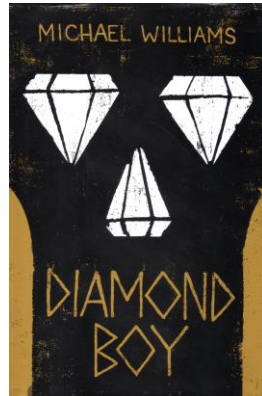
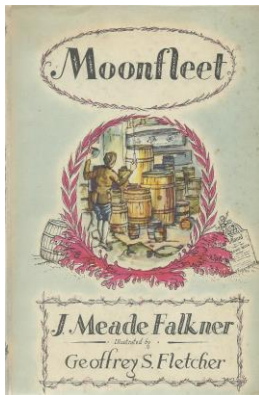


Prosper the Bonaventure... Storm Coming Now Jonathan Brough

An enquiry into how common elements within two pieces of young people's literature, written at different times and set in locations with contrasts both in time and place, reflect protagonists' personal development through geographical travels.



The title of this essay combines key quotations from each of the two pieces of literature which I shall consider within it. “Prosper the Bonaventure” (Falkner 2012 118¹) is used as a password to a sea-cave smugglers’ hideout in John Meade Falkner’s *Moonfleet*, first published in 1898 but set in Europe of 1757. “Storm coming now” (Williams 2014 235²) is the psychic prediction of a far-seeing medicine woman in the 2014 title *Diamond Boy*, written by South African Michael Williams and predominantly set in Zimbabwe in 2006, a world in which belief in the supernatural powers of ancestors sits comfortably alongside mobile-phone using teenagers who crave the South African instant messaging service Mxit. Both texts are Bildungsromane, “‘upbringing’ or ‘education’ novel[s] which] describe the processes by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life” (Cuddon 1999 82). In this essay, I shall endeavour to show

¹ The *Collins Classics* version of Falkner’s *Moonfleet*, published in 2012, is the edition of the text which I shall reference throughout this paper.

² The Little, Brown and Company first edition of Williams’s *Diamond Boy*, published in 2014, is the edition of the text which I shall reference throughout this paper.

how the protagonists' developing sense of maturity and "manhood" (for "the geographical fantasy belongs to the man" (Phillips 1997 5) and consigns female characters to the background as ultimate and "rather shadowy" (Herbert 1984 39) rewards or prizes,) first rejects preconceived notions of boyhood in favour of a gung-ho, materialistic spirit of conquest and discovery: "when you have nothing, I suppose a journey promises everything" (Williams 2014 2). However, I shall then argue that the process does not stop during the travels themselves, when the main character in each text "abandons himself to chance, sailing in uncharted seas in a quest for gold and power" (Phillips 1997 8) but, rather, there is a subsequent development into a rejection of newly- discovered tokens of material wealth in favour of something much more metaphysical and spiritual: "The central conflict in nearly every Bildungsroman is personal in origin; the problem lies with the hero himself" (Buckley 1974 22). The title of the paper, therefore, reflects this development: "Prosper the Bonaventure" is the product of an optimistic appetite to reject the mundane in favour of travel, discovery, escapade, mercenary advantage and manly derring-do, whilst "Storm coming now" cautions, quite literally, that all will not be plain sailing; the waters are choppy ahead and calmer seas will prove something to be desired.

Despite being written 116 years apart, and with a gap in historical setting of around 250 years, there are many remarkable similarities between *Moonfleet* and *Diamond Boy*. Both novels involve travels of in excess of a thousand kilometres, both are concerned with the covert act of smuggling as a gesture of rebellion against an unjust controlling tyranny, both draw upon symbolic representation of life's opportunities through the shape of the letter Y, and both take the form of an ultimate quest to be reunited with a character named Grace, representative and suggestive of the ultimate goal of a peaceful state of mind, tranquillity and resolution. It is, therefore, quite remarkable that the author of the 2014 work has never read the earlier novel - "I confess to not knowing Falkner's *Moonfleet* nor having heard of this writer."³ claims Williams, and by comparing and contrasting the two works I shall attempt to show in this paper that the marked similarities between the narratives highlight the key elements of

³ Email correspondence from Michael Williams to Jonathan Brough, 12 January 2015.

the Bildungsroman ("childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" Buckley 1974 18). I suggest, therefore, that the implied reader's distance from either plot, either historic or geographical, may be not as far as it first appears: much common ground exists.

