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# *The Prydain Chronicles* as Myth and Realism

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Lloyd Alexander's *Prydain Chronicles* obviously fall into the modern fantasy genre, as they were written in the 1960s and contain the magic and monsters essential to such a work. But is fantasy nothing more than sorcerers and dragons? Nikolajeva points out that the genre is often cast aside as "purely formulaic fiction" (138). And certainly that is the case in poor works of fantasy, but poor works of realism can be deemed just as hollow. Alexander's work performs at the highest level of fantasy, a level too accurate in its portrayal of adolescence and psychological growth to be dismissed.

Schaafsma sees fantasy in terms of mythology, ritual, and spirituality: "fantasy performs the function formerly carried out by myth and religious ritual" (61). She contends that fantasy "constructs a bridge between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the nonhuman, the objective, material world and a subjective, spiritual realm" (62). Consider the key concern of fantasy, the transformation of the hero, through which he learns of his place in a "larger order" (Schaafsma 64). The idea of a larger order, and the spiritual relationship of an individual to it, is a key concern of myth and religion.

This concern has been carefully elaborated by Joseph Campbell, who suggests that the hero's journey is a search for self, and at the same time a search for God and the world.

Of the “hero-path,” he says, “And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world” (25). This is the purpose of myth—to guide the spiritual journey. This too is the purpose of fantasy.

Myth, fairy tale, and fantasy share the use of imagined landscapes, magic, and frightening creatures to explore the subconscious. Nikolajeva calls fantasy a “mindscape” which brings forth the “protagonist’s inner world” (152). Similarly, Bettelheim states, “In fairy tale, internal processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented by the figures of the story and its events” (25). Prothero says, “Myth teaches meaning, not by realistic logical explanation but rather by imagination and metaphor, entering the back door of the mind through the imagination” (33). Fantasy, fairy tale, and myth function in the same metaphorical way.

There has been some work to draw distinctions rather than show similarities between these three fictional modes, but none of it discredits the premise that fantasy, fairy tale and myth are, at heart, psychological in nature. For example, Nikolajeva claims that a key factor in defining a work of fantasy versus myth or fairy tale is the “presence of the Primary and the Secondary world” (142), the primary world being our own world, the landscape of realistic fiction, while the secondary world is the place of magic, the fairy tale world. The key, she suggests, is the movement from normal to magical world, the modern “clash between the magical and the ordinary” (139). But by such a definition, no book of the *Chronicles* qualifies as fantasy, as there is simply Prydain, the land where Taran was born and lives throughout his adventures.

More important to consider are the ways in which the definitions of fantasy, fairy tale, and myth seem to mimic or overlap one another, and therefore justify the evaluation of the *Prydain Chronicles* as myth. For example, in book one of the *Chronicles*, *The Book of Three*, Taran begins his journey by chasing the escaped oracular pig, Hen Wen, into the forbidden forest beyond

Caer Dallben where he has spent his entire young life (Alexander 23). Bettelheim, in discussing the nature of fairy tales, states that “being pushed out of the home stands for having to become oneself. Self-realization requires leaving the orbit of home, an excruciatingly painful experience fraught with psychological dangers” (79). Campbell suggests that in myth the journey begins with the crossing of a “first threshold” beyond the “hero’s present sphere, or life horizon,” beyond “parental watch” and the “protection of his society” (77). He also suggests that it is often a “blunder” of “merest chance” that leads to this crossing (51). This, of course, is very much the case as Taran charges into the forest because a pig has escaped his care. And one can logically relate Nikolajeva’s assertion that there are two worlds in fantasy to Taran’s crossing into the forest—not two worlds, but two zones (142).

Again, the important point here is that myth, fairy tale, and fantasy share the same thrust, which is to represent the dangerous journey into the self, and the discovery of the spiritual connections between world and self, as a fantastic adventure. This is the justification for interpreting the *Prydain Chronicles* as if they were myth.

Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey provides the best system for such an analysis. It follows the outward physical elements in the journey and connects them to the corresponding psychological processes. Under Campbell’s model, the hero will follow a number of identifiable steps along the way.

The journey begins as the hero is “lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure” (245). For a hero who has answered the call, he may be helped across the threshold by “some little fellow of the wood, some wizard, hermit, shepherd, or smith, who appears, to supply the amulets and advice that the hero will require” (72).

The threshold is the “entrance to the zone of magnified power,” the “limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon” (77). This zone is often desert, jungle, deep sea, and the like, as these “regions of unknown . . . are free fields for the projection of unconscious content” (79). There may be a “shadow presence that guards the passage” (245).

“Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves

in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (97). Some of the forces the hero encounters in the zone of magnified power will assist the hero on his journey (246). He may also be assisted by the “advice, amulets, and secret agent of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into the region” (97).

As the hero nears the end of his adventure, “he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward” (246). The reward may be the hero’s union with a goddess-mother figure or his atonement with a father figure, and likely the acquisition of some boon (246). Then the hero must return. “If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection . . . if not, he flees and is pursued” (246). Still other times, he is rescued: “the world may have to come and get him” (207). Either way, he must cross back over the threshold and reenter the world while “the transcendental powers must remain behind” (246). This return is also a test, as the hero must “survive the impact of the world” (226). He must bring back the “boon that restores the world” (246). The boon represents some form of enlightenment. The hero’s final test, then, is to teach what he has learned (218).

The stages of the hero’s journey may be summarized as follows:

- Call to Adventure
- Helpers and Amulets
- Crossing the Threshold
- Tests
- Helpers
- Final Test
- Flight
- Return
- Elixir

Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey provides a highly structured approach to interpreting a work of fantasy, a work that, like myth and fairy tale, uses fantastic images to represent a journey into the self. Such a journey is about breaking through inner fears and misconceptions to transform the self,

to reach a new stage of life. In Taran's case, his transformation is twofold: he becomes a man, and he becomes a king.

The remarkable achievement of *The Prydain Chronicles* is that readers can see step-by-step the changes that occur in Taran. There is a process that takes place outside the subconscious. Readers can see the outward signs of Taran's maturation, changes in his behaviors and attitudes. This is perhaps where we can see that *The Prydain Chronicles*, while sharing many key attributes of myth, are still a modern narrative form, highly detailed and full of richly realized characters. And in this regard, in addition to the *Chronicles* being a superb work of the fantasy genre, we may also consider Alexander's work as something closer to realism.

In *Worlds Within*, Egoff points out the relationship of the *Prydain Chronicles* to the realistic fiction that becomes prominent in children's literature of the era. The 1960s was a time when the family structure of the previous decade was "shattered," resulting in more working mothers and single-parent families and, for children in many families, increased responsibility and anxiety (Egoff 174). Divorce, drug addiction, alcoholism, sex, and child abuse were now acceptable topics of adolescent literature (Egoff 175). But at the heart of these issues as they played out in literature was a "search for identity" (Egoff 175). And, according to Egoff, "It is in its main theme—Taran's search for identity and his maturation—that the Prydain series breaks from earlier fantasies" (177). Alexander's search for identity likens the *Chronicles* to works of realism from the same period.

The changes in Taran's understanding of life are so gradual and true to life that we cannot ignore this aspect of Alexander's work in his main character. In the *Chronicles*, the hero's journey, central to works of fantasy, symbolically represents the journey into the self, and there is also the realistic presentation of Taran's maturation to adulthood.

If Campbell's model provides guidance in evaluating the hero's journey, then what is the model by which to judge Taran's growth throughout the five books? In part, the answer is intuition. Each person has his own idea of what it means to be an adult. But in looking for something more con-

crete, more structured, the answer can be found in the discipline of developmental psychology, which is concerned with the progress of an individual through the various stages of life.

