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**Lloyd Alexander's**  
*Chronicles of Prydain as a*  
*Bildungsroman*

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”For each of us comes a time when we must be more than what we are” (*The Castle of Llyr*, 10).

## **Introduction**

The *Chronicles of Prydain* are a children’s fantasy written by Lloyd Alexander and published for the first time between 1964 and 1968. The series enjoyed an immediate success both among readers and critics and have been reprinted in the States ever since their initial publication (White 100-101). The *Chronicles of Prydain* consist of five novels, namely *The Book of Three*, *The Black Cauldron*, *The Castle of Llyr*, *Taran Wanderer* and *The High King*. The novels are loosely based on Welsh mythology from stories collected in the *Mabinogion* (May 25-26), but as stated by Alexander in his “Author’s note” of the first novel, “Prydain is not Wales - not entirely, at least. The inspiration for it comes from that magnificent land and its legends; but, essentially, Prydain is a country existing only in the imagination” (7).

The novels centre on the adventures of the main character, Taran, a young orphaned boy who is an Assistant Pig-Keeper at the farm of the wise enchanter Dallben in the county of Prydain. In the beginning of the series, he is living a calm life in the country but very much yearns for a more adventurous existence. One day, the oracular pig he is supposed to guard runs away and Taran is forced to leave his safe home to pursue his charge into the wild forest. In his quest to retrieve the pig, Taran encounters many new friends and foes and a great deal of danger. Forced to make decisions that might be a matter of life and death for himself and his companions, Taran realizes that adventures are not as glamorous or as fun as he had previously imagined. From his ordeal and the examples of his friends, he learns a great deal about the way of the world and the true meaning of heroism. In the following four books, Taran sets out on other quests, each time learning something new about life and about himself.

Lloyd Alexander, the author of the chronicles, is an American writer born in 1924 in Philadelphia. After participating in the Second World War, Alexander began his writing career by translating French works and later published some books for adults. In the late 1950’s, he slipped into writing for children when asked to write biographical novels of American Jewish heroes for children (8, 13). Alexander was pleased to do this because, as Jill May explains, “[h]is World War II experiences had made him aware of the need for humanitarianism and he wanted to show how religious tolerance was a part of America’s greatness” (14). *The Book of Three* was one of Alexander’s first books for children and he found his passage to writing for children very satisfying: “I don’t want to imply that I didn’t like writing adult books, or wasn’t interested, or didn’t do my best. But I found this writing

[Prydain] to be the deepest form of art I had ever come across” (qtd in Tunnell 44). Since the Prydain series, Alexander has written numerous books for children in various genres.

I have chosen the quotation in the epigraph because it epitomizes an important aspect of *The Chronicles of Prydain*; the books are in a high degree concerned with the importance of becoming, of learning and of maturing. According to Alexander, “the Prydain books all together might be an attempt to express what it takes to become a human - all the things that you have to go through and give up and learn and so forth to become a real human being” (White 100). As Dallben states in *The Castle of Llyr*, “[f]or each of us comes a time when we must be more than what we are” (10), i.e. the world and circumstances will undoubtedly one day force every one of us to *become* something which we are not at present. To *become* greater than we are we have to experience new situations, learn new things and cultivate our minds.

The cultivation of the mind is exactly what the *Bildungsroman* deals with. Alexander’s series of novels have been referred to by critics as a *Bildungsroman* (Kuznet 29, Stott 25) and as seen above, even the author himself states that the books are about growth. Michael Levy points out, however, that the term *Bildungsroman* has often been used as a very vague definition, sometimes only implying that the main character develops during the novel (100). I therefore think it would be interesting to investigate if the *Chronicles of Prydain* could also qualify to be called a *Bildungsroman* according to the more stringent criteria for a *Bildungsroman* applied by Jerome Buckley in his book *Seasons of Youth*.

Prior to the examination of the chronicles, I will briefly present the concept of the *Bildungsroman* and its history and the criteria for a typical novel of development according to Buckley. In my analysis of *The Chronicles of Prydain* as a *Bildungsroman*, I would like to examine which criteria are fulfilled and which are not. If certain criteria are not met, I will try to find an explanation as to why they have been left out. In the section “Working Philosophy”, I will thoroughly examine exactly what Taran learns in each book and thereby map his way to “enlightenment”.

## The *Bildungsroman*

[W]e may call it the *Bildungsroman*, first, and primarily, on account of its content, because it represents the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion; but also second, because just this depiction promotes the *Bildung* of the reader more than any other sort of novel. (Morgenstein qtd in Kontje, 1993, 15-16)

The essence of the *Bildungsroman* is according to Thomas Jeffers physical, psychological or moral transformation, which means that “[t]he hero is no longer ‘ready-made’” (2) but is instead, as stated by Bakhtin, “the image of *man in the process of becoming*” (qtd in Jeffers 2). The *Bildungsroman* concept can trace its beginning to the 1794-1796 publication of Goethe’s work *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Jeffers 9) which was translated into *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* by Carlyle in 1824 (Buckley 10). The novel describes the self-cultivation, development and coming of age of the protagonist Wilhelm Meister as he searches for his place in society.

