

"UNTIL THE CROWS CAME TO COLLECT THEIR SOULS": RE-VISIONING THE
FANTASY HERO IN SELECTED FICTION BY STEVEN ERIKSON

by

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For Gregory.

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ABSTRACT

In the course of this dissertation, I will interrogate traditional representations of the heroic figure within the fantasy genre. I will argue that the tropes established by some of the most renowned fantasy texts are undergoing a process of evolution and that Steven Erikson (who is the special focus of my discussion) seeks to revision the heroic mould through his construction of Coltaine of the Crow Clan in *Deadhouse Gates* (2001). *Deadhouse Gates* centres on Coltaine, who is tasked with escorting tens of thousands of refugees across four hundred leagues of hostile territory. This re-evaluation of fantasy modes has significant ramifications for the future development of the genre as a whole.

In order to explore how Erikson interrogates heroic representation, I briefly establish some of the distinctive characteristics of fantasy. I then explore how some major fantasy texts represent heroism, before investigating Erikson's particular response to these traditions.

KEY WORDS

Fantasy as a genre, traditional representations of heroic characteristics, re-evaluation of the heroic figure, shifting perspectives, Erikson, Tolkien, Feist, Donaldson.

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I declare that

"[U]ntil the crows came to collect their souls": Re-visioning the fantasy hero in selected fiction by Steven Erikson.

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

(Mrs)

DATE

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CHAPTER ONE:
STEPPING INTO SECONDARY WORLDS

Fantasy as a genre has traditionally been marginalised and this is due – in part – to the critical dismissal of fantasy as escapist literature. Typically, the narrative worlds presented in the pages of fantasy works exist as distinct and separate from our own. Occasionally, however, the lines between the world of fantasy and what we commonly take to be the ‘real world’ blur and the boundary becomes difficult to discern. In this chapter, I will use this distinction as a starting point to explore the theoretical underpinnings of my investigation into the representation of heroism in contemporary fantasy.

The pre-eminent theorist of fantasy’s relationship to the ‘real’ is J.R.R Tolkien, who elaborates on his personal narrative strategies in *Tree and Leaf* (2001a). In this collection of essays, Tolkien refers to the ‘real world’ as the Primary world. He postulates that the relationship between this world of consensus reality and that of the world of the fantasy narrative (the Secondary World) is a vastly complicated matter, and does not rest on the premise that in order to establish veracity in the Secondary World, one must indulge in a monumental act of self-deception via the so-called ‘willing suspension of disbelief’.

In his preface to *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (1982), Roger C. Schlobin argues that fantasy works function as “the most creative of imaginative art” since

fantasy's reliance on the impossible and the empirically unknown requires less imitation and more invention than mimetic art. Its conception, as Northrop Frye explains, "transcends the limits both of the naturally possible and of the morally acceptable" and comes closest of all the arts to creation *ex nihilo*, creation generated by pure mind, what J.R.R. Tolkien calls the "most nearly pure form of art."

Fantasy has been around for so long that to dismiss it is imprudent, and far too many major thinkers have pointed to its personal and cultural importance. C.G. Jung identifies fantasy in its psychological inception and its descent into artistic media as a "self-justifying biological function" that is the "natural life of the psyche," that must be understood hermeneutically (not semiotically), that gives the will content, and is the living union of the outer and inner worlds. C.S. Lewis and Jerome Singer agree that fantasy makes available insights that go beyond possible experience. Harvey Cox cautions that "the survival of mankind as a species has ... been placed in jeopardy by the repression of festivity and fantasy" and that without fantasy "a society cuts itself off from the visceral fonts of renewal." Further, Cox agrees with numerous other scholars of culture that fantasy determines what we consider true, factual, and lawful as surely as the reverse [...].
(Schlobin, 1982: xiv-xv)

This form of hermeneutical understanding of fantasy is possible only through a process of placing it alongside its 'binary opposite', namely the real. This, however, does not necessitate the willing suspension of disbelief, as Tolkien argues:

Children are capable, of course, of *literary belief*, when the story-maker's art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called 'willing suspension of disbelief'. But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker provides a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed.
(Tolkien, 2001a: 37; original emphasis)

Tolkien's distinction between a story-teller (one who tells a story) and a "story-maker" (one who *makes* a story) is interesting. It implies a greater degree of creative (and, indeed, *creating*) involvement. For Tolkien, the act of suspension of disbelief amounts to little more than a failed pretence. In several passages, his dislike for a willing suspension of disbelief is articulated, and his preference for a distinct belief in the presented world.

The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind. The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality', is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. [...] Fantasy [...] combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of 'unreality' (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), or freedom from the domination of observed 'fact', in short of the fantastic.

[...]

That the images are of things not in the primary world (if that indeed is possible) is a virtue not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.

[...]

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode.

(Tolkien, 2001a: 47, 48 & 49)

Tolkien avers that the mark of good literature (Art) is that it presents a world that departs from our consensual understanding, and that this entails a form of freedom. For Tolkien, then, belief in the premise of any Secondary World is not predicated on *disbelief*, but on Imagination. Tolkien places great emphasis on the importance of the

capacity for Imagination, and fantasy (and its related construction of Secondary Worlds) as a means of conveying those moments of departure from consensus reality as the “high[est] form of Art” in its “most potent form” (Tolkien, 2001: 48). There is general agreement among literary theorists and critics that fantasy exists in a realm that is irreconcilably different from the world of consensus reality. This dissertation will demonstrate the ways in which this is *not* so in the works of Steven Erikson (among others). In *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw*, Samuel R. Delany postulates that the subjunctive mode of fantasy removes it from the context of the real, naturalistic world.

Fantasy takes the subjunctivity of naturalistic fictions and throws it into reverse. At the appearance of elves, witches, or magic in a non-metaphorical position, or at some correction of image too bizarre to be explained by other than the supernatural, the level of subjunctivity becomes: *could not have happened*. And immediately it informs *all* the words in the series. No matter how naturalistic the setting, once the witch has taken off on her broomstick the most realistic of trees, cats, night clouds or the moon behind them become infected with this reverse subjunctivity. (Delany, 2009: 11; original emphasis)

When the hero story is read within Delany’s hermeneutical parameters, we realise that the quest could never have taken place, precisely because of the existence of elements in the fantasy world that are simply impossible to credit (such as talking animals and plants, magical powers and interventionist deities) within the framework of a naturalistic world.

The entire fantasy mode, which relies heavily on the hero narrative, can only ever exist within the paradigms of the subjunctive mode. It further imposes limitations on the fantasy context in that it is never reconciled with the real, and remains outside and separated from it. In an essay entitled “The Encounter with Fantasy” in his *The*

Aesthetics of Fantasy Art and Literature (1982), Gary K. Wolfe comments on this notion:

C.N. Manlove agrees that “a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings, or objects” is needed for fantasy, explaining that supernatural or impossible means “of another order of reality from that in which we exist and form our notions of possibility.” And in examining his principle of inclusion for his bibliography *The Literature of Fantasy*, Roger C. Schlobin identifies the literature of fantasy as “that corpus in which the impossible is primary in its quantity or centrality.”

(Wolfe, 1982: 1; original emphasis)

He also points to

the quality of “otherness” in such a work, the construction of its narrative without any direct referent to our own world, [which] is sufficient that we may call it impossible [...].

(Wolfe, 1982: 4)

If this were invariably so, then fantasy – as in Delany’s definition – would have no point of intersection with the world of consensus reality. As I will show in Chapter Four of this dissertation, Steven Erikson’s *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series, while unquestionably part of the fantasy genre, does not depart irreconcilably from consensus reality or naturalistic fiction. The character who forms the focus of my dissertation as one of the ‘heroes’ of the series, Coltaine of the Crow Clan, could be called ‘ordinary’ rather than ‘supernatural’. He is mortal, fallible and is not predestined by birth, extraordinary talents or divine intervention for heroic status. The socio-political complexity of Erikson’s fictional world and the general veniality of most of its citizens further add to the overall impression of verisimilitude, despite the obvious fact that the histories narrated in the series have never happened and

could never happen. In this way, Erikson extends the scope and purchase of fantasy as a genre.¹

Yet Wolfe's central premise (namely, that fantasy exists as separate and disparate from consensus reality) does not account for the fact that fantasy is still reliant on the signifiers of the Primary World of consensus reality in order to constitute its signified objects. In other words, a constructed (Secondary) World may have a green sun, yet the signifiers "green" and "sun" are still required to constitute a new sign. The irreality of fantasy is still firmly grounded in the reality of what Tolkien calls the Primary World:

[S]ince reality [...] is socially constructed, it follows that the irreality of fantasy must gain some of its power from socially determined notions of what is possible and impossible. "Finite provinces of meaning" is the term Berger and Luckmann employ to describe the alternate realities of art, religion, and myth; and the term might well be applied in a more limited sense to describe the impossible worlds of artistic fantasy.