Adolescence is a process, rather than a state, through which an individual takes on adult responsibility (Rayner 104). During the process, the individual will often undergo what Rayner calls a “life crisis,” which occurs when “structures of adaptation and deference are no longer adequate to assimilate new demands” (105). In simpler terms, the youth is looking for his proper place in the world. Such a crisis will often involve “anxiety, perplexity, and impulsive action” (Rayner 105). This is similar to Campbell’s idea of crossing the threshold. Campbell gives the example of Pan, a threshold guardian who instills panic, or strong anxiety, in those who cross his path into the zone of amplified power (81). The similar elements of the life crisis and crossing of the threshold show that both approaches—mythology and psychology—are dealing with the same process of change, but one route follows the symbols, while the other follows behaviors.

The first component of adolescence is a focus on the self, which is in “a great state of flux” (Rayner 113). This is the frame of mind from which all other steps of development flow. The adolescent is looking to test his identity in society (Rayner 113).

He breaks his idealized view of adults, particularly parental figures and their “beliefs, way of life and their discipline” (Rayner 110). This is the first step in building his own outlook. At the same time, he may become the devoted admirer of older people, particularly of the same sex (Rayner 112). “Through their example, a young person can find the way to new perspectives of action and thought outside the limits of his family” (112).

The adolescent also experiences intellectual growth. The ability to think abstractly (in algebraic terms) develops, which leads to increased concern for the future (Rayner 107). This new thought process leads to an inclination toward planning, considering alternate possibilities. Also tied up in this abstract thinking is increased ability to see oneself from another’s point of view and the ability to “incorporate a variety of out-

side judgements into [his] self-concept” (Craig and Specht 155).

Psychologically, another key aspect of adolescence is sexual development, which is beyond the borders of Alexander’s work. But part of sexual development is finding a mate, a love interest. There is a tendency to fall in love with one who possesses a strength where we are weak (Rayner 129). There is a strong desire for one’s love interest to recognize some ability he believes he possesses, but is unsure of (Rayner 133). Looked at this way, the impulse to love one’s opposite can also be characterized as a movement toward inner growth.

Finally, because of an adolescent’s focus on the self, on his own change, he will often move through the world without regard for everyday tasks or the feelings of others (Rayner 123). This may lead to a reputation for thoughtlessness and irresponsibility not uncommon in adolescents (Rayner 123). But these are important aspects of “adult maturity,” and by adulthood others will come to be dependent on the adolescent, often in his role as worker (Rayner 123). Work choice, then, is central to one’s development of identity (Rayner 120).

In summary, we can break down the adolescent search for self into the following components:

- Rejecting parental figures.
- Gravitating toward role models.
- Thinking abstractly: planning and seeing other points of view.
- Seeking a mate.
- Showing concern for others.
- Taking responsibility for the completion of tasks.
- Choosing a work identity.

The hero’s journey and the journey through adolescence are parallel, two ways of describing the same transformation—myth below the surface, and developmental behaviors above the surface. The hero’s journey and the development psychology models can be applied to each book of *The Prydain Chronicles* and also to the series as a whole.

When we meet Taran, in *The Book of Three*, he is an

assistant pig-keeper in the care of the 379-year-old wizard, Dallben, and Coll, a farmer and pig-keeper. Coll is teaching Taran to make horseshoes, but Taran wishes to forge a sword. He grabs up a strip of hot iron and, over Coll's protests, begins to hammer out a sword which, not surprisingly, he turns into a strip of twisted iron (Alexander, *Three* 11-12). Immediately, Taran is shown to be impulsive, lacking in regard for the advice of his guardian and at odds with his chosen work identity. In the opening scene, three of seven behavioral factors are at work. In other words, Taran is a rebellious teen.