An obvious parallel between the texts is a focus on diamonds and their power, the initial catalyst for the journeys in the narratives to be made. Portrayed as independent personalities in themselves which enter into conflict with the main characters' underdeveloped consciences- "the girazi finds you" (Williams 114) - the jewels in both novels are vocal and active, certainly equivocal and quite possibly malevolent, agents of greed and avarice: Trenchard hears his asking "Am I not queen of all diamonds in the world? Am I not your diamond? Save me from the hands of this scurvy robber" (188), as it leads him into making one of his greatest, and most ill-considered, actions within the text. Similarly, Patson frequently finds himself having to console "Stumpy" (the stump of his leg following standing on a land-mine, which unbeknownst to him contains his girazi jewels that are being ignored as he searches for his sister Grace): "Stumpy roared at me with angry spikes" (313); "He was red and angry, crying out for attention" (245). In considering the nature of the Bildungsroman, it is telling that the diamonds' influence is greatest on the characters when they are younger, less mature and more egocentric, driven by a thirst for physical, as opposed to emotional, wealth. This, in itself, is initially seen as synonymous with masculinity and Trenchard dismisses Grace's warning regarding Blackbeard's jewel as "a girlish fancy... I wanted so much to be rich, namely to marry her one day" (146): at this stage in his development, he views marriage as a prize that can be bought and sees himself, defined by his masculinity, as the party who should pay. However, the jewels eventually become forgotten and believed lost as characters mature and learn from the travels which they undertake. Furthermore, the diamonds' powers are finally thwarted either by a senior, well-educated member of the community such as Patson's South African hospital specialist, who removes the jewels from the wound - "Whatever you did, Doctor, Stumpy has gone all quiet" (358) - or, in the case of Trenchard, as a result of a newly-discovered desire to satisfy Grace's initial wish and do good for the community, thus defeating the curse supposedly imposed on the jewel by Blackbeard.

The possibly supernatural role of the diamonds, therefore, brings questions of fate, predestination and the power of the metaphysical into question within the texts, either as a curse from wronged parties in the past or as a blessing from ancestors. Furthermore, this may suggest that the personal development of the characters is subject to external forces and they are thus denied important free will on their journeys of self-discovery. Whilst it is certainly a trait of the less mature protagonists to reject responsibility for personal action by attributing phenomena to forces outside their control, be these the results of a curse- “’twas evilly come by, and will bring evil with it” (Falkner 146) - or interference from ancestors, “thanks to my shavi for bringing me both the girazi and a way of getting it off the mine” (Williams 126), both novels retain some respect towards such forces which retain their mystery throughout but mature into a sense of spiritual awareness and belief. This is appropriate for narratives where a protagonist travels into new cultures and experiences phenomena not witnessed in his home setting: “the journey from home is also in some degree the flight from provinciality” (Buckley 1974 20). Indeed, it is in rejection of the materialistic in favour of the spiritual, and in the very act of taking some responsibility for action through appreciating “all you need is within you” (Williams 360, referring both to Patson’s ancestry and his jewels concealed in his wound) that the gradually developing subjects of the novels cast materialistic cares aside by preferring more valuable and philosophical achievements gained from travels. This leads to a more mature understanding of wealth beyond the material in terms of a well-developed character with an inner “vocation and working philosophy” (Buckley 1974 18), and the fully or partly cyclic nature of the journeys in question involves a desire to regain provinciality and return home (or, in the case of Patson, to arrive somewhere similar to the home that was forever lost,) as a complement to the initial provocation to venture forth. It is significant, therefore, to notice talismans in each text which are carried as tokens or emotional bonds but that also have significant functions in plot development: for Trenchard, it is a copy of the Book of Common Prayer, whereas Patson and his sister have two: a “white tie patterned with squiggly black lines” (20) to remind them of the faithfulness of those who help them on Earth, and a firm belief in the power of the spirits of deceased parents and more distant ancestors. In his childhood, Patson proclaims “I’m sort of a prince but it doesn’t mean anything to anybody” (78) and it is only after the ordeals of his travels that he accepts his regal

qualities even though they have been evident to others for some time: in Williams's companion novel, *Now is the Time for Running*, we learn from an observer that "there is a fire in his eyes" (Williams 2012 65). It is telling, therefore, that the final scene of *Diamond Boy* is a message which literally comes from beyond the grave, reminds Patson to "believe", and calls him "Half-Prince" (373).