Meaning is an essential factor in the irreality function of fantasy; it is what lends the fantasy something resembling Clive Bell's "significant form" and what sustains our interest in the impossible long after our cognitive apprehension of impossibilities has passed, long after we have resolved the momentary hesitation or irresolution Todorov calls "the fantastic." (Wolfe, 1982: 6-7)

Fantasy as a genre, then, relies upon a symbiotic relation between the real and the imagined to constitute and establish its own otherness. In constructing fictional heroes, most fantasy authors have subscribed to the idea of fantasy residing in a liminal imaginary space, and have reinforced it through the 'impossibility' of heroic acts. In *Theorising the Fantastic* (1996), Lucie Armitt states that

¹ *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* series is extensive, but there is a lamentable lack of critical work on Erikson's writing outside the 'informal' genre of reviews. A diligent search of a number of academic journal databases failed to discover any sustained critical response to his work. In consequence, my dissertation constitutes an original contribution to the field of fantasy studies.

[F]or the structuralist a text is believed to function akin to a language, being composed of an interrelational series of signs which are, in themselves, arbitrarily connected by socially accepted but by no means logically bound signifiers and signifieds. This self-validating structure, which places its own internal rulings before all external verification, is perfectly positioned as a model for fantasy.

[...] If, as G.W. Grace argues, ‘reality construction is probably ... the primary function of human language’, where does this leave the world of the fantastic? Robert Branham, taking up the challenge, turns the terms of this upside down. For him, it is not that language reduces the fantastic to the world of the real, but rather that fantasy is always signalling an overspill beyond language that renders such narratives at least partially ineffable: ‘Language is a conventional system for the expression and understanding of conventional experiences. Fantasy fiction, while presented in language, is characterized by its unabashed presentation of imaginary and impossible worlds, phenomena, and cultures.’ But while there is an element of truth in this, he is actually misrepresenting an important issue. It is not simply that fantasy fictions are ‘presented’ as language, they *are* language. The world of the literary fantastic, just like that of classical realism, only exists as a linguistic construct. Literature, more than any other aesthetic medium, reminds us that we understand, create and experience not only the world around us but also the world of our dreams, desires and fears, in terms of the very language we learn to articulate. Fantasy fiction simply brings this to the fore.

(Armitt, 1996: 17-18; original emphasis)

The myriad conventions utilised by fantasy as a genre are not social in the same way as language is socially mediated and constructed. Rather, they are mediated by the genre’s readership. Fantasy, does, however, still utilise the highly conventionalised terminology of language in order to constitute its own otherness (such as “a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible” (Tolkien, 2001a: 49)). That is to say, the signifier “elf” has come to be accepted as denoting a being with (stereotypically) elongated and pointed ears, ethereal beauty, and an (often) immeasurably long lifespan. There is no signified that corresponds to the signifier “elf” in the real world of consensus, and yet the term not only exists, but is mediated

and agreed upon, constituting a new sign which readers of fantasy can comprehend.²

The same is true of fantasy's many other descriptions of race and place. This problematises the binary opposition between the imagined and the real.

At worst, a fantasy will not carry us much beyond the initial recognition that what we are reading is impossible; at best, it will lead us to a further recognition that these surface impossibilities constitute a necessary strategy for approaching some profound and intense reality. For such works, "the impossible" may be little more than a surface structure; the works themselves concern things that could not be more real. (Wolfe, 1982: 13-14)

Fantasy, then, takes from the real world in order to develop the unreal and in so doing raises issues that are pertinent not only to the world of consensus reality, but to human development as well. In "Heroic Fantasy and Social Reality", Jules Zanger states that

Though these denials of reality define the fiction as fantasy, they normally constitute only a small portion of the total fiction, embedded in it like plums in the pudding of the familiar. Once we accept the denial of the real world implicit in the magic that works, or the existence of elves, or the possibility of talking flowers, we find ourselves on otherwise familiar turf: conflict and resolution, psychological characterization, and motivation all seem relatively undistinguishable from that found in the historical romance. Good and evil remain definable and familiar. (Zanger, 1982: 228)

Fantasy also (re-)constitutes familiar tropes in unfamiliar ways. In Erikson's fiction, however, "[g]ood and evil" *do not* "remain definable and familiar" (Zanger, 1982: 228). This blurring of the demarcations between good and evil is one of Erikson's primary contributions to a genre that has traditionally seen these terms as markedly distinct, heralding a new trend in fantasy fiction. Zanger goes on to argue that

² This point will be elaborated on in Chapter Two. The same is particularly true of Tolkien's invented signifier, "Hobbit".

even in those fantasies least clearly linked to the familiar world of experience to existing models, the careful reader can discover in the value structure, in the characterizations, even in the imagery and metaphor, evidence of the social situation that the fantasy retains and transforms. (Zanger, 1982: 229)

Zanger's comments are particularly true of Erikson, who constructs his Secondary World as a fairground mirror to this world. Zanger explains that fantasy – as a genre – has “restored the primacy of the romantic imagination, providing a world which, if not man-centred, was at least comfortable” (Zanger, 1982: 232), yet contemporary fantasy seeks to interrogate the idea of comfort in fiction as much as realistic fiction does, albeit through the portrayal of a world that is strikingly different from our own.

The romantic imagination focuses on the primacy of the idyllic and Edenic, as seen in Tolkien's Middle-earth, Donaldson's Land and Feist's Midkemia. Disruptions to the peace of the narrative world are considered abominations and cause global consternation until the ensuing conflicts are resolved. Nevertheless, Steven Erikson creates a world that is much like our own, in that it is practically devoid of the idyllic, and that is not predicated on binarisms or clearly demarcated divisions between 'good' and 'evil'. In his world, disruption through war, persecution, xenophobia and political ramifications is virtually constant, much as in consensus reality. This means that heroism is not an absolute virtue, but is situational. As will be demonstrated in the course of this dissertation, even the sign “hero” is subject to various changes in that its associated signifieds have become versatile and are undergoing their own evolutionary processes, with significant implications for the development and future constructions of Secondary Worlds. Heroism, in such works, arises within a specific context, rather than appearing as a transcendent solution to a virtually instantaneous global problem.

The symbiotic, rather than exclusive, relationship between fantasy and consensus reality means that the representation of heroes in contemporary fantasy cannot be dismissed as merely escapist or apocryphal. While these figures are presented as larger than life, they possess qualities that are firmly rooted in established literary genres, such as the Greek and Roman epics (as I shall show in Chapters Two and Three) and, in Erikson's fiction, they respond to situations that bear a significant resemblance to the socio-political challenges of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In addition, they also reflect the ironic and at times self-deprecatory self-awareness of twentieth and twenty-first century literature.

Timothy Shutt implies that fantasy fails in its attempt to recapture the epic form when he states that *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) "in its own way, is an attempt – at least partially – to fulfil [the] epic ambition" (Shutt, 2004: disc 1, lecture 1, track 3). I argue, in contrast to Shutt's rather condescending assertion, that fantasy does not attempt to recapture the literary form of the epic or even to position itself in response to it, but seeks merely to establish its own place in a long literary tradition as that which is not only worthy of notice but of critical respect and acknowledgement. This particular positioning may rely on a long literary history of the epic in narrative, but fantasy's epics are *influenced* by (rather than a *response* to) this history, as is virtually every other form of narrative. The figure of the hero is pre-eminent in many forms of literature.

With regard to the presentation of the hero, which is the focus of this dissertation, it is worth noting C.N. Manlove's (in "On the Nature of Fantasy") comment that

there is a definite tendency for fantasy to be more contemplative in aim and character, concerned at least as much with states of being as with processes of becoming. (Manlove, 1982: 23)

These processes of heroic self-discovery are the central concern of fantasy fiction, and while the hero of contemporary fantasy fiction (such as Aragorn, Thomas Covenant and Pug) may be viewed as a distant relative of the hero-figure in Classical Greek and Latin mythology (e.g. Aeneas, Achilles and Odysseus), the central focus of fantasy narratives is not on the greatness of the achievements, but on the gradual development of the protagonist.

In a documentary entitled *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed* (2007), Peter Jackson comments on the nature of the heroic figure: “Mythic stories”, according to Jackson, “were originally designed as cautionary tales. They’re stories which instruct us how we should behave, how we should conduct ourselves” (2007: n.p.). They are, however, much more than this. Tales such as these become that which inspires us, that which awakens us to the possibility of greatness within. They call to a part of us that is almost as primal as the most basic survival instincts to take up arms (be it the Sword of Elendil, a Ring of Power, a Lightsaber, a wand, or even a burning torch from the first fire) and venture out into the cold night to do battle with the forces of Darkness:

Luke fulfils a role as a mythic hero because they usually start out as being very simple, slightly insecure characters. For example, characters like Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, like Harry Potter, like King Arthur. They are what’s called “every men”; they’re us. They have the same insecurities and fears as we do.

(Jackson, 2007: n.p.)

Myth. Magic. Mighty heroes. Scheming Villains. Dragons. Damsels in distress (and less often, damsels *causing* distress). Swords. Sorcery. These themes have been a part of human imaginative experience for the greater part of our existence. And this is no more evident than today.

With the release of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, fantasy cemented its popularity among the masses, more so than when this fan-base was limited to readers of the books. While the devout fans of Tolkien's literary masterpiece no doubt flocked to the cinemas in order to see their much-loved books immortalised on the silver screen, the films certainly managed to captivate new audiences as well. Since then, the fantasy followers have no doubt increased in number, and now march boldly to the next cinematic release of films like the Harry Potter series (2001-2011), "Inkheart" (2008), "300" (2006) and many others. With Marvel increasingly churning out films centred around their popular X Men mythos (which arguably borders the realm of Science Fiction, and which deals with genetic mutations to the human genome, resulting in human beings with extraordinary powers of telepathy, telekinesis, flight, super-human strength, to name but a few), fantasy's place in popular culture is very firmly established.