The term *Bildungsroman* was invented by Karl Morgenstein in 1803 (Kontje, 1993, 15) and as seen from the quotation at the top of this chapter, the *Bildungsroman* was early depicted as promoting both the *Bildung* of the novel’s protagonist and that of the reader. The hero of a *Bildungsroman* “engages in the double task of self-integration and integration into society. Under ideal conditions, the first implies the second: the mature hero becomes a useful and satisfied citizen” (Kontje, 1992, 12). Buckley renders Susan Howes’ definition of the *Bildungsroman* as a “‘novel of all-around development or self-culture’ with ‘a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience’” (13).

The *Bildungsroman* concept spread from Germany to England and was soon embraced by authors such as Carlyle, Mill and Arnold. Jeffers, however, points out that the German writers were more concerned with the individual’s development in itself while English writers tried to integrate the individual’s cultivation with his development as a part of society (35): “the hero of a typical English *Bildungsroman* [...] is decidedly part of his social milieu, and his social milieu is part of him” (Jeffers 36). In contrast to the continental *Bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti points out that the English *Bildungsroman* emphasizes equality and democracy and that its hero is often an everyday person that the reader easily can identify with (191). Another difference between the continental and the English *Bildungsroman* is according to Franco Moretti the fact that plot in the continental

*Bildungsroman* is based on a conflict between the mind of the hero and the values of his society, whereas the established and influential middle class in England makes the English version of this genre derive its conflicts not from the values of the social class of the hero but from above or below in the social ladder or from something inherently evil, such as monsters or the devil (199-200). Though some critics think it best not to define or that it is impossible to define exactly what a *Bildungsroman* is (Jeffers, 49, Redfield, vii), I will nevertheless use Buckley's criteria of a typical novel of development and see if it is possible to define *The Chronicles of Prydain* as a *Bildungsroman*.

### **Buckley's criteria for a *Bildungsroman***

It is an illusion that youth is happy, an illusion of those who have lost it; but the young know they are wretched, for they are full of the truthless ideals which have been installed into them, and each time they come in contact with the real they are bruised and wounded. (Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*, qtd in Buckley vii)

According to Buckley, the plotline of a typical *Bildungsroman* can be summarized in the following stages: childhood, provinciality, the conflict of generations, the larger society, self-education, alienation, the search for a vocation, ordeal by love and a working philosophy (17). Buckley states that no true novel of development lacks more than two or three of these elements.

Buckley also adds that a typical novel of development is "strongly autobiographical" (23) and to illustrate, he quotes Maugham's description of his *Bildungsroman Of Human Bondage*: "It is not an autobiography, but an autobiographical novel; fact and fiction are inextricably mingled" (24). Buckley states that the novel of development is often one of the first novels written by the author. Consequently, the author is often too near the subject of his novel and can not distance himself from the novel in a satisfying way. The result of this is that the writer often leaves the ending ambiguous (24).

For practical reasons, I will sometimes put two of these terms which are closely related together in my analysis. I will now examine to what extent *The Chronicles of Prydain* can be said to fulfil these requirements.

## **Which elements of the *Bildungsroman* are present in *The Chronicles of Prydain*?**

### **Childhood and provinciality**

Since the elements of childhood and provinciality are often connected in the *Bildungsroman*, I will discuss these two terms together. Although there is no elaborate description of the main character Taran's upbringing, the first book commences when Taran is still young. No exact age of the protagonist is ever stated, but Dallben clarifies in the first novel that Taran is "barely on the threshold of manhood" (13) and in the second novel which takes place half a year later, another character informs us that Taran has grown since the first novel (17-18), which means that Taran is probably in his early or middle teens in the first book of the series.

According to Buckley, the classical hero of a *Bildungsroman* grows up in the countryside or a provincial town, where his imagination is bound by social or intellectual constraints. The hero is often fatherless or altogether an orphan (17-19). Taran meets this requirement of a *Bildungsroman* hero, because he grows up in a "white, thatched cottage" which is surrounded by fields, forest, an apple orchard, a chicken run, a forge and a pig pen (*The Black*, 11). All of these words tell us that Taran's home Caer Dallben is a small farm in the country. Taran is also an orphan whose parents are unknown and he has been raised by the old enchanter Dallben and the farmer Coll. Taran's imagination is dampened by his surrogate fathers, as will be shown in the next passage.

### **The conflict of generations and alienation**

Buckley says that the hero's family, most often his father, is antagonistic to his ambitions and creative instincts and "to new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading". The hero's schooling at home also frustrates him because it makes him see the limited possibilities in his environment (17).

In Taran's case, he has two surrogate fathers, Dallben and Coll, and he feels that they both stand in the way of his ambitions and creative instincts. The very first lines of *The Book of Three* illuminate this aspect of Taran's discontent: "Taran wanted to make a sword; but Coll, charged with the practical side of his education, decided on horseshoes" (9). This sentence lucidly conveys the conflict between Taran's dreams and his reality: Taran wants to live a life full of adventure, represented by his wish to make a sword, but in real life, he lives the life of a farm boy and has to settle for an everyday life, represented by the horseshoes. The term education is even mentioned in this quotation, and it is easy to see that Taran does

indeed feel frustrated by his schooling at home, like a true *Bildungsroman* hero. Taran's other surrogate father, Dallben, also tries to curb Taran's desire for adventure, and when danger threatens the country, Dallben forbids Taran to leave the farm "for the time being". Taran then exclaims: "For the time being! [...] I think it will always be for the time being, and it will be vegetables and horseshoes all my life!" (13).

