Immersed this past year in the attempt to read my namesake’s works, I find it impossible to pen elegiac closure. As I write, another of his books is still to be published, and Mr. Alexander’s spell still holds his living progeny. I propose a toast, then. Here’s to both Lloyd Alexander and to the worlds he invented and peopled. Here’s to the imaginations he sows! These will insure his immortality. May we all endeavor to be the persons he thought we could be. Cheers!

**THE SPELL OF ALEXANDER THE FANTASTIC**

In which the Magician/Writer appears in his own narrative world

“There has never been enchantment strong enough. Magic can’t work miracles,” said Arbican. “I create illusions. I don’t indulge in them myself” (*Wizard*, 14). In fact, though Alexander clearly had the magical ability, he, as so many of his protagonists, did not accurately assess his impact. Though so many of his writings are still lauded today (in part perhaps in spite of, or because of, *Harry Potter’s* exploits), the magician/author brooded over his own relevance, and he placed himself squarely in his stories. Read the biographical and autobiographical records and you will find yourself seeing Alexander in each of his works. Flewdur Flam “carries the author’s soul” (May 49), but he is uncannily like the Boy in *The Gawgon and the Boy* and his gifts like those of Arbican. He is the idiosyncratic character, gracious and self-deprecating. Perhaps he is the figure with a shaggy lock of hair carelessly pushed out of his eyes, wandering a woodsly path. We are certain, though, that when the critical moment arrives, he steps forward with the right invocation, the astute observation.

**One smiles—One learns**

Alexander could amuse even the distraught—both physically and emotionally pained. Insinuating the scrawny and unsuccessful robber, Moxa, into the misfortunes of Prince Jen
and company, Alexander mixed wisdom with idiosyncrasy. Though the Moxa is the picture of
inauspicious presence, he names his own perspicacity and senses: the Ear of Continual Atten-
tiveness, the Eye of Discerning Perception, and the Nose of Thoughtful Inhalations—even as
the Voice of Solemn Warning deals with a sword-brandishing madman. The Prince has his own
moments: “Jen hesitated. His belly went on in a wheedling vein, suggesting tasty dishes and a
warm bed. Jen began to suspect that his belly was very clever and subtle with its own purposes,
and not to be trusted” (Remarkable Journey 194). Gurgi, an extremely endearing creature from
Alexander’s stable of talking animals, subverts both language and oppressors with his “rantings
and chantings” (Taran 72).

With the power to invent narrative worlds comes the license to prescribe. Strangely,
though, axioms and maxims don’t raise a brow or roll an eye when mouthed, especially a pro-
pos for a storyteller. Lucian of The Arkadians muses, “The more people who share this knowl-
dge, the greater safeguard for it. Isn’t there more danger in ignorance than knowledge?” (268).
He also points out that life experience gets all mixed up, “as if the tales were my life and my life
was a tale” (269). The author’s own wisdom interwines with the text. In a later story, published
in 1991, Master Hu frequently guides behavior with philosophy such as, “Do we call ‘chance’
only what we cannot foresee?” (Remarkable Journey 272). Speaking of the ideal kingdom of
T’ien-kuo: “If, indeed, such a realm exists, it is any place you make it to be. Therefore, why
seek what you have already found?” (273). Any one of Alexander’s stories provides us with the
book of life from which to live.

Women are from Venus—are Men from Prydain or Westmark?

As is so true in the magic of writing, the author can weave the future. Principally, the
genuine strengths attributed to heroines in Alexander’s worlds precede gender role awaken-
ings in other forms of popular culture. Vesper Holly, the Beggar Queen, Gypsy Rizka, Mirri,
Eilonwy—each of Alexander’s female depictions is respectful. Especially refreshing are the
women’s appearances. They are notable for distinctive features, wiriness and stamina, not usu-
ally for traditional beauty. Male protagonists rise above adversity and are worthy leaders only
when they embrace fairness, morality, intellect, and humanity, not when they are overcome
by stereotypical male qualities. Very seldom do men succeed in these stories purely by brute
strength. Taran and Theo (especially), Jen, Tamar, Lucian, and Luka-Kasha: all struggle to con-
trol their tempers, to learn from others, and to repress selfishness; and all find that real strength
has little to do with sword wielding and swash-buckling. Although the titular characters are
young adults, their dialog is often mature. Alexander can, however, master the discourse of the
child as well. A young scallywag, Haki, wears on the nerves of Lukas-Kasha: “You will see our
goats. Are you fond of goats, al-Ukash? I like them better than sheep. Why does your friend
always talk to himself? He does not seem happy in the mountains. His verses are not very
good. Do you have a trade? Can you read? What do you like to eat?” (First Two Lives 137).
In which we learn how to govern ourselves