So much so, in fact, that Massively Multi Player Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs or, more simply, MMOs, born from the more traditional tabletop role-playing games, which later gave way to single-player computer games set in fantastical environments) have cemented fantasy's popularity by bringing the fantastical landscapes of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth (*Lord of the Rings Online*), Howard's Hyboria (*Age of Conan*), George Lucas's Star Wars galaxies (*Star Wars*:

The Old Republic), and a wider host of the fantastical to the foreground of modern computer technology; enabling average, ordinary citizens to live out their own personal fantasies in these popular realms. Players of these games are able not only to move about in a world they previously only envisioned in their mind's eye, but to fulfil the role of the hero, thus becoming the narrator and protagonist of their own personal epic fantasies.

To date, two of the three film adaptations of Tolkien's works remain in the top twenty highest grossing films (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_highest-grossing_films, Retrieved July 15, 2011). Far from testifying to the general population's lack of intelligence, phenomena such as these illustrate that fantasy – both as a genre and as an increasingly recurring popular trope – can no longer be summarily dismissed as flights of fancy and ignored as escapist literature, nor does it rank quite as low as it once did on the intellectual agenda.

In this dissertation, I will argue that *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* series, by contemporary fantasy writer Steven Erikson, has affinities with the traditional heroism as outlined by Campbell, Harris and Platzner and Kelso, but also diverges significantly from this tradition. Two points of divergence are Erikson's use of multiple and therefore partial perspectives (where traditional fantasy is usually narrated from a single authoritative perspective) and the resulting destruction of the 'good guys–bad guys' binary opposition.

Erikson's 'heroes' can only be seen as 'heroic' in erasure. I will focus on Coltaine in *Deadhouse Gates*, because Coltaine's journey and posthumous reputation fit him for

the title of ‘hero’, although, as I will show, this status is repeatedly qualified in the series. By contrast with some ‘established’ views of fantasy, Tolkien awards the genre the same value in relation to ‘Reason’ as ‘scientific verity’:

To many, Fantasy, this sub-creative art which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it, combining nouns and redistributing adjectives, has seemed suspect, if not illegitimate. To some it has seemed at least a childish folly, a thing only for peoples or persons in their youth.
[...]

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make.
[...]

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. (Tolkien, 2001: 54 & 55)

In my analysis of the representation of Coltaine in Erikson’s *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series, I will demonstrate that Erikson fulfils Tolkien’s high aspirations for the fantasy genre. Erikson recognises the difficulty of choices facing any character, and yet presents his readers with a psychologically evolved and complex narrative within the parameters of a traditionally marginalised genre.

CHAPTER TWO:

HEROISM AND HUBRIS (ON HEROES AND HEROICS)

“[S]tories”, according to Terry Pratchett, “are important” (1999: 8). In *Witches Abroad* (1999), Pratchett speaks of “narrative causality”, and states:

People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it’s the other way around.

Stories exist independently of their players. If you know that, the knowledge is power.

Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling ... stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness.

And their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper.

This is called narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, *takes a shape*. It picks up all the vibrations of all the other workings of that story that have ever been.

This is why history keeps on repeating all the time.

[...]

Stories don’t care who takes part in them. All that matters is that the story gets told, and the story repeats.

(Pratchett, 1999: 8; original emphasis)

Pratchett’s observations about the “narrative causality” of stories imply that the epic tales that have so enthralled us are not merely fictional, but carry historical significance as well.

Fantasy heroes share a set of similar characteristics and, in general, conform to all of the criteria inherent in these traits. I will draw on the following renowned works of fantasy in order to discuss these characteristics and to draw an intertextual correlation between Steven Erikson and his construction of the heroic figure of Coltaine in *Deadhouse Gates* (2001), *The Magician* by Raymond E. Feist (2009), J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (2001), and

Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* (1993). These works have been selected for comparison with Erikson's writing since they both typify and demonstrate the ubiquity of the hero in fantasy. No novel that falls into the fantasy genre (with all of its might and magic, swords and sorcery) is complete without a focus on a heroic figure. The heroic figures utilised by the authors I have chosen to scrutinise include: Pug of Crydee (whose first appearance is in Raymond E. Feist's *The Magician*), Aragorn (from J.R.R. Tolkien's acclaimed *The Lord of the Rings*) and Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever (who is knocked unconscious in a car accident and reawakens in Stephen Donaldson's Land in *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*), who form but a few in the vast pantheon of heroes. It should be noted, however, that the heroic figure is by no means limited to fantasy and that mythology as well as other literary genres contains many 'Hero-Stories', as Joseph Campbell – in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973) – attests:

Whether we listen with aloof amusement to the dreamlike mumbo jumbo of some red-eyed witch doctor of the Congo, or read with cultivated rapture thin translations from the sonnets of the mystic Lao-tse; now and again crack the hard nutshell of an argument of Aquinas, or catch suddenly the shining meaning of a bizarre Eskimo fairy tale: *it will be always the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously [sic] constant story that we find*, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told. (Campbell, 1973: 3; emphasis added)

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell traces various mythologies and establishes commonality between them by examining the trajectory of the heroic endeavour. What is most interesting in this particular quotation, though, is his use of the words "one, shape-shifting [...] story". This is the One Story to rule them all, and it concerns the pre-eminence of the heroic figure.

In the course of this dissertation, I will discuss an ‘eccentric’ heroic figure who disrupts certain heroic moulds while conforming to others – Coltaine of the Crow Clan in Steven Erikson’s *Deadhouse Gates*. In order to discuss this departure from the heroic – and indeed, fantasy – norm, it is first necessary to explore the appearance, characteristics and personae of traditional fantasy heroes. In doing this, I will draw on Campbell’s work and address the issue of the mythological hero figure and his² emergence in the fantasy environment (Campbell’s work is focused on the mythological, rather than fantasy or its sibling genre, science fiction).

First and foremost, any heroic figure is defined as one who accomplishes great deeds in the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles and adverse conditions. Campbell notes that

[w]e do not particularly care whether Rip van Winkle, Kamar al-Zaman, or Jesus Christ ever actually lived. Their *stories* are what concern us: and these stories are so widely distributed over the world – attached to various heroes in various lands – that the question of whether this or that local carrier of the universal theme may or may not have been a historical, living man can be of only secondary moment. The stressing of this historical element will only lead to confusion; it will simply obfuscate the picture message.

(Campbell, 1973: 230-231; original emphasis)

From J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* to J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, reader imagination has been captured by the trials and tribulations of the “local carrier” (the heroic figure). The primary concern of the depiction of the heroic figure is not with the veracity of his existence, but on the element of story as delineated by Terry Pratchett in the opening quotation of this chapter. This is perhaps most evident in ancient mythology, which explores vices such as pride, rage, and envy, and, through the heroic figure, these tales often point to

² It is no accident that fantasy focuses on the male heroic figure, since the more traditional epics (in the vein of *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*) are primarily concerned with masculinity and how this has been variously displayed. The gender of the hero does not, however, fall within the scope of my dissertation.

lessons to be learnt from these human pitfalls. Here, the narrative, rather than its accuracy, becomes pre-eminent in contributing to an understanding of both mankind and the world in which we live. In *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights*, Harris and Platzner claim that the “Greeks gods and/or heroes commonly represent *archetypal characteristics or personalities*, serving as paradigms for a whole class or category of human types” (2008: 48; emphasis added). These original epics have found a mirror in contemporary fantasy, since here, too, the category of “epic or heroic [...] centre[s] on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose *actions* depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or [...] the human race” (Abrams, 2009: 97; emphasis added), and, although Abrams (in *The Glossary of Literary Terms*) is using this term in the sense of epic or heroic poetry, the same can be said for the fantasy genre. Fantasy uses many of the same features of epic or heroic poetry (as practised by, for example, Homer and Virgil) while expanding the heroic quest into narrative format (a notable departure from the oral tradition, in which epics were composed in verse).

In the fantasy genre, much like in the traditional epics, the heroic figure is central to the events unfolding in the text and the tale is concerned with how the hero progresses through the narrative world. In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the speaker asserts that “in intellect and physical skill, men can perform *deeds* worthy of gods!” and that “through creative thought and *heroic action*, men can compete with gods” (quoted in Harris & Platzner, 2008: 22 & 23; emphasis added). Man’s actions, however, always carry the threat of annihilation, since “even the greatest human accomplishments are eventually nullified by death” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 23). It may be suggested that the threat of death makes heroic action more impressive. Fantasy often focuses on such great tales, and concerns itself with the idea that “humanity’s potential seems almost unlimited, and heroic ambition inspires men to strive with gods” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 23). Much like Homer and the tragic poets, writers like Tolkien

have further explored these ideas. Fantasy heroes, like many of their classical counterparts, often resist their call to destiny as well, and thus the heroic journey, or quest, begins (this aspect will be discussed later in this chapter). In the third book (*Warlord* (2008)) of her *Wolfblade Trilogy*, one of Jennifer Fallon's characters makes a telling observation about the role of the hero:

“The right person for any job is the one who gets it done,” Charel Hawksword informed [Rorin] gruffly. “And that’s usually,” he added, holding his cup out [...] for a refill, “some poor sod in the wrong place at the wrong time who gets left with no other option than to be a hero.”