It is obvious that Taran is dissatisfied with his circumstances and that he feels a certain alienation from his current situation in life which is so far away from the way of life he desires. These sentiments of alienation and conflicts between the generations are also clearly expressed when Taran complains to Coll that "I think there is a destiny laid on me that I am not to know anything interesting, go anywhere interesting, or do anything interesting. I'm certainly not to *be* anything. I'm not anything even at Caer Dallben" (*The Book of Three*, 15).

Taran wishes to lead a completely different kind of life and he does not feel that he is important, or fulfilling a role at Caer Dallben. The feelings of not fitting in and not contributing to Caer Dallben's existence in a meaningful way probably also feed Taran's sense of alienation from his home. Taran's statement that he will never do any of the things he desires, likewise reinforces the conflict between the generations regarding the way Taran is to lead his life. Since the *Bildungsroman* concept emphasizes all the things Taran regrets that he will probably never do, namely becoming and experiencing new knowledge, places and skills, Taran's statement also points to a certain possibility that *The Chronicles of Prydain* may be classified as a *Bildungsroman*.

### **The larger society and self-education**

Buckley claims that because of the constraints of home, the hero of a *Bildungsroman* leaves his home and his innocence and goes to the city. In the city, the hero experiences urban life and his true formation process begins. The city represents both freedom and corruption (17). In *The Chronicles of Prydain*, the element of leaving home is present, but Taran does not expressly leave his innocence and his home because of his discontentment, but because the oracular pig he is supposed to look after runs away into the forest. Taran does not either go to the city in the first novel, but he journeys across the country in search of the pig and other objectives he sets for himself during his quest. In none of the five novels does Taran actually go to the city and the main reason for this is that there does not seem to exist any city in Prydain. The closest things to a city in Prydain are castles, and Taran stays at castles for some time but he never really interacts with the residents here or learns anything important. I would



rather like to compare the experiences the *Bildungsroman* hero has in the city to the experiences that Taran gains in Book Four when he wanders around Prydain and makes different kind of acquaintances with all sorts of people.

What on the other hand fits Buckley's description of this *Bildungsroman* element is the fact that Taran leaves his innocence behind when he departs from his home. During his journey, friends and foes he meet along the road will disillusion him and many of his romantic notions of adventure will fade. Almost immediately after entering the forest, Taran meets Gwydion, the mightiest hero in Prydain and when he reveals to Taran that Coll once performed a heroic deed, Taran disbelieves him: "Coll? A hero? But...he's so bald!". Gwydion answers that "you have curious notions about heroes. I have never known courage to be judged by the length of a man's hair. Or, for that matter of that, whether he has any hair at all" (26-27). This is only one of the first episodes of disillusionment about heroism that Taran will experience in the course of his adventures. Forced to make a difficult decision between pursuing the important oracular pig or warning the royal family of an attack, Taran will soon long for his safe home and "[yearn] even to weed the vegetable gardens and make horseshoes" (73).

Buckley defines the city as being a source of both freedom and corruption and in a similar manner, Taran's journeys across Prydain also represent both freedom and corruption. Taran is free to make his own choices in life and he soon comes to understand how difficult the principle of free choice can be. On numerous occasions, Taran has to choose between giving up his quest and, in turn, gain divine wisdom, a kingdom, or a vocation or simply do his duty and continue his quests but as a result, win nothing. If he should chance to make the wrong choice, corruption may be behind the corner. An example of a choice Taran is faced with takes place in Book Two when he is offered to become the war leader of a traitor war lord who aspires to rule Prydain (202). In this way he is presented with a way in which to gain easy glory but if he accepted, he would certainly have entered the road to corruption.

The *Bildungsroman* emphasizes the fact that we are free to make our own choices, a thought which Jeffers corroborates by saying that "the central idea [of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*] [...] is that a person in some measure is free to shape his own life" (27). Jeffers is also of the opinion that there is no fate in Goethe's novel but that Wilhelm makes his own story by "the intelligence that can create something out of the opportunities given by the lucky or unlucky agencies [...] of necessity, chance or anything he himself might freely have effected" (28). Alexander seems to share the same philosophy of a man's ability to make his own fortune by choices and cunning. This becomes maybe most evident in the fourth

book, when Taran meets a man called Llonio who appears to have extraordinarily good luck. When they part, Llonio reveals the secret of his good fortune: “my luck’s no greater than yours or any man’s. You need only sharpen your eyes to see your luck when it comes, and sharpen your wits to use what falls into your hands” (205). Thus, by making his own choices and using his wits, Taran is able to shape his own destiny and finally become king in the last novel. Dallben in the last book also highlights the decisions Taran has made in his life as essential to his final destiny:

*If you had failed at your tasks; if you had followed an evil path; if you had been slain; if you had not chosen as you did – a thousand “ifs”, my boy, and many times a thousand [...] of all things that might have been, one alone becomes what really is. For the deeds of a man, not the words of a prophesy, are what shape his destiny. (215-216)*