Furthermore, in both books it is a character named Grace who acts as the ultimate reward for the emergent hero: for Trenchard she is his future wife whom he has long admired from afar and who resides in the village at the start and end of his travels; for Patson she is his younger sister who has been kidnapped and taken to South Africa. The name Grace personifies a set of qualities and is suggestive of an ultimate good, indeed divine and Virginal (Hail Mary, full of grace,) virtue - perhaps the pinnacle of spiritual awareness- which contrasts with the malevolence implied by the cursed diamonds. Little explicit reference to the Christian faith appears within *Diamond Boy*, although Innocent, a minor character whose name implies both purity and a certain naïve ability to see through to the hub of a matter, reminds us "The Ephesians said that you are saved by grace through faith" (293). Furthermore, we learn from the companion novel that Innocent carries a Bible with him, inscribed by his deceased father as "always your salvation" (Williams 2012 211), thus forming an intriguing parallel talisman to Trenchard's Common Prayer. Furthermore, Trenchard foreshadows the development he will undergo throughout the novel when he comments "all the time my aunt read of spiritualities and saving grace, I had my mind on diamonds and all kinds of mammon" (27, my italics). The necessary maturity for attaining both grace and Grace, however, is only achieved at the conclusion to each Bildungsroman, when the journeying is complete, travels are over and appropriate perspective is gained on worldly goods.

The opening line of *Diamond Boy*, "How did you get here, Patson?" (unpaginated), foreshadows the concluding scenes of the novel when the question is again asked, this time after a reminder that "the story you tell makes you who you are" (347). "Adventures map masculinity in relation to geography" (Phillips 1997 45) and the protagonist in both novels undergoes significant travels, both geographical and philosophical, in order to succeed in his quest (first for diamonds, but then for Grace,) and make the most of all the situations which he encounters. Such sentiment is also

evident in *Moonfleet*, in the legend around Elzevir's backgammon board: "Life is like a game of hazard; the skilful player will make something of the worst of throws" (218). The journeys undertaken in the texts, in which Patson and Trenchard act as "the picaresque hero who in his travels meets all sorts and conditions of men" (Buckley 1974 13, with apposite reference to the Book of Common Prayer,) involve considerable geographical exploration. In the first part of *Diamond Boy* (tellingly subtitled "Journey",) Patson endures a six hour walk after a fourteen hour drive; in total, he reflects from Table Mountain at the end of the novel, his travels take him over 1500 kilometres. Trenchard journeys for a broadly similar distance; his itinerary involves Dorset, the Isle of Wight and two areas of the Netherlands before a return to his starting-point; his physical travels are cyclic but his progression in mentality, maturity and the respect of the wider community is not- "the boy hero becomes himself the richest and most respectable member of the village and enforcer of the bourgeois code" (Baldanza 1974 322). Patson, by contrast, has a circular journey in terms of the role he plays within society- he begins the novel as a schoolboy in Bulawayo, but is then denied an education as it is deemed inappropriate for his development into the world of the mine, being told "Your initiation into manhood begins on the diamond fields. There you will learn what it is to become a man" (54), but eventually he regains a place in school at the dénouement of the text. Whilst changes in Patson's personality are not in question- "The Patson who had begun his journey in Bulawayo was nothing like the Patson standing on this mountain above Cape Town" (367) - he does not encounter the final success enjoyed by Trenchard. The respect Williams shows for the complexity of twenty-first century Zimbabwe prevents such an unequivocally happy conclusion, for whilst Patson is back in school he may not be thriving there: his sister "loves being in class again" (372), but Patson's diary merely confirms he "was accepted... [and has] a whole term under [his] belt" (372). Patson regretfully realises that a Tolkienesque journey "there and back again" is not for him: "There's no point in going back now. I feel I have lost my country" (372). Forces beyond him, the representatives of Mugabe and his policies, ensure at least one element of Patson's alienation cannot be overcome.