(Fallon, 2008: 162)

The hero's lack of choice is the central premise upon which the work of Steven Erikson rests, particularly with regard to his construction of Coltaine of the Crow Clan. The sequence of events by which Coltaine becomes heroic – his leadership of the Chain of Dogs and the rescuing of thousands of refugees – comes about, not by his own choice, but in a similar way to Charel's comments above: the ‘quest motif’, here, arises due to the fact that there is nobody else to save the refugees and lead them to safety. Erikson's hero is thrust into heroic stature by political and historical events outside himself, rather than wilfully embarking on a journey to find a heroic deed by which he can establish his own status (there is, arguably, some serendipity involved in the emergence of heroes). These great deeds, or actions, on the part of the hero are the first distinguishing feature of fantasy as well as its primary tropes. Closely related to this is *inaction* or resistance, which is the primary plot device used by, for example, Stephen Donaldson: Thomas Covenant chooses a path of inaction³ despite the fact that the world in which he finds himself “accepted him” and “accorded him power”

³ Note that a choice is still implicit, and thus one may argue that Covenant's *inaction* is – by virtue of its being his choice – an action in itself, since it implies resistance to action.

(Donaldson, 1993: 64).⁴ This is in direct contrast to the Greek or Roman heroes of traditional epics (and, in fact, most fantasy heroes), who are marked by their choice in acting:

The heroes we meet in the *Iliad* are, like Heracles, divided souls. Gifted with enormous energy *and the drive to use it*, they take an aggressive stance towards life, whether in the characteristic “shoot first, ask questions later” attitude or in the irresistible impulse always to “go forward,” to attack their problems or their enemies head-on.

(Harris & Platzner, 2008: 376; emphasis added)

This “drive to use” their “enormous energy” persists in the fantasy genre. Covenant’s reluctance and/or unwillingness to act is directly opposed to Aragorn’s role in Tolkien’s work, since Aragorn (like Coltaine in Erikson’s novel) is fully cognisant of his duty. In “Councils and Kings: Aragorn’s Journey Towards Kingship in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings*”, Judy Ann Ford and Robin Anne Reid state that

Destroying the Ring will save Middle-earth from falling under the shadow of Sauron, but it will take the true king – Aragorn – to restore the world of men to its former glory. Aragorn must not merely help defeat Sauron or rule a great kingdom; he must serve as the agent of Gondor’s renewal on both the material and spiritual levels. [...] It is made clear throughout J.R.R. Tolkien’s novel that Aragorn is a character conscious of his destiny and determined to fulfill it. In contrast, the Aragorn of Peter Jackson’s film version of *The Lord of the Rings* is far less certain about his destiny; he is a more modern, self-doubting hero. These two versions of Aragorn both arrive at the same narrative resolution, namely, becoming the king who restores the world of men to the glory of earlier ages, but their narrative arcs describe two quite different paths.

(Ford & Reid, 2009: 71)

Upon his meeting the Hobbits and acknowledging his “*true*” name (Tolkien, 2001: 167; original emphasis), Aragorn says “I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will” (Tolkien, 2001: 168). It should be noted that Aragorn places great emphasis

⁴ Covenant’s personal transformation comes about when he learns to trust his own power to act.

on the task of preventing the Hobbits from coming to harm, and that he firmly states that his task will be to “save” them. This implies a greater degree of complicity when it comes to safeguarding the Hobbits.⁵ In fact, Aragorn demonstrates an awareness of his role and path upon the road the Hobbits must travel when he says “your road and our road lie together for many hundreds of miles” (Tolkien, 2001: 269).⁶ In the case of Aragorn, there is no unwillingness to act. His exercise of agency or meaningful action is, indeed, the basis of his status as a born leader, a born king. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn will serve as a beacon of hope for the race of Men; he is the one who unites the human forces under the banner of Gondor (and rightfully so, since he is the heir to the throne); he is the figure who relieves the occupants of the Path of the Dead of their curse by providing them with a way to redeem themselves (by coming to the aid of Gondor and its would-be king); the army he marshals serves as a distraction for Saruman at the battle of Helm’s Deep and goes some distance in diminishing Saruman’s forces and the threat he poses to the mission of the Hobbits, thus enabling Frodo to reach Mt Doom and destroy the One Ring.⁷

The use of a heroic figure as a unifying or synthesising figure is prevalent in fantasy and a common trope. Feist, for example, uses Pug of Crydee as a unifying heroic figure. In *The Magician* (2009), readers witness Pug’s rise in magical power to become the greatest magician the two worlds (the world of Midkemia, Pug’s place of origin, and Kelewan, the home-world of the invaders of Midkemia) have ever seen. He will reconcile the two forms of magic (lesser, present on Midkemia, and greater, present on Kelewan) and consequently

⁵ Note that Aragorn’s attitude implies that he feels the Hobbits are in need of saving and serves as an indication of the sometimes patronising attitude Tolkien tends to adopt when it comes to the Hobbits.

⁶ Tolkien’s use of the noun “road” is both literal and metaphorical. It functions as a representation of the literal path that the Fellowship must walk in order to reach its goal, as well as a metaphorical depiction of the psychological journey the Fellowship will undertake.

⁷ Frodo, along with the other hobbits in the Fellowship of the Ring, is as much a hero in Tolkien’s narrative as Aragorn and will thus be discussed in conjunction with Aragorn.

functions as a symbol of unification on a 'spiritual' level, later becoming a diplomat to both worlds and thus serving as the connecting force between them. Pug, in later novels in the series, will both raise and be the standard-bearer for various forms of resistance. After accepting his role, Thomas Covenant – like traditional fantasy heroes – emerges as ultimately heroic by healing the Land and expelling Lord Foul, thus ending the threat that looms over the Land. Coltaine of the Crow clan leads the Chain of Dogs on a seemingly futile mission to escort some 20 000 refugees to safety in Aren (a city over 400 leagues away, across hostile territory).

Closely linked to the premise of heroic actions and deeds is the trope of a hero's pre-destination when it comes to his personal greatness. The use of a heroic figure who is unquestionably heroic, ultimately beyond reproach and decidedly pre-destined for greatness is perhaps nowhere as evident as in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and his figure of Aragorn, son of Arathorn. This character, in particular, is from the outset a fully developed, if somewhat reticent, hero. His portrayal has striking resonances with Campbell's description of the nature of a hero as follows:

The ease with which the adventure is [...] accomplished signifies that the hero is a superior man, *a born king*. Such ease distinguishes numerous fairy tales and all the legends of the deeds of incarnate gods. *Where the usual hero would face a test, the elect encounters no delaying obstacle and makes no mistake.*
(Campbell, 1973: 173; emphasis added)

Tolkien's work as well as that of Feist (to name but two examples from fantasy's pantheon of writers) utilises this method of depiction of heroic figures: Tolkien focuses on the figure of

“the born king”, and Feist “the elect”.⁸ In both cases, Aragorn and Pug (respectively) have it as their birthright to be heroic, and Tomas, Pug’s childhood companion, is also accorded heroic potential from an early age. Stephen Donaldson’s *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* also utilises the figure of the elect, predestined hero, albeit one who resists the mantle of heroism. More contemporary fantasy writers have begun to disrupt the ‘flawless hero’ trope, as is demonstrated through the use of Patrick Rothfuss’s hero, Kvothe, in *In the Name of the Wind* (2007). Here, mistakes are made, yet Kvothe is able to recover from these precisely *because he is heroic*; that is to say, the heroic figure is not only flawed, but capable of erring, and the extent to which he recovers (as well as Kvothe’s innate ability to bounce back from any mistake) is predicated on his status. In his *Discworld* series, Terry Pratchett satirises the trope of the “born king” through the creation of Captain Carrot Ironfounderson of the City Watch, a human orphan raised by dwarves and so immersed in the dwarven world that he considers himself to be one of them, despite certain obvious discrepancies such as size.⁹ In *The Art of the Discworld*, Pratchett describes Captain Carrot as follows:

Can there be anybody in Ankh-Morpork now who does *not* know that a common watchman is heir to the city’s ancient and woodwormy throne? But he does not wish to do anything about it, and seems quite happy where he is. Destiny is optional, he feels. On the other hand, one can only speculate what will happen if ever the city is run in a way not to his liking and, maybe one day, one will.

(Pratchett, “Captain Carrot Ironfounderson”, 2004: n.p.; original emphasis)

⁸ It should be said that “the born king” and “the elect”, while considered synonymous by Campbell, are – as far as fantasy as a genre is concerned – often two distinct terms; one does not necessitate the other. As demonstrated, Aragorn is a born king, but has to aspire to becoming “the elect” insofar as the Hobbits are concerned; he has to prove his worth to them (and – by extension – the rest of the Fellowship) despite the fact that he is chosen by Gandalf. By contrast, Pug is not a “born king”, yet is most definitely portrayed as “elect” (Campbell, 1973: 173).

⁹ The fact that Captain Carrot is an orphan is no accident, and is once again a deliberate attempt on the part of Pratchett to satirise this common fantasy motif.