### **The search for a vocation**

Buckley lists the hero’s trying out a professional career as a vital part of the classical *Bildungsroman* (17). Although Taran holds the title of Assistant Pig-Keeper until he ascends the throne at the end of the last book of the series, he harbours higher ambition than his present place in the world. In *Taran Wanderer*, Taran therefore leaves home and tries out different careers. First he learns the craft of the sword smith at the forge of Hevydd the Smith. Taran works hard in the smithy, and does all tasks from gathering fuel for the furnace, smelting out metal from stones and casting iron bars to finally shaping the metal. Eventually, Taran succeeds to make a sword that can serve and Hevydd praises him and tells him that he has the capacity to become a good sword smith. Hevydd protests when Taran says it was by luck he completed his sword, claiming that Taran made his sword more by “labour than luck” (213). Hevydd goes on to explain his view on life; “Life’s a forge, say I! Face the pounding; don’t fear the proving; and you’ll stand well against any hammer and anvil!” (213). At Hevydd’s, Taran thus learns that by working hard you can achieve almost anything you want in life. This is an episode where it is easy to argue that Alexander’s American background asserts itself as Hevydd’s philosophy on work ethics seems to be closely related to the Franklinian American Dream. After Taran has completed the sword he realizes, however, that his heart is not into this craft and he continues on his journey.

Next stop on Taran’s journey is the loom of Dwyvach Weaver-Woman. In order to teach the craft of the weaver, also Dwyvach has Taran working hard combing and carding

the wool, spinning it to thread, dying the thread, threading the loom and finally weaving the cloth. Dwyvach praises him and tells him that he has a future as a weaver but Taran realizes that weaving is not his vocation either. Taking leave of Taran, Dwyvach says that “if life is a loom, the pattern you weave is not so easy to unravel” (220). At Dwyvach’s, Taran thus learns that in order to avoid unnecessary complications in life, it is essential that you make the right decisions, since once made, mistakes are difficult to undo.

Taran’s third and last attempt at a craft in *Taran Wanderer* takes place at Annlaw Clay-Shaper’s hut. Taran becomes enchanted by Annlaw’s craftsmanship and wishes more than anything else to master the potter’s craft. At Annlaw’s, Taran learns how to find, dig, sift, mix and knead the clay and work at the potter’s wheel. Finally, Taran succeeds in making a bowl that is worth keeping. Serving his apprenticeship at Annlaw’s, Taran understands that you can also see life as “clay to be shaped, as raw clay on a potter’s wheel” (253). To Taran’s dismay, however, he finds that he does not possess the talent to realize his dream of becoming a potter: “I could forge a sword well enough and weave a cloak well enough. But now, what I truly long to grasp is beyond my reach. Must the one skill I sought above all be denied me?” (232). Since the potter’s craft is truly denied him, another lesson Taran learns at Annlaw’s is what it is like to fail.

The theme of the failed artist is not uncommon in the *Bildungsroman*, as Jeffers points out: “No few canonical *Bildungsromane* [...] project the hero as artist manqué, someone not talented enough to be an artist but sensitive enough to be a critical member of the audience” (53). Even if Taran does not find his vocation in *Taran Wanderer*, he at least tries out several crafts and learns many different ways of looking at life. In a *Bildungsroman*, mistakes are a vital part of the self-education, or in Goethe’s own words: “it is possible that all their apparently misguided steps may lead to some inestimable good” (qtd in Jeffers 33). The same train of thought is delivered by Dallben in *The Book of Three*, “[i]n some cases [...] we learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from the answer itself” (14).

### **Ordeal by love**

To experience ordeal by love, Buckley declares that the classical *Bildungsroman* hero must have “at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” that leads to a reassessment of the hero’s values (17). This is an element of the classical *Bildungsroman* that is not at first glance present in *The Chronicles of Prydain*. Taran is romantically interested in

the head-strong and garrulous princess Eilonwy and their relationship slowly evolves through the series. In the last chapter of *The High King*, the two are finally married.

According to Moretti, the classical *Bildungsroman* must end in marriage since marriage is a “metaphor for the social contract”, a “[pact] between the individual and the world”; “[o]ne either marries or [...] must leave social life” (22-23). The marriage between Taran and Eilonwy at the end of the series is thus appropriate for a *Bildungsroman*, and it is evident that Taran has at least one love affair in the chronicles. But is there another?

William Thompson observes that sex or sexual desire is a taboo in children’s literature (121) and since the chronicles are children’s books, the complexity of the hero’s sentimental education is naturally not dwelled upon. Thompson also remarks that “Alexander [...] tend[s] to treat the erotic feminine either obliquely or not at all” (128). Because of these reasons, it is not easy to determine if there is more than one love affair in the series. I will, however, argue that there is another woman who may not be an outspoken love interest of Taran’s but who nevertheless will make Taran reassess his values about women. This woman is Achren, an evil sorceress queen that in *The Book of Three* captures Taran and Gwydion. Achren is described as very beautiful: “[h]er long hair glittered silver in the torchlight. Her face was young and beautiful, her pale skin seemed paler still above her crimson robe” (43). It is obvious that Taran admires her beauty. Even if Taran is still very young in the first book, it is yet possible that he, at least on a subconscious level, entertains some brief, romantic notion about Achren. The queen tries to lure Taran into betraying Gwydion by using her charms and playing nice. When Gwydion warns him of her trap, Taran is bewildered: “[f]or an instant he could not believe such beauty concealed the evil of which he had been warned” (44). When Gwydion has tipped Taran off, Achren shows her true evil nature openly to Taran and he is incarcerated.

