — as H. Porter Abbott puts it, the use of the diary strategy has become "a formal attribute of the absence of form" (Abbott 19). Though the commentary claims to have been written at the same time it exceeds the possibilities of the fictive document form and cannot have been written by Wilderness as apparently claimed.

This play between texts is again continued after lunch in the Canal, the parallel text being now an alternative commentary on the voyage, drawing a comparison between the Canal and a novel, between the operator of the locks ("who would feel perfectly comfortable if only he did not know that there was yet another man sitting yet higher above him in *his* invisible control tower" [61]) and the novelist. Yet enough has been said to demonstrate the ways in which "Through the Panama," unlike my other three journals, breaks down the boundaries of the diary form. Secondary documents are no longer framed by the diarist's narrative but run parallel to and even themselves frame the diary entries. At the end of "Through the Panama" the form is summed up in the following: "*The whole is an assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another*" (98). And since this comment is both included in and excluded from the text by being placed in italics, is both a comment by Wilderness yet an echo of D. H. Lawrence's description of *Ulysses* quoted earlier (Lowry 31), it too participates in that slippage.



## VI

We have then four sea journals, each of which charts a separate limit of modern diary fiction. *Rites of Passage* returns to the age of the letter journal to recreate that form for a modern readership. In Golding the fictive document is not an imitation of a nonfiction genre but is more subtly a copy of an imitation, the document doubly framed, and Edmund Talbot's rationalist discourse is undermined as much from without as from within. *The Voyage of the Destiny* stresses the documentary possibilities of the fictive document, using the modern resources of the journal form as a confessional to chart Sir Walter Raleigh's final private voyage alongside his final public voyage. For Robert Nye the fictive document is employed not to invoke a past literary form but to invoke history. *Trawl* pushes through the literalness of the fictive document to produce the modern quasi-diary, the diary thought rather than written. But more radically, B. S. Johnson's unnamed narrator throws into doubt the assumed division between fact and fiction — the quasi-diary is also a quasi-autobiography. "Through the Panama" adheres more closely to the formal aspect of diary fiction, but only to disrupt it the more thoroughly. The named narrator is retained but is undermined by being given a number of alternative names. Lowry, like Golding, is concerned with exploring the more literary concerns of diary fiction, but does so with a much more demonic force. The sea journal as fictive document is first holed by a contradiction of dates and then breaks up as its cargo of documents shifts and splits its narrative frame. Of all four authors Lowry is the most adventurous. It still remains to be seen whether any future British writers are prepared to risk their own diary fiction in following him, whether in fact the new routes he opens up will attract other literary explorers.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For an interesting view of the diary novel as a sub-genre of the novel see Prince.
- <sup>2</sup> My remarks in this section are greatly indebted to Martens, Chapter 8, "Letter-Journal Novels and the Influence of Richardson."
- <sup>3</sup> I am indebted throughout this paragraph to Martens, 133-37.

- <sup>4</sup> For a fuller examination of the autobiographical status of *Trawl* see Hassam.
- <sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that the publication details of Nicolay's book are omitted from the text, thus questioning also its status as a factual document. Only by consulting secondary evidence can the book be established as a genuine document. See Nicolay.
- <sup>6</sup> The British diary novel most similar in form to "Through the Panama" is Ann Quin's *Passages*, half of which is in the form of an annotated diary. However, though *Passages* undermines the diary as a self-contained document, the questioning of the diarist's identity does not extend beyond the frame of the novel.

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