As far as Tolkien's own "born king" is concerned, by contrast, in a letter to Frodo Gandalf the Grey introduces an aid to the journey of the Hobbits:

You may meet a friend of mine on the Road: a Man, lean, dark, tall, by some called Strider. He knows our business and will help you. [...] Make sure that it is the real Strider. There are many strange men on the roads. His true name is Aragorn. (Tolkien, 2001: 166 & 167; original emphasis)

Interestingly, it is Strider's "true" name that sets him apart from strangers. Attached to this name is the poem which heralds Aragorn's eventual acceptance of his fate:

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;¹⁰
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*
(Tolkien, 2001: 167; original emphasis)

Aragorn, himself, acknowledges 'ownership' of the prophecy associated with his name when he says: "I am Aragorn, and those verses go with that name" (Tolkien, 2001: 168). By this prophecy, Gandalf illustrates that Aragorn's destiny is already decided, and has been even before his birth. He is fated to be heroic, and Bilbo's poem (which becomes a prophecy in its own right, and which serves as the criterion for identification of Aragorn) is even cognisant of his 'wanderings'. He is the "deep [root]" which shall not be "reached by the frost" and his coming – like the fires which are stoked to re-forged the "Sword of Elendil" (Tolkien, 2001: 269) – heralds a light in the dark, for he "is Aragorn son of Arathorn [...] descended through

¹⁰ In the recent film *X Men Origin: Wolverine* (2009) a variation of this is seen as a sticker – proclaiming "Not all who wander are lost" – in the rear window of the elderly couple's car (in whose barn Wolverine seeks refuge) and a parallel may be drawn between Aragorn and the figure of Thomas Logan (Wolverine). The implication is that Wolverine will undergo a similar process of realising his potential and role in the events surrounding the X Men as Aragorn does in *The Lord of the Rings*.

many fathers from Isildur Elendil's son of Minas Ithil. He is the Chief of the Dúnedain in the North" and even his ancestry awards him the mantle of the hero (Tolkien, 2001: 240). Ford and Reid attest that "Aragorn's ancestry establishes that he is not only descended from a royal line, but from a line that traces its origin back to a god" (Ford & Reid, 2009: 74). It is also on the occasion of acknowledging ownership of the name and the revelation of Strider's 'true' identity by Elrond that Aragorn is presented with his first opportunity to lay claim to the Ring his legendary forefather once wore (and which would, therefore, hereditarily belong to him).

Aragorn does not, however, take the Ring from Frodo (even though Frodo offers it to him) since this particular journey is not his to make (it is perhaps also for this reason that Aragorn is separated from the Hobbits relatively early on in the novel). His reticence, here, functions as a means of foregrounding the action of the Hobbits, and emphasises the extent to which Tolkien's choice of placing the most powerful artefact in Middle-earth, the Ring of Power, in the hands of mere Hobbits is an example of an extension of the pre-destined hero leitmotif. The fact that the Ring is called the Ring of Power is no accident. Gandalf explains the nature of the One Ring to Frodo by explaining that the Ring would seek "to get back to its master":

"A Ring of Power looks after itself, Frodo. *It* may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it. At most he plays with the idea of handing it on to someone else's care – and that only at an early stage, when it first begins to grip. [...] It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided things. The Ring left *him*."

[...]

"The Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him; then when a chance came it caught poor Déagol, and he was murdered; and after that Gollum, and it had devoured him. It could make no further use of him: he was too small and mean; and so long as it stayed with him he would never leave his deep pool again. So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out his dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum. Only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire!

“Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.”

(Tolkien, 2001: 54-55; original emphasis)

Tolkien’s use of the phrase “most unlikely person imaginable” is reminiscent of Fallon’s description of the hero as “some poor sod in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Fallon, 2008: 162). Gandalf’s allusion to predestination is particularly interesting here. He suggests that something *other* than the Ring-maker deemed the accidental discovery of the Ring on the part of Bilbo Baggins a necessary event, which – as Gandalf tells it – “was the strangest event in the whole history of the Ring so far: Bilbo’s arrival just at that time: and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark” (Tolkien, 2001: 54). Thus, it would seem, serendipity and predestination are present in the discovery of the Ring (an event which, in truth, leads to the entire journey of *The Lord of the Rings*, which sequentially occurs after *The Hobbit* (2010)).

Notably, Bilbo Baggins is often considered odd by his fellow Hobbits because of his strange ways – “strange” insofar as Hobbit nature is concerned. The narrative voice in the prologue of the book describes Hobbits as follows:

they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools. Even in ancient days they were, as a rule, shy of ‘the Big Folk’, as they call us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find. (Tolkien, 2001: 1)

Here Tolkien emphasises the Hobbits’ natural inclination to “peace and quiet” and their earthly ways. Indeed, they are not only peace-loving, but peaceable: “[a]t no time had

Hobbits of any kind been warlike,¹¹ and they had never fought among themselves” (Tolkien, 2001: 5). Nor are Hobbits given, as a rule, to travelling any further than the boundaries of the Shire, an event which serves to distinguish Bilbo Baggins from Bag-End from his fellows, as will be demonstrated in the course of his quest:

The Hobbits of the Westfarthing said that one could see the Sea from the top of [the tallest of three Elf-towers beyond the western marches]; but no Hobbit had ever been known to climb it. Indeed, few Hobbits had ever seen or sailed upon the Sea, and fewer still had ever returned to report it. Most Hobbits regarded even rivers and small boats with deep misgivings, and not many of them could swim. And as the days of the Shire lengthened they spoke less and less with the Elves, and grew afraid of them, and distrustful of those that had dealings with them; and the Sea became a word of fear among them, and a token of death, and they turned their faces away from the hills in the west.
(Tolkien, 2001: 6-7)

Hobbits generally regard “foreign parts” with great scepticism (and perhaps a small amount of fear) (Tolkien, 2001: 23) and are distrustful of strangers.¹² The fact that the four Hobbits of the Fellowship (Frodo Baggins, Samwise Gamgee, Meriadoc Brandybuck and Peregrin Took) will have dealings with the Elves later in the course of the novel is, thus, also considered remarkable.

Bilbo Baggins, who adopts Frodo as his heir since he has none of his own progeny, is already marked by the narrator as strange, and his nephew Frodo seems to share this strangeness.

Readers are told that “Bilbo and Frodo Baggins were as bachelors very exceptional, as they were also in many other ways, such as their friendship with the Elves”, since “[t]he houses

¹¹ This fact will starkly illustrate the changes wrought in the four Hobbits of the Fellowship when they return and organise the Shirelings into a formidable fighting force in order to expel Sharkey (Saruman) and his men from the Shire.

¹² This scepticism and distrust of “foreign parts” (Tolkien, 2001: 23) is parodied by Terry Pratchett through the use of his witches (Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg, and Magrat Garlick), most notably in *Witches Abroad* (1999). The emphasis, here, is on the unfamiliarity of that which is located *out there*. ‘Foreign’ represents the liminal space of the unknown into which the hero must travel. It symbolises a process of defamiliarisation, which constitutes a significant part of the hero’s development to psychological maturity and potency.

and the holes of Shire-hobbits were often large, and inhabited by large families” (Tolkien, 2001: 7). Thus, their first distinguishing feature is their isolation and their status as bachelors (neither Frodo nor Bilbo ever marries, unlike Frodo’s Hobbit companions). Bilbo is described as “very rich and very peculiar” and the source of “wonder [...] ever since his remarkable disappearance and unexpected return” more than sixty years before the commencement of the narrative events (Tolkien, 2001: 21). The “riches he had brought back from his travels had now become a local legend”, and Bilbo is a further figure of awe by dint of his “prolonged vigour”¹³ (Tolkien, 2001: 21). Bilbo is also literate, which – while not unknown amongst hobbits – is considered rare. Bilbo and Frodo are thus singled out as possessing unusual characteristics, which predestine them for the elevated destinies they are to fulfil. Another who shares their status as “peculiar” is Meriadoc Brandybuck, by virtue of belonging to the Brandybuck clan:

“no wonder they’re queer [...] if they live on the wrong side of the Brandywine River, and right agin [*sic*] the Old Forest.¹⁴ That’s a bad place, if half the tales be true.”

“You’re right, Dad!” said the Gaffer. “Not that the Brandybucks of Buckland live *in* the Old Forest; but they’re a queer breed, seemingly. They fool about with boats on that big river – and that isn’t natural.”

(Tolkien, 2001: 22; original emphasis)

However, Samwise Gamgee and Peregrin Took are by no means unexceptional Hobbits. Peregrin Took belongs to the great house of Took, who would seem to be far more actively engaged in combat – albeit combat by Hobbit standards – in that the Took have ““deep holes in Green Hills, the Great Smials and all, and the ruffians can’t come at ’em; and they won’t

¹³ This “prolonged vigour” (Tolkien, 2001: 21) is, unbeknownst to the Hobbits, a result of being in possession of one of the Rings of Power.