Although the passage where Taran meets Achren is brief, the meeting will have far-reaching consequences, because this meeting makes Taran a bit suspicious towards women. The next person the imprisoned Taran encounters is the princess Eilonwy and although she offers to help him run away, Taran still doubts her: “she might betray him to Achren. It might be another trap, a new torment that promised him freedom only to snatch it away” (53). Even after Eilonwy has rescued him from his cell, Taran is quick to call Eilonwy a traitor and compare her to Achren because of an innocent mix-up: “What treachery is this! [...] You’ve been with Achren all along. I should have known it. You’re no better than she is!” (66). Taran’s relationship with Eilonwy starts off on a bad footing because of Taran’s experiences with Achren. I therefore argue that Taran has had two emotional involvements

with women (no matter how brief) and that one of these experiences was of a debasing nature while the other was of an exalting nature. Seen from this perspective, Taran can be said to meet the requirements of a classical *Bildungsroman* hero for ordeal by love to a certain extent.

### **A working philosophy**

Buckley claims that in a typical *Bildungsroman*, the hero changes his values through soul-searching, gains his own philosophy about the way of the world and thereby reaches maturity. Having cultivated himself, the hero can return to his old home and show everyone what he has become.

Since Taran gains new wisdom and thus acquires a new addition to his working philosophy in each novel, I will deal separately with the novels and examine exactly what working philosophy Taran gains in each book.

#### *The Book of Three*

In *The Book of Three*, Taran changes from a naïve boy eager for heroism and discontent with his quiet country existence into a boy who realizes the dangers of an adventurous life and longs for the safety of home. Jon Stott demonstrates that in *The Book of Three* one of Taran's major accomplishments is that he learns to appreciate his companions (22). At the beginning of his meetings with each new companion, he mostly considers them an inconvenience. For instance, at his first meeting with Gurgi, a creature half-human, half-beast, Taran calls him a "silly, hairy thing" who "deserve[s] to have [his] head smacked" (30). Still at his third meeting with Gurgi, Taran's opinion of him is not favourable: "He is no friend of mine [...] He is a miserable, sneaking wretch" (71). Taran's first attitude to Eilonwy is likewise condescending and he addresses her as "[I]ittle girl" (47) and thinks of her as "scatterbrained", "addlepat" and "a rattlebrained fool" (53, 59, 54). Taran, marked by his experience of Achren, also soon begins to regard Eilonwy with suspicion. Seeing the bard Fflewddur Fflam for the first time, Taran feels only disappointment because he had expected to meet Gwydion instead and accusingly threatens Fflewddur with his sword: "'You're not Gwydion!' he shouted. 'Never claimed I was', the stranger shouted back. [...] 'Come out of there', Taran ordered, thrusting again. 'Certainly not while you're swinging that enormous – here now, watch that! Great Belin, I was safer in Achren's dungeon'" (66).

It is clear that Taran does not give his companions an initially warm welcome but considers them either a nuisance like Gurgi, a disappointment like Fflewddur Fflam or

with condescension or suspicion like Eilonwy. During the course of the journey, Taran realizes that each companion is useful to the group and at the end of the book, after having completed his mission, Taran even confesses to Dallben,

I have no cause for pride [...] Gurgi, not I, found [the pig] [...] Fflewddur fought gloriously while I was wounded by a sword I had no right to draw. And Eilonwy was the one who took the sword from the barrow in the first place. As for me, what I mostly did was make mistakes. (154)

It is thus a humbled Taran that returns home after his adventure. He has learned not to overestimate his own abilities and not to underestimate the help of his companions. Dallben points to the importance of the unity of the group and not of the individual achievements: “Does it truly matter [...] which of you did what, since all shared the same goal and the same danger? Nothing we do is ever done entirely alone. There is a part of us in everyone else” (155).

There is also a stark contrast between Taran’s feelings about staying at home in the first chapter of the *Book of Three* and in the last chapter. His complaint about the tediousness of staying at home in the first chapter, “I am not to know anything interesting, go anywhere interesting, or do anything interesting” (15), has turned into a praise for home in the final chapter: “I have dreamed often of Caer Dallben and I love it [...] I asked for nothing better than to be at home, and my heart rejoices” (155).

The experiences away from home have contributed to Taran’s growing up process and it is clear that Taran has gained some wisdom. This new-found sense of maturity is reflected in Taran’s next sentence, following his utterance about his appreciation for home: “Yet it is a curious feeling. I have returned to the chamber I slept in and found it smaller than I remembered. The fields are beautiful, yet not quite as I recalled them” (155). The solution to the mystery of Taran’s erroneous memory is of course, as Dallben observes, not that his home has diminished but that Taran has grown.

### *The Black Cauldron*

Stott notes that in *The Black Cauldron* Taran wrestles with his ego (22). Already in the opening scene of the novel, Taran’s pride is hurt when the haughty prince Ellidyr calls him a pig-boy. In this novel, Taran joins prince Gwydion’s quest to retrieve a black magical cauldron which is used for evil purposes and therefore must be destroyed. In order to fulfil his

mission, Taran finds himself forced several times to sacrifice his own glory or forego his chances to win easy glory.