During the same opening chapter, Dallben is introduced as Taran's primary guardian and, in mythic terms, his first helper. Dallben explains the dangers present in Prydain, gives warnings and advice. He even explicitly sets out the threshold for Taran's adventure. "You are barely at the threshold of manhood . . . So, you must not leave Caer Dallben under any circumstances, not even past the orchard, and certainly not into the forest" (Alexander, *Three* 17). This jibes with the behavioral model of maturation to manhood as well as the mythic model concerning a physical boundary.

As mentioned earlier, this is exactly how Taran's adventure begins. He blunders into the forest, where immediately he encounters the Horned King, who acts as both threshold guardian and ultimate test in *The Book of Three*. Taran's reaction is one of panic, which as Campbell suggests is often the case upon crossing the threshold. Taran hides, "terrified" (Alexander, *Three* 25). And he is in fact cut by a blade of one of the Horned King's horde, an indication of the real danger that lies beyond Taran's familiar home (Alexander, *Three* 26).

Soon after, Taran meets Gwydion, high prince of Prydain and a fierce warrior. He is another helper, an early indication that Taran will not have to make his journey unaided. Gwydion also serves as Taran's first and primary role model. He is everything Taran aspires to be. And yet at the same time, this first encounter provides another look at Taran's ill-conceived expectations of identity. Taran is disappointed to find that the prince is not

outwardly the hero he had expected. "Taran still stared in disbelief at the simple attire and the worn, lined face. From all Dallben had told him of this glorious hero, and from all he had pictured himself—Taran bit his lip" (Alexander, *Three* 27). It does not, however, take long for Taran to begin to admire Gwydion.

As the *Book of Three* goes on, Taran comes upon helpers and tests, which are often one and the same. How Taran treats these various helpers and what they show him about himself provide insight into Taran's maturation. The tests bring out the best and worst of Taran's traits.

The strange creature Gurgi is both a helper and a test. He provides a test of Taran's character, rather than a physical obstacle to be overcome. How will Taran treat a seemingly weaker, less civilized creature? And early on, Taran does not pass this test. His first reaction to the hairy, straggly creature is one of impatience and disgust (Alexander, *Three* 40-41). And later, when Gurgi runs from the evil Cauldron-Born, Taran calls him a "miserable, sneaking wretch," though Gurgi's presence would have been little help (99). It is only later, after Gurgi has been wounded and nobly suggests the companions go on without him, that Taran sees the error of his judgement (Alexander, *Three* 121). Taran tells Gurgi, "You won't be left in the woods, and you won't have your head chopped off—by me or anyone else" (Alexander, *Three* 121). This incident is a first, strong sign of Taran's concern for others. It comes slowly, but once Taran sees what is right, he is kind and loyal. That is growth.

We see a similar characteristic of Taran in his relationship with Gwydion. When the two (along with Gurgi) are attacked by Cauldron-Born, Taran stands with the prince to fight, though he has been commanded to flee (Alexander, *Three* 56). The two are captured and then imprisoned by the sorceress Achren. Later, when Taran believes Gwydion dead, he takes on the prince's task of getting word to his kingdom of Don. "My own quest," says Taran of finding the pig, Hen Wen, "must be given up. If it is possible after the first task is done, I mean to return to it. Until then, I serve only Gwydion. It is I who

cost him his life, and it is justice for me to do what I believe he would have done” (Alexander, *Three* 111). Here, in a test of Taran, we see his loyalty to a task and to his role model Gwydion, and his idealism. Throughout the *Book of Three*, Taran continually makes mistakes and then works to right them.

His relationship with Eilonwy is a perfect example. She aids Taran in escaping from Achren’s dungeon after he and Gwydion are captured by the Cauldron-Born, but she accidentally frees the bard and king Ffleuddur Fflam instead of Gwydion as Taran has asked of her. For her effort, Taran calls her a “traitor and liar” and accuses her of complicity with Achren (Alexander, *Three* 92-93). But moments later, he apologizes. And moments after that, he is ready to head out alone in shame, but she won’t allow it. It is the earliest sign of an awkward youthful courtship, always vacillating between endearment and blunder. There is an exchange, after Eilonwy fails in an attempt to cast a spell against the Cauldron-Born:

He gave Eilonwy an admiring glance. “It doesn’t matter. They’re gone. And that was one of the most amazing things I’ve seen. Gwydion had a mesh of grass that burst into flame; but I’ve never met anyone else who could make a web like that.”