¹⁴ The Brandywine River separates the Shire from Buckland. Buckland – in turn – serves as boundary territory between the Shire and the Bree lands. Thus, the “wrong side of the Brandywine River” (Tolkien, 2001: 22) implies that its residents are not entirely considered to be part of the Shire Hobbit society. This further reinforces Meriadoc’s status as Other, since he originates from this liminal space and from the boundary between the Shire and the rest of the world.

let the ruffians come on their land. If they do, Tooks hunt 'em'" (Tolkien, 2001: 986).¹⁵

Peregrin is also the youngest Hobbit in the Fellowship, and evinces his youth in his sometimes careless disregard for danger (such as when he picks up the palantír (Tolkien, 2001: 578)).¹⁶

Samwise's *arête* (as the Greek classical writers would call his virtue) lies in his unwavering loyalty to Frodo. He is, in fact, the only individual who remains by Frodo's side throughout the duration of the adventure, with the only instance of their parting occurring when Frodo, thought to be dead after the encounter with Shelob, is taken by the orcs. It is, notably, Samwise who goes to find him, refusing to believe that he is dead. Samwise is further differentiated by the fact that he does not exhibit the same distrust of Elves as the rest of the Shire Hobbits. He is, in fact, enamoured of them and is drawn into the narrative due to the appeal of setting out on an adventure which would bring him into close contact with the Elves. When Gandalf discovers him eavesdropping and asks what he had heard, Samwise responds in the following manner:

"I heard a great deal that I didn't rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr. Bilbo, sir, and dragons, and a fiery mountain, and – and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn't help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too, whatever Ted may say. Elves, sir! I would dearly love to see *them*. Couldn't you take me to see Elves, sir, when you go?"

(Tolkien, 2001: 62; original emphasis)

¹⁵ Bilbo Baggins is the only son of Bungo Baggins and a Took (Belladonna) and has "got something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side" (Tolkien, 2010: 5). Bilbo sets out on his adventure in *The Hobbit* because "something Tookish woke up inside him" (Tolkien, 2010: 16), indicating that his 'Tookishness' is the spirit of adventure.

¹⁶ The film adaptation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (dir. Jackson, 2001) depicts Peregrin Took absent-mindedly knocking a suit of armour into the well in the depths of Moria, thus alerting the goblins and orcs to the Fellowship's presence. This moment is meant to prefigure Peregrin's later mischief with the palantír.

Samwise's allusions to 'Ted's' comments imply the dismissal of all things not associated with the Shire on the part of the Hobbits. The pastoral Shire is Edenic and self-sufficient, and the Hobbits have nothing to do with outsiders, since they do not require anything from the outside world.¹⁷ Thus, Samwise's fascination with the tales pertaining to the great age of the Elves indicates a departure from the parochial norm. When Gandalf announces that he "shall go away with Mr. Frodo", Samwise exclaims:

"Me sir!" cried Sam, springing up like a dog invited for a walk. "Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!" he shouted, and then burst into tears.
(Tolkien, 2001: 63)

Samwise's elation is associated with the innocence of Hobbit-kind, and his jubilation indicates his desperate desire to experience a world which lies beyond the Shire's boundaries. His relationship to Frodo is also demonstrated here by the noun "sir", which indicates a position of subservience (further emphasised by the canine associations in "like a dog invited for a walk" (Tolkien, 2001: 63), which connotes loyalty to a master). Frodo, in turn, undergoes a similar process of differentiation. The aforementioned conversation between Daddy Twofoot and his son, the Gaffer (Samwise's father), detailing the odd nature of the Baggins family, continues with the following information, which also sets Frodo apart from his fellow Hobbits:

"Small wonder that trouble came of it, I say. But be that as it may, Mr Frodo is as nice a young hobbit as you could wish to meet. Very much like Mr. Bilbo, and in more than looks.¹⁸ After all his father was a Baggins. A decent respectable hobbit was Mr. Drogo Baggins; there was never much to tell of him, till he was drowned [*sic*]." (Tolkien, 2001: 22)

¹⁷ Bilbo and his nephew, then, are further differentiated in that they not only tolerate Gandalf's presence in the Shire, but welcome it.

¹⁸ A strong argument could be made here for Frodo as the inheritor of Bilbo's adventurous spirit.

Frodo's father, Drogo, met his end when whilst staying with his father-in-law at Brandy Hall. He “went out *boating* on the Brandywine River [something considered strange by the Hobbits, as illustrated above]; and he and his wife were drowned [*sic*], and poor Mr. Frodo only a child and all” (Tolkien, 2001: 23; original emphasis). Frodo is, thus, the child of a relatively strange father, and marked from birth as distinctive by virtue of his father's ‘strange’ proclivities. In this way he is similar to several other heroes in epic and fantasy, who have unusual parentage or ancestry as part of their lineage. Bilbo and Frodo (and, by virtue of his family, Meriadoc Brandybuck) are marked as peculiar, and differentiated from their fellow Hobbits. Since they are small in stature (in comparison to the race of Men) and considered relatively unremarkable when examined in the context of the ‘strangeness’ of Middle-earth, what they accomplish is expressly reported as extraordinary.¹⁹ The destruction of the Ring by Hobbits is made noteworthy precisely because they had – until then – been considered liminal inhabitants of Middle-earth. Tolkien's use of Hobbits as the initiators of change in his world may be interpreted as a moralistic message that illustrates that even the smallest and most insignificant personage is capable of great deeds, and is capable of initiating change in the world. This is a fairly common theme in the depiction of heroes, as Stephen Donaldson demonstrates through his protagonist, Thomas Covenant.

While it is difficult to trace the exact origin of the particular heroic trope that utilises a hero-elect, the same is true of Pug in Feist's *The Magician* (2009): while still an orphan, he is predestined to be great, and his exceptional powers are demonstrated from a young age, like those of his childhood friend Tomas (a sturdy, stocky boy obviously in possession of physical gifts). When readers first encounter Pug, it is as a young, carefree – if somewhat

¹⁹ Middle-earth functions as a Secondary World in that it is predicated on establishing itself as a departure from the Primary World. Through the development of a narrative detailing events that cannot occur in the Primary World of consensus reality, Tolkien emphasises the sheer magnitude of the Hobbits' (and the rest of the Fellowship's) accomplishments.

mischievous – boy playing outside the keep. A storm breaks suddenly, and Pug becomes lost in the forest surrounding the keep, where he is rescued from being gored by a wild boar by Meecham, who takes him back to his master’s house inside the forest. It is there that Pug meets Kulgan, a magician of the Midkemian (lesser) arcane arts. Kulgan explains that the boar that nearly took his young life is “as much a victim of circumstance as [Pug]” (Feist, 2009: 10) and shows Pug a scrying orb, which he had coincidentally been “testing” when he saw Pug making for the road leading to the keep (Feist, 2009: 11).²⁰ He tells Pug to “[l]ook deep into the orb” and when Pug is able to conjure a clear image of the kitchen in Crydee, Kulgan is surprised and says “you seem to be more than you first appear” (Feist, 2009: 11). This, then, is the first introduction to Pug, and already readers are made aware of the fact that Pug is differentiated from the other boys of the keep and set in a place above the norm. The degree to which this is so, however, is revealed only in the course of the novel.

In Feist’s world, on a festival celebrating the New Year, the boys of Castle Crydee undergo a day of Choosing, in which the Craftmasters of the various trades required in the daily running and maintenance of a keep choose their apprentices. These apprentices then begin their tutelage in the various professions (for example, blacksmithing, soldiering, carpentry, stable-keeping, etc.) until their proficiency is deemed satisfactory and the boys (now men) either remain on to work under their master in the profession, or leave the keep in order to ply their trade elsewhere. On the day of Choosing, an excitable Pug eagerly awaits the calling of his name so that he may begin practising a trade. All the boys who are considered of age are called, and Pug realises with dismay that “[h]e would be the only boy uncalled” and struggles not to cry (Feist, 2009: 27). Before Lord Borric is able to utter condolences to the boy,

²⁰ Feist, here, emphasises the role coincidence plays in the heroic call to action, and also establishes an interplay between coincidence and destiny.

Kulgan speaks and requests that Pug become his apprentice. Quite often a hero in epic or fantasy is shown to be unteachable by the established methods of tutelage or apprenticeship. The implication here is that these institutions are unequal to the task or talents of the hero in the making, and in this way fantasy points to the limitations of many processes of social replication.

Pug studies diligently under the tutelage of Kulgan, but finds himself incapable of even the most basic spells. The first instance of Pug's display of magical power occurs when he rescues the daughter, Lady Carline, of the Duke of Crydee from an attack by trolls. His remarkable magical ability enables him to stun the trolls by recalling and reciting a spell he read in a scroll (without having to read directly from the scroll).

In a conversation between Pug and Kulgan, we read:

“Some magic is intrinsic to the magician, such as taking on the shape of an animal or smelling weather. But casting spells outside the body, upon something else, needs an external focus. Trying to incant the spell you used from memory should have produced terrible pain in *you*, not the trolls, if it would have worked at all!”

[...]

“It's as if you have discovered a completely new form of magic,” he said softly. Hearing no response, Kulgan looked down at the boy, who was deeply asleep. Shaking his head in wonder, the magician pulled a cover over the exhausted boy. He put out the lantern that hung on the wall and let himself out. As he walked up the stairs to his own room, he shook his head.

“Absolutely incredible.”

(Feist, 2009: 58)

On Midkemia, magicians require the presence of “scrolls, books, and other devices” (Feist, 2009: 58) in order to focus their magic, and Pug's deed of reciting a spell from memory is strange and foreign to the principles upon which Midkemia's magic users base their craft. It is for this reason – that he is anathema to Midkemia's magic – that Pug cannot unleash his

potential in the beginning of his training. Since he is an elect hero; however, this problem does not persist for long, and Feist emphasises Pug's young age at this point in order to demonstrate his latent power. Feist's rationalisation of Pug's difficulties serve, once again, to enforce the leitmotif of fantasy heroes in that the difficulties encountered by mythological heroes are generally overcome with relative ease (Campbell, 1973: 173).