One example of such a sacrifice presents itself when Taran has to choose between keeping a magical brooch which contains prophetic dreams and wisdom that would give him the chance to “win much glory and honour” or give the brooch away in exchange for the for Taran useless cauldron he seeks in his quest (158). Having sacrificed the brooch to buy the cauldron, Taran later finds himself in a position where he has to disclaim his own part in regaining the cauldron and give all the glory to Ellidyr to ensure the cauldron’s successful return to prince Gwydion. Finally, Taran rejects the glory offered to him by a treacherous war lord. By making these choices, Taran overcomes his desire for glory and his ego is dampened. Prince Ellidyr can be seen as a foil for Taran, but while Taran’s ego is tempered, Ellidyr’s ego takes control of him. Ellidyr’s ego is even described as a black beast riding on his shoulders and not until Ellidyr dies, is he freed from the beast.

Voluntarily giving up his chances to win easily gained glory marks another step on Taran’s journey to become a man. When Taran regrets the loss of the brooch, Gwydion responds: “You chose to be a hero not through enchantment but through your own manhood. And since you have chosen, for good or ill, you must take the risks of a man. You may win or you may lose” (219). His journey of sacrifices has made Taran loose a bit more of his childhood naïveté.

As in the first book, the inner growth is reflected in changes in Taran’s appearance. At the end of *The Black Cauldron*, King Smoit, a character who met Taran at the beginning of the novel comments, “You looked like a rabbit the first time I met you. Now the rabbit is gone and only the skin and bones are left!” (217).

### *The Castle of Llyr*

As Alexander states in his author’ note in *The Castle of Llyr*, the novel is “sometimes more comic” and “bittersweet rather than grandly heroic” (7). In the novel, Taran struggles with his feelings for the princess Eilonwy and tries to come to terms with his sense of not being worthy of her because of his lowly station in the world. Stott reports that Taran in this novel is made aware “that individuals must be judged by their inner worth” (23). In *The Castle of Llyr*, Taran’s patience is severely tried by the clumsy and thoughtless prince Rhun whose parents wish to engage him to Eilonwy. On a closer acquaintance, Taran realizes that Rhun has many good qualities and despite the rivalry he feels, he accepts that Rhun is not to blame.

I also argue that another example of the importance of a man's inner qualities is to be found in the giant Glew. Glew was originally a very small man and in an attempt to gain respect, he drank a potion that made him much bigger. The pivotal thing about Glew is that although he is big on the outside, he is still a small, petty man on the inside. As a consequence of his small-mindedness, Glew still can not get any respect because his inner qualities shine through. Glew's lingering smallness is illustrated by Ffleuddur continually referring to him with the adjective little, i.e. "little worm" and "little fellow" (126,132). Ffleuddur even comments that "Glew seems rather, how shall I say it, small! [...] he was a feeble little fellow to begin with and now he's a feeble little giant!" (117). Ffleuddur even professes an inability to stop associating Glew with smallness: "I don't know why I keep thinking of him as a little fellow, except that he impresses me that way no matter what his size"(132). I consequently endorse Stott's idea that *The Castle of Llyr* is a lesson in judging persons by their inner qualities but with the reservation that this is nevertheless a lesson that Taran does not completely assimilate until the next book, *Taran Wanderer*.

#### *Taran Wanderer*

*Taran Wanderer* is the novel where Taran grows into a man for real. As I have stated before, I also argue that this novel can be seen as the equivalent to the part of a classical *Bildungsroman* where the hero goes to the city. In this book, Taran goes out into the world to find out who his parents are. In his heart, he hopes to discover a noble background that will enable him to propose to the princess Eilonwy.

In his search for his unknown parents, Taran meets all sorts of people and from each, he learns something new. From King Smoit, Taran learns that "a king's strength lies in the will of those he rules" (60) and by employing his diplomatic skills, Taran succeeds in settling a long-standing dispute in Smoit's kingdom. In return for his service, Smoit offers Taran to become his heir to the throne and his adoptive son. Taran's consciousness, however, tells him to continue his search and that he "would rather hold kingship by right of noble birth, not as a gift" (79). This sentence demonstrates that Taran still considers a man's birth more important than his inner worth and that some of the prejudices he fought in *The Castle of Llyr* still remain with him.

Another important lesson that Taran learns is not to disdain the worth of human beings even though human beings have bad qualities as well as good ones. Taran is taught this by his encounter with the evil wizard Morda who, though born human, has removed himself from the human way of life. Morda scorns human beings; he considers them to be "feeble



creatures”, “lower than beasts, blind and witless, quarrelsome, caught up in their own small cares” (110) and he transforms Taran’s companions into animals, Gurgi for example becomes a mouse. Morda has hidden away his life outside his body and consequently ceased to be human, in order to obtain longevity. When Morda realizes that Taran has accidentally found his life and can easily crush him, Morda offers him gold, all his secrets, enchantments, power and even “the race of men at your beck and call” (122). Taran is appalled and replies, “You set yourself above the human kind [...] You scorned their weakness, despised their frailty, and could not see yourself as one of them. Even I, without birthright or name of my own know that if nothing else I am of the race of men” (121). I believe that this episode is the beginning of Taran’s ensuing realization that all men are equal. The theme of inner worth is again emphasized when Taran tells Gurgi that “Morda couldn’t have changed what you truly are [...] Mouse though you might have seemed, you still had the heart of a lion” (131).