Neither book is a travelogue, and the pace of each narrative is not commensurate with the distance explored by the characters. Indeed, "a whirligig of time" (Falkner 219, referencing V.i.376-377 of Shakespeare's

Twelfth Night and thus perhaps implying an appetite for the “manly” characteristic of revenge) is at work throughout both texts and the longest journeys often take place within the fewest words. For example, Trenchard travels from the Isle of Wight to the Netherlands in the space of one sentence - “I shall not say anything about our voyage, nor how we came safe to Scheveningen, because it has little to do with this story” (171) yet takes in excess of six pages to travel just over eighty feet down the well of Carisbrooke Castle. Similarly, Patson Mayo travels the 360 kilometres from Musina to Johannesburg in under three hours (and one page of text) but struggles over five pages to walk from his bed to a lavatory- a mission which is eventually unsuccessful- and takes six pages to climb Gwejana Rock to find the grave of his friend at the summit. What is powering the “whirligig” here, of course, is not the distance of the physical journey but the intensity of the personal one instead. Key developments in each novel often take place within a small, isolated area but they have enormous significance in the personal growth of the characters concerned: these are the moments of little bodily movement but much mental maturation: “I took my first giant step away from childhood” (158), says Patson when, over an evening meal, he realises that his life must change forever.

It is during the smallest journeys, the moments of greatest character development, when the central protagonists in each work experience profound alienation and become reliant upon themselves for survival - Trenchard’s journey down Carisbrooke well takes place in a bucket where “all was black as night” (157); Patson finds himself deserted, albeit for his own good, when he faces the challenges of relieving himself or discovering the truth about his friend at the pinnacle of the rock. However, for the majority of their travels through the texts, Trenchard and Patson are accompanied by a companion. Partly this is a symbol of the masculinity to which they aspire in their journey through the narrative, partly it is as a guide, albeit one who reminds the younger protagonists of the conflicts they have endured with an older generation, and it is partly a reflection of themselves. In common with many Bildungsromane, the boys are fatherless, Trenchard from the beginning of the novel and Patson from his father’s death comparatively early in the text. However, the travels which they undertake not only help them to discover a substitute parent - Elzevir for Trenchard, Boubacar for Patson - but also to learn a way of making their own way in the world, modelled on their older, wiser and more manly companion, which has visible practical use to them. Patson’s family’s

relocation from Bulawayo, driven by his stepmother but supported by his father in accepting a teaching post in the middle of a diamond field, causes his previous family unit to disintegrate and he consequently needs to reject the values propounded by his birth parents (albeit, he hopes, temporarily) and find a new means of survival within an alternative world: despite an obvious and enduring respect for his forefathers, Patson claims it is Boubacar who “taught me what it means to be a man” (314). Similarly, Trenchard’s parents die several years before the plot of *Moonfleet* begins, and he is brought up by his Aunt Jane, “too strict and precise ever to make me love her” (1): she alienates him and he only finds acceptance through Elzevir.

The travels within the texts, therefore, often happen with the character of the young person aided and guided (although not necessarily mentored; when moments of great philosophical growth occur, they tend to be necessarily suddenly deserted) by an older father figure. These strong, powerful individuals at first appear to be models of stereotypical, withdrawn masculinity: when we first see Elzevir he is “grim and silent” (7); when we first meet Boubacar, he is described as “a bit scary... tall, with broad shoulders and muscular arms... the ugliest man [Patson] had ever seen” (20). However, they are on voyages of discovery and development themselves - Elzevir, we quickly learn, is coping with the bereavement of his son, who is exactly the same age as Trenchard and of similar appearance, and Boubacar is wrestling with the guilt he feels through being made a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a forced maturation into a premature masculinity: “They came to my village when I was fourteen and made me into a soldier... They made me a leader and gave me my own boys so that I could turn them into soldiers as good as me” (322). A warmer side to each of the adults is then exposed, exemplified by the physical actions which they take in carrying the younger men when they become unable to walk because of injury, and resulting in a mutual acceptance of a redefined father and son relationship: “I should be to him a son in David’s place” (58) claims Trenchard; “Thou art my diamond” (156) assures Elzevir, “I shall be your papa, but only for the crossing” (288) asserts Boubacar as Patson faces the prospect of crossing a crocodile-infested river with only one leg and a pair of bound crutches, although in the companion novel *Innocent* has no doubt of their relationship: “‘I will carry him,’ said Patson’s father” (Williams 2012 97). Indeed, both companions blend a strong physical presence with a powerful