An example of Pug's role as elect is illustrated by Kulgan. Feeling frustrated by his inability to tap into his magical resources with the same apparent ease as Kulgan, Pug becomes despondent.

“I ... I don't know. It's as if I expect to find something that will tell me, 'This is the way it must be done, the only way,' or something like that. Does that make any sense?”

[...]

Kulgan stood up. “Don't dwell on it; you are still young, and I have hope for you yet.” His tone was light, and Pug felt the humour in it.

“Then I am not a complete loss?” he said with a smile.

“Indeed not.” Kulgan looked thoughtfully at his pupil. “In fact, *I have the feeling that someday you may use that logical mind of yours for the betterment of magic.*”

Pug was a little startled. He did not think of himself as one to accomplish great things.²¹ (Feist, 2009: 88; emphasis added)

Kulgan's words prove to be prophetic, since Pug later establishes the Sorcerer's Collective (a collection of magicians working alongside the Tsurani magicians – magicians who once sought to invade and dominate Midkemia) for the betterment of both magic (as Kulgan predicted) and socio-political relations between the two worlds.

²¹ As will be demonstrated, humility is a significant feature of the contemporary fantasy hero, and thus Pug's humility is noteworthy here in that readers are called to contrast his latent diffidence with his later accomplishments.

Feist's hero, thus, is not entirely incompetent, but discovers that the reason he could not perform lesser acts of magic (such as those practised by magicians who require the use of a scroll in order to perform magic, and – more specifically – those magicians on Midkemia) is because he is attuned to greater forms of magic. This inability to act due to forces outside his control, while possessing superior powers to his fellows, is in direct contrast with Stephen Donaldson's hero in *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*.

Covenant's initial task, when he awakes to find himself in the Land, is to serve as a messenger on behalf of the Land's greatest threat. When one of the inhabitants sees him for the first time, the woman heralds him as “Halfhand! Do legends live again? [...] Berek Halfhand!²²” (Donaldson, 1993: 45). As a leper in the real world, Covenant's fingers on his right hand have been amputated. The missing fingers serve as a visual reminder to all who see him of the fact that he has leprosy and is an object of scorn and revulsion. In the context of the Secondary World of the Land, however, the missing fingers, as well as his wedding ring (perceived as an object of power), mark him as one of the Land's great heroes returned. Early in the novel, a woman named Lena says to him: “You have the omen of the hand, for the legends say that Berek Earthfriend may come again” (Donaldson, 1993: 47).²³ Covenant, then, is marked as the “elect” hero, as detailed earlier in this chapter: the hero returned at a time when the land needs him most. In fact, so close is his resemblance to the hero Berek Half-hand that a singer who claims to be “an old friend” of Berek's and to whom Berek taught “half the songs [she] know[s]” mistakes him for the mythological hero (Donaldson, 1993: 398). Covenant, however, rejects both the location he finds himself in (the narrative world of the Land) and the portents associated with that location as a fanciful dream.

²² The name of Donaldson's great hero is strongly reminiscent of Tolkien's fabled hero Beren One-hand.

²³ The word “omen” here is suggestive, once again, of the role of predestination in the construction of a heroic figure.

Donaldson's use of a figure who actively resists heroic stature sheds light on the qualities of fantasy heroism. Covenant's initial resistance is demonstrated by the instances where he sees his role in the events unfolding upon the Land (events he is central to) as survival only: "keep moving, don't think about it, survive. [...] His resemblance to a legendary hero was only part of a dream, not a compulsory fact or demand" (Donaldson, 1993: 85). Donaldson's establishment of a heroic protagonist who views his circumstances as "a dream, not a compulsory fact or demand" emphasises Covenant's resistance of his heroic role (a "demand" on the part of the Land's inhabitants): for example, when called to lead the army in the upcoming war, Covenant refuses.²⁴ In fact, Campbell notes that heroes often resist the call to greatness, which leads to dire consequences for both the heroic figure and his world: "His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless" (Campbell, 1973: 59), and it is precisely this scenario that threatens both the Land and Covenant himself. Thomas Covenant suffers both the literal and the metaphorical results of this attempted refusal of the heroic call. The vegetation of the Land withers and he is left with a sense of malaise and disenchantment.

While Covenant is branded Berek Halfhand reborn, he is also – in many ways – portrayed as an antihero by his committing deeds and displaying characteristics that are considered distinctly *anti-heroic*. *The Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the role of an anti-hero as

The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that of the *traditional* protagonist [emphasis added], or *hero*

²⁴ In *The Chronicles of Thomas Convent, the Unbeliever* (1993), Donaldson complicates the relationship between the Primary and Secondary Worlds in that his heroic protagonist crosses the boundaries between the two. This implies that rather than "looking at the little abortive Secondary World from the outside" (Tolkien, 2001: 37), the demarcations between the two worlds blur and become virtually indistinct, and the two worlds exist as separate and distinct entities. One could, in fact, argue that Thomas Covenant's very name implies a level of agreement between the two worlds (the Primary World from which Covenant originates – which, it is assumed, is that of our own world of consensus reality – and the Secondary World of the Land).

[original emphasis], of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, clownish, or dishonest. (Abrams, 2009: 14)

Covenant's rape of Lena is the first example of "ignominious" behaviour on his part: "he remembered the softness of Lena's body under him, felt the low shake of her sobbing", and it is only when he sees "the blood on her loins" that he rises and, walking toward the river, "vomited the weight of his guts into the water" (Donaldson, 1993: 84). The factor that affects Covenant in such a visceral way is not remorse over the act of rape, but the sight of blood (since Covenant is a leper, blood would for him signify injury, and injury "could damage him mortally" (Donaldson, 1993: 383)). This view is further reinforced by the fact that Covenant commits rape in an attempt to demonstrate his own recently returned virility and does not initially display remorse over the act until much later in the novel, when he considers his act of violation and of taking away something which is considered precious, her virginity, by contrasting it with Lena's running away "so that her people would not learn what had happened to her and punish him" (Donaldson, 1993: 444). It is her act of "extravagant forbearance" that shames him, and it is only when her daughter, Elena, stands before him that he realises all that Lena sacrificed for him (Donaldson, 1993: 444). Even then, however, Covenant justifies his act by saying that because he had been impotent for so long, he "forgot what it's like" (Donaldson, 1993: 449). In the face of such extravagantly inadequate regret, one is forced to consider the moral composition of Covenant's character, and condemn his inability to atone for the rape. The act of rape, then, adds to Covenant's status as 'wounded' or 'flawed' hero, and functions as one of the qualities that *emphasise* this differentiated status. It also serves as a process of differentiating him from the other occupants of the Land,

since even here rape is considered transgressive of socially mediated norms and values.²⁵

Covenant commits the act of rape because he does not see the Land as ‘real’, and also as a means of compensating for his physical sterility and impotency in the ‘real’ world. There is a certain freedom due to the fact that he thinks the Land is a figment of his imagination and so his transgressions are – by extension – not committed in a ‘real’ world and therefore not ‘valid’ insofar as they are not true offences.

Another instance of Covenant’s role as antihero is his resistance to the call, which manifests itself as unwillingness to act – what I earlier called his “passivity”. Throughout the *Chronicles*, we find repetition and variation of the phrase “don’t think about it, follow the path, survive” (Donaldson, 1993: 67), which in turn is a variant of his ‘real-world’ refrain “[l]eper outcast unclean!” (Donaldson, 1993: 68).²⁶ This phrase serves as Covenant’s justification for his own inaction. He does not perceive the Land as real (as the text repeatedly informs readers), and so does not believe that he should become involved in its affairs. Involvement would signal his symbolic acceptance of the Land, and that acceptance would mean relinquishing his grasp on a reality in which he is an outcast, and in which he has to stand constant vigil against threat of injury.²⁷ Injury in the real world, of course, is symbolic of Covenant’s mortality and – most importantly – weakness. Covenant’s self-awareness of his own mortality is juxtaposed, by Donaldson, with the inherent strength of the hero reborn, Berek Halfhand. In an attempt to justify his reluctance and unwillingness to act, Covenant says:

²⁵ Donaldson’s Land does not diverge from the societal values of the Primary World of consensus reality, and thus the moments of overlap between the Primary and Secondary Worlds are once again enforced.

²⁶ Significantly, Covenant’s two refrains are symbolically linked by rhythm and reference to the physical manifestations of his illness.

²⁷ The self-proclaimed epithet of “the Unbeliever” is used throughout the series to identify Covenant, to differentiate him from the other inhabitants of the Land, and alludes to Jesus’ disciple, Doubting Thomas, who, like Covenant, is brought to believe by the evidence of his senses.