Eilonwy looked at him in surprise, her cheeks blushing brighter than sunset. “Why, Taran of Caer Dallben,” she said, “I think that’s the first polite thing you’ve said to me.” Then, suddenly, Eilonwy tossed her head and sniffed. “Of course, I should have known; it was the spiderweb. You were more interested in that; You didn’t care whether I was in danger.” (Alexander, *Three* 126)

This pattern continues throughout *The Book of Three*,

with Taran moving in and out of Eilonwy's good graces.

We can see from the above examples Taran's movement through adolescence—his rejection of parental figures, gravitation toward a role model, concern for others, taking responsibility for a task, and seeking of a mate. We can also see his progress through the hero's journey—his call to adventure, crossing the threshold, helpers, and tests.

There are numerous other pieces of the puzzle that have not been highlighted. Of his behavioral development, there is planning as he guides his companions toward the Royal House of Don after Gwydion's apparent death, and he certainly sees other views of himself, which are constantly thrust upon him by Gwydion and Eilonwy.

Other aspects of the hero's journey in *The Book of Three* are the additional helpers of Fflewddur Fflam, the dwarf Doli, the nature lord Medwyn, and King Eiddileg, who at first is a test, but then supplies Doli as a guide. The primary amulet is the ancient king's sword Dyrnwyn, which Eilonwy finds while leading Taran from Achren's dungeon. Other significant tests were Taran's nursing of a fledgling Gwythaint, a fierce bird cruelly used by Arawn, recovering the oracular pig, Hen Wen, and the final test, an encounter with the Horned King, during which the Horned King is slain. It is important here that Taran does not actually defeat the Horned King. Gwydion does.

In the framework of the journey, then, Taran does not accomplish much without the explicit help of others. But in the end, he sees this. "I have no just cause for pride," he says, "It was Gwydion who destroyed the Horned King, and Hen Wen helped him do it. But Gurgi, not I, found her. Doli and Fflewddur fought gloriously while I was wounded by a sword I had no right to draw. And Eilonwy was the one who removed the sword from the barrow in the first place. As for me, what I mostly did was make mistakes" (Alexander, *Three* 217).

And so while Taran's return to his home in Caer Dallben is not accompanied by a boon to "restore the world," he does come armed with new insight into his place within the world

(Campbell 246).

Taran carries forward this insight into *The Black Cauldron*, book two in the *Prydain Chronicles*, and into each successive volume of the series. In each book, we see the hero's journey repeated, and in each book we witness his maturation through adolescence, sometimes repeating lessons, sometimes learning new ones.

In *The Black Cauldron*, Taran's call to adventure is no blunder, but a task assigned to him by the enchanter Dallben and Prince Gwydion, both helpers in Campbell's model, and the latter a role model as set out in the developmental psychology model. In this task that he is assigned, to aid the retreat of a war party, Taran is split off from his role model, Gwydion, but finds another in Adaon, son of Prydain's chief bard. And as plans go awry and Taran's party takes on the greater task of finding and destroying the black cauldron, Taran faces a number of tests from both within and without the party and himself. He finds a treacherous rival in Prince Ellidyr, must face the powerful witches at the Marches of Morva, and survive the Huntsmen of Annuvian. But, more difficult than any of these tasks, he must deal with the death of Adaon and surrender, for the sake of his task, a broach given to him by Adaon which bestows great wisdom upon its wearer.

Later, in a similar incident, which represents both a challenge in Campbell's model and a step toward adulthood in the developmental model, Taran swallows his pride for the sake of his task. He agrees to give Ellidyr full credit for recovering the black cauldron, which Taran himself has obtained, in exchange for Ellidyr's help in delivering the cauldron to Gwydion (Alexander, *Cauldron* 190).