At one point in *Taran Wanderer*, Taran’s quest seems to be at an end when the shepherd Craddock claims to be his biological father. Taran can not hide his disappointment at finding a poor shepherd to be his father. He feels trapped and obliged to stay with Craddock and help him with his work. Taran gives up all aspirations of ever winning Eilonwy and comes to resent Craddock for destroying his dreams but at the same time he admires him for his kindness and hard work. Still, when he for a few seconds fears that Craddock has died in an accident, Taran almost rejoices: “beyond his will, terrifying in its sudden onrush, a wild sense of freedom flooded him as though rising from the most hidden depths of his heart. In one dizzying glance he seemed to see his cage of stone crumble” (178). Taran even considers leaving the wounded Craddock to die for a moment, but then he comes to his senses and is ashamed of himself. In an effort to save Craddock, he sacrifices a thing of great value to him, but it is in vain as Craddock still dies. Following this event, Taran truly realizes that it is the inner worth of a man that counts and sees his parentage as irrelevant: “

Taran makes me sick at heart. I longed to be of noble birth [...] A proud birthright was all that counted for me. Those who had none – even when I admired them [...] as I learned to admire Craddock - I deemed them lesser because of it. Without knowing them, I judged them less than what they were. Now I see them as true men. Noble? They are far nobler than I”. (189)

Taran is shocked by the revelation that he almost let a man die because he disdained the man’s low station in life and its repercussions on Taran’s social standing. He finally

acknowledges that it is a man's actions and not his birthright which defines the man and he cannot any longer ignore his own despicable actions vis-à-vis Craddock. This is a turning point in Taran's development as he up until this moment has always nurtured a hunger for glory deep down. In this episode Taran can clearly see that it is this hunger for glory that has debased his character and almost made him sacrifice another human being.

No longer desiring any noble birthright, Taran instead takes it upon himself to try to find a job that will make him proud of himself. At the end of the novel Taran gazes into The Mirror of Llunet, a pool of water said to reveal who a person truly is. I argue that when Taran describes his vision in the pool, the principles of equality, inner worth and the fact that we are all both good and evil that he learned during the course of the novel, are again stressed to show that Taran has integrated them into his philosophy:

I saw myself [...] I saw strength – and frailty. Pride and vanity, courage and fear. Of wisdom, little. Of folly, much. Of intentions, many good ones; but many more left undone. In this, alas, I saw a man like any other. But this, too, I saw [...] Alike as men may seem, each is as different as flakes of snow, no two the same. [...] Now I know who I am: myself and none other. I am Taran. (252)

This passage demonstrates that Taran embraces his own humanity. Taran recognizes that he is a man like all other men, with both good and bad traits. His admission of his own flaws and weaknesses shows a whole new level of maturity in Taran. Even though Taran realizes that he is not unique but just a man among other men, the passage also reveals his belief that each man is special in his own right. Taran in this way both relinquishes the idea of himself as somebody unique who must be destined for greatness, and welcomes his own humanity because being human means belonging to a race of individuals, each different and alike in his own special way.

I believe that this passage bears witness to Taran's passage into true manhood. At this stage, Taran has learned how the world works, he has learned to interact with and appreciate various kinds of people and he has finally discovered and accepted who he himself is.

### *The High King*

As in the first two books, Taran's inner growth achieved in *Taran Wanderer* is reflected in a change in his outward appearance in *The High King*. At Taran's homecoming in *The High*

*King*, Eilonwy remarks: That's odd [...] There's something different about you. [...] It's – well, I can't quite say. I mean, unless you told someone, they'd never guess you were an Assistant Pig-Keeper" (11). Coll's comment also underlines Taran's growth: "He [Taran] left us a pig-keeper and comes back looking as if he could do anything he sets his hands to" (11). Taran's new-found manhood and capabilities are also evident from the fact that he is now allowed to give orders in his old home and in the king's statement that "the day has come when an Assistant Pig-Keeper must help bear the burden of a king" (101). Taran does not enrich his working philosophy as much in *The High King* as he did in the previous novels because he has already matured in this last novel. One issue discussed in this novel is the fact that good and bad are interwoven in the human heart. Taran's final last lesson is given him by Gwydion following Taran's victory over Arawn Death Lord:

You have conquered only the enchantments of evil. That was the easiest of your tasks, only a beginning, not an ending. Do you believe evil itself to be so quickly overcome? Not so long as men still hate and slay each other, when greed and anger goad them. Against these even a flaming sword cannot prevail, but only that portion of good in all men's hearts whose flame can never be quenched. (220)

As shown in this passage, the ending of the chronicles is left open and ambiguous since Taran's real challenge begins at the end of the series. Overcoming the evil in men's hearts by the example of goodness is a never-ending task. In this way, Gwydion's words can also be interpreted as an exhortation to the reader to follow in Taran's footsteps and help complete his assignment.

In connection to this theme is the idea that we are free to shape our own lives, or as expressed by the witch Orddu's metaphor: "You must still choose the pattern, and so must each of you poor, perplexed fledglings, as long as thread remains to be woven" (211). Again, this can be seen as directed both at Taran and at the readers as Taran as well as the implied readers are just at the starting point of life. As pointed out by Stott, the ending where Taran becomes high king of Prydain, is really just the end of Taran's apprenticeship and in fact the start of another beginning where new choices have to be made (28).

### **Autobiographical elements**

There is definitely an autobiographical element to *The Chronicles of Prydain*. Tunnell points out that Taran is the character in the series with which Alexander identifies the most (238): “I [Alexander] have been racked up by indecision just as much as poor Taran, and I certainly have physically gone through, to some extent, the same kind of miseries.” Alexander nevertheless recognizes the differences between himself and his fictional creation: “Taran emerged a ‘shining hero, and I did not’” (qtd in Tunnell 42). Tunnell also remarks that there is a similarity between Taran and Alexander in the fact that Alexander, to his great disappointment, discovered that he was never going to be able to become a real violinist in the same way that Taran realized that he did not have the ability to become a fine potter (238).