As Lloyd Alexander first honed his powers, he wrote historical biographies, commissioned as in the days when there was patronage for artists. Perhaps it was his research for these that gave him the confidence to set his tales in diverse worlds, to find other times and places. *The Iron Ring* leads us through a geography and social caste system like India’s, highest to lowest to highest again, sadder but wiser. *The Arkadians* hearkens back to ancient Greece. Prince Jen’s adventures take readers to the Orient. In the *Westmark Trilogy*, Alexander chronicles a political revolution in a land of his own making. Alexander indulges his predilection for Philadelphia in adventures created for *The Boy* and *Vesper Holly*.

And The Master is missed. With the passing of this prolific writer came formal eulogies and blogs of appreciation for his foresight and impact. Connections between the current violence and military actions and the loss and destruction of war in Alexander’s books are obvious. Readers learn as the main characters do, by experiencing the daily lives of others and taking on their hardships. Such knowledge of the Other allows for respectful governance. Humanity in law and politics are a constant themes with Alexander. Though many of the governments he crafts are characterized by monarchies, they are ultimately democratic because the ruler serves the people. As Alexander fashions his narrative worlds with integrity and the common good, he represents the best of leaders.

The style and the voice

Often drawing from legend and history, Alexander was ambitious. The lands and societies, the histories and cultures of his imagination were vast. In such pursuits, his focus was on the manipulation of dynamics in plot and character development. Readers witnessed and felt change through circumstances, behaviors, and the exposition of internal dilemmas. In fact, the worst of villains was usually characterized by his or her inability or unwillingness to change. *The Chronicles of Prydain* and the *Westmark Trilogy* are most often cited as award winning. In detail and in dialog, however, Alexander’s most recent books are more endearing and natural. The reader conceives of the characters rather than simply being told that so-and-so is honorable or quirky or larger than life. Corofino (The Rope Trick) is evidently an inspired baker: “Apple puffs, yes—so delicious. But they can be difficult. Shy, as might say. You have to coax them to be flaky. Jam tarts, on the other hand—bold and brash, altogether immodest. I tell them: please, please, a little more restraint” (136). Jen’s (*The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*) vile enemy shackled him with a wooden collar, “‘Very well,’ Jen said. ‘To business.’ Thus began his war with the cangue” (224). The Boy chooses Friday with his aged aunt over a trip to Atlantic City (*The Gawgon and the Boy*): “On the other hand, The Gawgon had taken me to Moscow, Napoleon’s disastrous retreat through howling blizzards, and left me deliciously agonized in suspense when he was exiled to a rocky island. But the Gawgon had some magical way of turning mind-numbing history into new adventures, equally irresistible” (75).

To be sure, readers will become aware of Lloyd Alexander’s pet expressions and favorite devices. *Vesper Holly* will always be that “dear girl,” metonymy commonly adds interest
as in: that paragon of animals, *Whisper of Sympathetic Consideration, Wonder of Ineffable Knowledge*. In fact, the headings in this piece are a borrowed Dickensian touch Alexander used in *Prince Jen*. *Bildungsroman* is the general cycle for plots, except notably in the later *Gypsy Rizka* where the heroine speaks often of the vagabond life but never decamps. And more often than not, the protagonist acquires the wisdom that was there all along. In the later works, Alexander could employ his favorite tricks and turn his attention toward language play. *The Golden Dream of Carlo Chuchio* was published posthumously as I finished writing. As Alexander’s spells have remained dynamic, like those of his heroes and heroines, we look forward with great anticipation to opinions concerning this last fantastic journey.

'Twas my fortune to be the first Lloyd Alexander Graduate Research Scholar working on this journal. Alas! I am also the last one who toiled while he was alive. Lloyd Alexander, upon hearing that this position had been created and named after him, said he was “honored to know there would always be a young scholar at Purdue” who knew his work. I am certain there are many others who remember Lloyd Alexander and his contribution to American literature.

**Works Cited**