In addition to Adaon and his broach, Taran encounters other helpers, most notably Gwystyl, of the race of fair folk, who is stationed not far from Annuvian and who is deceptively shrewd. He helps the companions escape the Huntsmen and also provides the magical bird Kaw, who will travel with Taran throughout the *Chronicles*.

The above examples are not exhaustive, but serve to reveal the presence of key elements of the hero's journey and

Taran's march through adolescence within the *Black Cauldron*. Similar analysis could be successfully applied to each of the final three books in the series. Instead let us look at the *Prydain Chronicles* as a whole, which combined follow the hero's journey more faithfully than any one of the books.

*The Book of Three* serves as our primary call to adventure. When Taran enters the woods beyond Caer Dallben, it is his first step into Campbell's journey and the only moment in the series—though he ventures from his home to woods many times afterward—that Taran meets the threshold guardian. In fact, the key challenge for Taran, the final test, is the slaying of the Horned King, who serves as the guardian. Along the way, Taran picks up the key helpers of his ongoing adventures: Fflewddur Fflam, Prince Gwydion, Gurgi, Doli, and Eilonwy. Dallben and Coll also serve as helpers, although they are met prior to Taran's crossing of the threshold. The sword Dyrnwyn, which does not reveal its full powers until the final book in the series, *The High King*, is also gained during this first adventure of the *Prydain Chronicles*. The sword serves as the singular amulet of the overall story, and its appearance early in the story shows that important elements of a single, extended hero's journey occur throughout the *Chronicles*.

*The Black Cauldron*, *The Castle of Llyr*, and *Taran Wanderer* serve as tests within the extended hero's journey. *The Black Cauldron* is concerned with destroying the magical cauldron that provides Arawn Death-Lord with his army of undead. Just as there are many sub-challenges to defeating the threshold guardian in *The Book of Three*, there are sub-challenges in destroying the cauldron. Within *The Black Cauldron*, these sub-challenges serve as the tests leading up to the final test. But in the extended hero's journey of the *Prydain Chronicles*, these sub-challenges are simply components of the one test, that of destroying the cauldron.

The same can be said of *The Castle of Llyr*. The final test here is the protection of Eilonwy and the defeat of Achren, who once ruled Prydain and who bestowed Arawn Death-Lord's powers upon him. Along the way, Taran and company face challenges such as an encounter with a giant cat and his

giant master. The cat, Llyan, later becomes a helper to the group. Another challenge faced here is the clueless and kindly Prince Rhun, whom Taran sees as a rival for Eilonwy's love, but whose bumbling turns him into an inadvertent magical helper.

In *Taran Wanderer*, Taran's quest is of his own choosing. He sets out to learn his parentage. Discovering himself is a key test for Taran as without that knowledge he cannot be a leader of men as he must become in *The High King*. Among the sub-challenges of this test are a shepherd who falsely claims to be Taran's father and a king who offers to take Taran as his son and heir. These are among the toughest challenges Taran faces in all the *Chronicles*, the former because Taran must come to terms with his lowly station, and the later because he must refuse a royal station, though he greatly desires it, because he knows it is not his true place in the world.

In *Taran Wanderer*, he meets a number of unique helpers in the Free Cammots. Among these are Llonio, Hevydd the Smith and Dwyvach Weaver-Woman, Annlaw Clay-Shaper, and Llassar the shepherd. Each of these characters helps Taran to see himself. The importance of these helpers grows in *The High King*, as Taran is asked by Gwydion to rally the men of the Free Cammots for a final battle with Arawn Death-Lord. Taran has been moving closer to leadership since *The Book of Three*, and in *The High King* he experiences the full burden of leadership, as men may suffer under his choices. This is perhaps Taran's most difficult test within the *Prydain Chronicles*, but the final test, the supreme ordeal of the *Chronicles*, is the defeat of Arawn Death-Lord and his deathless cauldron-born. Both of these feats are accomplished by Taran with the power of the sword Dyrnwyn. At this point we see the climax of the hero's journey attained.