sense of the spiritual. In the case of Elzevir, this is made quite explicit- not only is his strength of character sufficient to appreciate the dangers of pursuing the diamond at all costs - “let the jewel be, John; shall we not let the jewel be?” (181), but his musculature enables him to save Trenchard from the storm, even at the cost of his own survival: “Elzevir has something of God the father - and God the son - about him. Elzevir, Christ-like, bears John up the zig-zag; he is his companion in slavery, he gives his life for him” (McEvoy 2004 56). Boubacar has similar physical strength, again shown in tempestuous water as he carries Patson across the Limpopo River. However, his emotional might is demonstrated differently and reflects the contrasting challenges which face the youth of the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries: instead of encouraging his ward to resist diamonds as Elzevir does (which, indeed, Boubacar sees as essential passports to facilitate the journey between Zimbabwe and South Africa,) the learning which Boubacar passes on concerns marijuana - “Boubacar refused, saying he didn’t smoke roasted cow dung” (155)- and survival: “You want to be a Stumpy all your life?... You are a man now, but if you are going to make the rest of this journey with me, you’d better start believing it” (280).

Both texts are, therefore, effective Bildungsromane, chronicling the journeys of their central protagonists into manhood through a range of travels. The significance of a **Y** is a final comparison to be made, as it is used in both novels as a symbol of opportunity and choice. In *Moonfleet*, the **Y** is a cross-pall on the heraldic shield of the Mohune family, extended by Parson Glennie in a sermon based on Matthew VII: 13-14 into choices of broad or narrow ways in life: “everyone must choose for himself whether he will follow the broad and sloping path on the left or the steep and narrow path on the right” (17) - rather an excellent précis of a Bildungsroman in itself! Furthermore, the same **Y** symbol is a “mark of Cain” (169), the brand used on Block and Trenchard when they are sentenced to slavery, although tellingly it is removed from the former during his self- sacrifice in the storm. In *Diamond Boy*, a similar meaning is placed on the **Y** although it emphasises potential rather than selection, reflecting the explicitly spiritual element within the narrative. Patson dreams of his mother carving a stick in the **Y** shape. It is planted and grows, becoming a tree, house and skyscraper, thus representing the potential everything he can achieve- “ ‘This is all for you,’ she said” (216).

The journeys, travels and experiences of Trenchard and Patson turn them from boys into fully-developed men. As such, they satisfy “very precise psychological needs amongst the readers - the imaginary test of being thrust into situations of physical peril insupportable to most adults, and by pluck and luck providing oneself worthy beyond one’s years” (Baldanza 1974 320). The appetite to escape - Prosper the Bonaventure - is clearly there, but the storm also appears and the waters are choppy: “No diamond is a true diamond until it has been cut and polished. The same is true for a man. Not one of us becomes a man without the pain of being tested, or without the polish of suffering” (280) says Boubacar. Turbulent travels indeed!

Works Cited

- Falkner, James Meade. *Moonfleet*. London: Harper Press, 2012.
- Williams, Michael. *Diamond Boy*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014.
- Baldanza, Frank. “James Purdy on the Corruption of Innocents”. *Contemporary Literature*, Vol 15.3 (1974): 315-330.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Herbert, Michael. Notes on *Moonfleet*. Harlow: Longman, 1984.
- McEvoy, Emma. “‘Really, though Secretly, a Papist’: G K Chesterton’s and J Meade Falkner’s rewritings of the Gothic”. *Literature and Theology* Vol 18.1 (2004): 49-61.
- Phillips, Richard. *Mapping Men & Empire*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1997.
- Williams, Michael. *Now is The Time for Running*. London: Tamarind, 2012.