As a child, Alexander loved reading and in the wake of World War I, he and his playmates were fascinated by the notion of war. May writes, “as he grew up Alexander thought of war as a wonderful adventure; he dreamed of the heroism found in wartime and failed to recognize its more somber aspects” (2-3). Nineteen years old, Alexander joined the army and was finally placed in the military intelligence (May 4-5). But, as Tunnell points out, Alexander soon discovered the realities of war and “the romantic bubble burst” (236). In the autumn of 1944, Alexander was shipped to Wales where he was to find his inspiration for the chronicles (May 6). To Alexander, Wales seemed to be a country of legends. This is apparent in May’s quotation of Alexander: “Wales, to my eyes appeared still a realm of bards and heroes; even the coal-tips towered like dark fortresses” (6). White reports that Alexander himself has confessed that *The Chronicles* represent “his attempt to come to terms with his own war experience” and White notes that the series “deal with what happens when youthful idealism meets the realities of war” (100). In this respect, it is easy to see that Taran is an alias of Alexander, because they were both young idealists who “dreamed of the heroism found in war-time and failed to recognize its more somber aspects” (May 3).

It is also noteworthy that like many *Bildungsromane*, the chronicles were one of its author’s first literary works and the ending of the series is left open, signalling that the writer may have identified with his hero to such an extent that he could not neatly tie up the novel no more than he could have tied up his own personal life.

## Conclusion

I claim that *The Chronicles of Prydain* can be regarded as a *Bildungsroman* on the basis of Buckley's criteria for a typical novel of apprenticeship. In one disguise or another, all Buckley's criteria for a typical novel of development are met. It is also clear that the series follows in the footsteps of the English tradition of *Bildungsromane* as Taran is definitely part of his social milieu. The end result of Taran's self-education is in fact that he is so much a part of society that he is chosen to rule it. The English *Bildungsroman* ideas of equality and democracy are also prominent in the novels and Taran's greatest strength as a character comes from the fact that he seems to be just an ordinary boy. Since the conflict in the chronicles does not arise from a clash between the hero's values and those of society but from an evil entity lurking in the shadows, one need not hesitate to call *The Chronicles of Prydain* a typical English *Bildungsroman*.

In his chronicles, Alexander adds his own touch to the *Bildungsroman* elements of childhood, provinciality, the conflict of generations, the larger society, self-education, alienation, the search for a vocation, ordeal by love and a working philosophy. The first novel starts when Taran is still essentially a child and as a true hero of a novel of development, Taran grows up in the countryside. Taran is discontent with his upbringing, feels alienation with the station in life his foster fathers have provided him with and he longs to prove his own worth in the outside world. Unexpectedly, Taran is forced to leave his safe home and experience the nature of the harsh reality. Making new acquaintances and realizing that adventure is not as easy-going and glamorous as he had imagined, Taran learns life's hard lessons on his own. In the fourth novel, Taran tries out different professional vocations and through Achren and Eilonwy he becomes familiar with different representations of women and learns to discern what to value in a woman he is romantically interested in. In all five novels, Taran adds to his working philosophy and at the end of each adventure, Taran returns home a little wiser and having lost a little more of his naïve illusions about the world and about what being a man is really like.

As can be seen from my arguments, the series literally meets all the criteria except that Taran does not go to the city when he enters the larger society and that he does not have two explicit love affairs. I nevertheless argue that the omission of these two points result from necessity. Taran cannot go to the city since the geography of Prydain does not seem to include any cities and he cannot experience two sexual encounters since these are children's books. I have nevertheless argued that both Eilonwy and Achren can be seen to fulfil the roles

of romantic interests, though in Achren's case this is only vaguely hinted at. Had this been an adult book, Achren's interactions with Taran would probably have been more extensive. Taran nevertheless has two emotional experiences of very different women and one of these is debasing while the other one is exulting.

Since Taran acquires new knowledge in each book (and this is the case most notably for Books One, Two and Four), one can argue that each book can be seen as a *Bildungsroman*, but to meet Buckley's definition, it is necessary to consider the whole cycle. As Tunnell affirms, Alexander himself is of the opinion that the main theme of his writings is "the process of growing up" (130) and in the *Chronicles of Prydain*, the author has successfully integrated the adventure genre with the *Bildungsroman* concept. The conflicts Taran encounters reflect conflicts within him, a fact which is also in concordance with Buckley's statement that "the central conflict in nearly every other *Bildungsroman* is [...] personal in origin; the problem lies with the hero himself" (22). From the novel of development's point of view, Taran's adventures serve to highlight certain aspects of the human condition and how to deal with it. Stott has brilliantly illustrated the essence of *The Chronicles of Prydain* in his observation that "Taran's main journeys take place within his heart and soul" (27).

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The Chronicles of Prydain, based on Welsh mythology, have become the standard of excellence in fantasy literature for children. Since The Book of Three was first published in 1964, young readers have been enthralled by the adventures of Taran the Assistant Pig-Keeper and his quest to become a hero. Taran is joined by an engaging cast of characters

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