To review, in *The Book of Three*, Taran hears a call to adventure and the threshold is crossed, the threshold guardian defeated. In *The Black Cauldron*, *The Castle of Llyr*, and *Taran Wanderer*, Taran faces the tests of destroying the cauldron, saving the Princess Eilonwy, and finding himself. Finally, in *The High King*, the final test is faced, Taran becomes a leader and defeats Arawn Death-Lord. Throughout these ad-

ventures, various helpers and amulets are encountered and smaller tests are surpassed. In *The High King*, the three remaining steps of the hero's journey occur: flight, return, and elixir.

Though, by Campbell's definition, flight occurs when the hero seeks to escape the magic realm, in *The High King* the Sons of Don leave Prydain and take all that is magical with them, including Dallben and Taran, if he so desires. "All enchantments shall pass away and men unaided guide their own destiny" (Alexander, *High King* 280).

The return, then, occurs when Taran refuses to go to the distant land, where life is eternal: "There are those more deserving of your gift than I, yet never may it be offered them. My life is bound to theirs. . . . I cannot restore the life of Llonio Son of Llonwen and the valiant folk who followed me, never to see their homes again. Nor can I mend the hearts of widows and orphaned children. Yet if it is in my power to rebuild even a little of what has been broken, this I must do" (Alexander, *High King* 290). In making this choice, his final test, Taran is then crowned high king of Prydain.

Taran's ascension to the throne is part of the elixir to heal the land. It gives him the power to apply what he has learned. The other elixir is the craft secrets which Arawn had stolen from the people of Prydain long ago, and which Gurgi unknowingly saved when the dark realm of Annuvian was destroyed. "Here are the secrets of forging and tempering metals, of shaping and firing pottery, of planting and cultivating. This is what Arawn stole long ago and kept from the race of men. This knowledge is itself a priceless treasure" (Alexander, *High King* 298). Hence, each step of Campbell's hero's journey is played out across the five books of the *Prydain Chronicles*.

In terms of Taran's development through adolescence, there are steps of his maturation present within each book, but also we can find a focus within each book corresponding to key components of the developmental psychology model.

In *The Book of Three*, the elements of the developmental model that stand out are Taran's rejection of parental figures and gravitation toward role models. He has no desire to remain in

the role that has been chosen for him, an assistant pig-keeper. He wishes to be a warrior. And as he spends time with Prince Gwydion, he begins to learn what a true warrior is. In *The Black Cauldron*, the completion of a task drives Taran, and he is willing to sacrifice his pride and most valuable possession to that end. In *The Castle of Llyr*, the focus is on Taran's seeking a mate. The plot is built around trying to rescue Eilonwy, while at the same time trying to save Prince Rhun, who is Taran's rival for the princess's love. In *Taran Wanderer*, Taran looks for himself, but does so by seeking out a work identity, sampling various trades of the Free Cammot folk. And, finally, in *The High King*, Taran's concern for others is at the forefront. It is first visible in his straining under the weight of commanding troops, the responsibility for people's lives, and later when he chooses to stay in Prydain to help rebuild the land when the easier thing to do would be to join the Sons of Don on their journey.

In Alexander's *Prydain Chronicles*, we see Taran's growth into manhood played out in a story of action, monsters, and magic, a story that functions as all myth functions—as a metaphor for subconscious changes in the mind that mirror one's physical development. At the same time, Alexander has written a story of realism, one that presents the literal changes in behavior and attitude that one experiences on the road to adulthood. This dual presentation of Taran's growth makes the *Chronicles* both myth and realism, and yet more than either. It is the completeness of this presentation that makes the *Prydain Chronicles* so satisfying.

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