“This – Land – is suicide to me. It’s an escape, and I can’t afford even thinking about escapes, much less actually falling into one. Maybe a blind man can stand the risk, but a leper can’t. If I give in here, I won’t last a month where it really counts. Because I’ll have to go back. Am I getting through to you?”
(Donaldson, 1993: 479)

On one level, Covenant’s refusal of the Land indicates his own sense of self-preservation, in that acceptance of the Land would signal a disavowal of his condition as leper in the real world – he cannot believe in the Land, because he has to return to the real world in which he is dying. The veracity of the Land is constantly questioned, which problematises his perceived role in the narrative world. His assertions that the Land is not real, however, are naturally not accepted by its inhabitants, and yet Covenant still clings to the ‘real’ world, and this becomes the very factor that serves to incapacitate him, and render him symbolically and literally impotent.²⁸

There is a metaphorical association between Covenant’s impotency and the way he views himself and his own role. As a failed writer and a leper (and therefore an outcast in his society), Covenant identifies himself as a ‘nobody’ – his identification resides in his perception of himself as one who does not merit any significant consideration and who does not possess any intrinsic worth. This is telling in itself, as the novel is an attempt at a *bildungsroman* that traces the development of Covenant as character and – ultimately – as a hero. Donaldson thus plays with the notion of a hero emerging from relatively unremarkable circumstances and becoming renowned by performing great and heroic deeds. The establishment and development of an intrinsic sense of self-worth is, furthermore, a departure

²⁸ By Covenant’s refusal to accept the Land, Donaldson indicates that clinging to the ‘real’ world of consensus reality is symbolic of Covenant’s masochistic urge to cling to his own disabled identity as outcast; as leper. His acceptance of the Land will provoke his choice to act and will enable him to heal both the Land and himself through virtuous and heroic action.

from the traditional mode of the heroic figure in that a classical hero does not truly consider his self-worth, since it is already firmly established and also endorsed by those around him.

Generally, the notion of predestination is closely tied to the hero's humble origins. This, however, pertains to Aragorn only insofar as he is – almost – an orphan (his father died when he was two and his mother when he was seventy-six). According to the beliefs of his people, he was fostered (after his father's death) by the Rivendell elves and taken into the house of Elrond himself, but was not aware of his “true name and heritage until [...] he was twenty” (<http://tuckborough.net/aragorn.html>, Retrieved November 12, 2011), and his acclaim spreads throughout Middle-earth. As has been demonstrated, Aragorn's very name carries with it a significant legacy, since he is the direct descendant of Isildur Elendil. Pug, however, neatly fits the mould of the orphan-hero. Similarly, Tomas will one day become the ‘reincarnation’ of one of the most powerful and intimidating figures on Midkemia, the Dragon-rider Ashen-Shugar reborn, and yet his parents serve as members of the kitchen staff in Castle Crydee, implying humble origins. As has already been demonstrated, the Hobbits who form part of the Fellowship and accompany Frodo on his journey and quest originate from the pastoral and parochial environment of the Shire, and Hobbits, as a rule, do not go adventuring (as seen in *The Hobbit*, where the narrator tells us that “[the Bagginses] never had any adventures or did anything unexpected” (Tolkien 2010: 3)). Adventuring, however, as well as all the pitfalls associated with it as a quest motif, is not to be lightly undertaken. Most fantasy heroes (and even the heroes of the Greek and Roman epics) often have extraordinary powers, even if latent. These powers include perseverance; physical and psychological strength and

determination; and intelligence, or resourcefulness.²⁹ These qualities are tested by obstacles and reversals, which are inevitable features of the adventure that constitutes the heroic quest.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell examines the heroic figure, who proliferates across cultural boundaries, and stands at the very epicentre of myth and legend:

The composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional gifts. Frequently he is honored [*sic*] by his society, frequently unrecognized or disdained. He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolical deficiency. In fairy tales this may be as slight as the lack of a certain golden ring, whereas in the apocalyptic vision the physical and spiritual life of the whole earth can be represented as fallen, or on the point of falling, into ruin.

Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph.

(Campbell, 1973: 37-38)

Traditionally, the fantasy hero is a figure beyond reproach. In *The Folklore of the Discworld* (2008), Terry Pratchett (renowned author of the *Discworld* series, a fantasy satire) writes about his understanding of the heroic figure:

We're not talking about small-h heroes, here. Given a smidgeon of courage and a suitable crisis, practically anybody could turn out to be a small-h hero. But a capital-h Hero is a star in the firmament of myth and legend, a precious asset to any bard or storyteller who happens to meet him. People hoping for a quiet life are less enthusiastic, since a considerable amount of mayhem erupts wherever a Hero passes, even one who is seeking justice rather than, say, the green eye of a little yellow god.

Heroes come in two main types: the Heir to the Kingdom, and the Barbarian. Both are recognizable by certain signs, well known to anyone who

²⁹ It is interesting that in fantasy 'cunning' carries negative connotations and is an attribute associated with 'evil'. A heroic figure fighting on the side of 'good', therefore, will instead be described as intellectually gifted (as is the case with Patrick Rothfuss's hero Kvothe (*In the Name of the Wind*)). In *The Iliad*, Homer's description of Odysseus carries the modifying adjective "resourceful", implying that this is more than a mere idiosyncrasy but should in fact be considered a part of Odysseus's heroic status (Homer, 2000: 11). Odysseus, by contrast with Achilles, is described as "resourceful" and "great-hearted" (Homer 2000: 11 & 84), and occasionally as "godlike" (Homer 2000: 27), implying heroic status equal to that of Achilles.

knows anything about folklore and the power of narrativium,³⁰ and abound in the semi-historical legends of many nations.

(Pratchett & Simpson, 2008: 261)

Pratchett here plays on the notions of origin of “capital-h Hero[es]” and the depiction of heroic figures emerging to restore order to the world often through violence itself, since it would seem that in order to overthrow the tyrant, one must wield a sword.³¹ Fantasy tropes often include a revelation of the hero as true “Heir to the Kingdom”, and this is no less true of Tolkien’s use of Aragorn. In the hands of Tolkien, Aragorn is depicted as a figure who is in possession of great courage and determination, since it is he who – when the Balrog drags Gandalf down into the depths of Moria – urges the Fellowship onwards when its members have all but given up hope. Aragorn is adept in terms of his military prowess as well, since – despite the fact that he has never commanded an army – Tolkien deems him worthy of being the one to lead the armies against the forces of both Mordor and Isengard. He is also a skilled swordsman, ranger and tracker. Harris and Platzner note that “the epic hero is typically a man of physical action who proves his worth by demonstrating indomitable courage and fighting skill” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 23). Towards the end of *The Return of the King* (the third volume of *The Lord of the Rings*), Aragorn is also in possession of the traditional healing powers, which are the special capability of the king’s hands. He is deliberately portrayed as a fully-fledged hero and is to be juxtaposed with the figures of the Hobbits.

Campbell speaks of the distinguishing characteristics of a hero as follows:

³⁰ The word “narrativium” is Pratchett’s name for “the narrative imperative, the power of story” (Pratchett & Simpson, 2008: 6).

³¹ This, of course, is a means of depicting a moral dilemma in that in order to oppose the (oftentimes) violent regime of the tyrant, heroic figures are required – by necessity – to take up arms themselves in an attempt to restore peace.

The man hero [...] must “descend” to re-establish connection with the infrahuman. This is the sense [...] of the adventure of the hero.

But the makers of legend [note the use of the word “makers”] have seldom rested content to regard the world’s great heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found. On the contrary, the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception. *The whole hero-life is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its culmination.*

This accords with the view that herohood is predestined, rather than simply achieved, and opens the problem of the relationship of biography to character. Jesus, for example, can be regarded as a man who by dint of austerities and meditation attained wisdom; or on the other hand, one may believe that a god descended and took upon himself the enactment of a human career. The first view would lead one to imitate the master literally, in order to break through, in the same way as he, to the transcendent, redemptive experience. But the second states that the hero is rather a symbol to be contemplated than an example to be literally followed.

(Campbell, 1973: 319; emphasis added)

As Campbell notes, fantasy is premised on the ascension of the hero as the centrifugal force of the narrative events. The heroic figure is an awe-inspiring one, whether he is descended from the divine, or whether he is simply the man who is destined to complete a certain task. Feist’s Pug is a character whose parentage is shrouded in mystery and has – as yet – never been linked to his personal propensity for the greater form of magic, which is not, in fact, native to his world. Kulgan is the first to perceive Pug’s extraordinary powers and even his ‘advanced’ level of education (which takes Kulgan by surprise when he first meets the young future hero) sets him apart from the other boys of the keep. He is anathema to Kulgan’s understanding of the governing principles of magic as he knows it. Addressing the keep’s Father Tully, Kulgan explains Pug’s powers as follows:

“The boy’s right, you know,” Kulgan stated flatly. “There is no explanation for why he cannot perform the skills I’ve tried to teach. The things he can do with scrolls and devices amaze me. The boy has such gifts for these things, I would have wagered he had the makings of a magician of mighty arts. But this inability to use his inner powers ...”

[...]

“It is confusing, Tully. I think you’ll agree he has the potential for great talent. As soon as I saw him use the crystal in my hut that night, I knew for the first time in years I might have at last found my apprentice. When no master chose him, I knew *fate had set our paths to cross*. But there is something else inside that boy’s head, something I’ve never met before, something powerful. I don’t know what it is, Tully, but it rejects my exercises, as if they were somehow ... not correct, or ... ill suited to him. I don’t know if I can explain what I’ve encountered with Pug any better. There is no simple explanation for it.” (Feist, 2009: 37; emphasis added)

Pug’s powers are indeed, as Kulgan first estimates, indicative of “the potential for great talent” and – as is later revealed – the rationalisation for why Pug struggles with the magic is (conveniently) explained as a result of the fact that it is “ill suited to him”, since Pug’s proclivities extend to the greater forms of magic, which Kulgan cannot teach him. Pug, then, is depicted as different and placed in a position that far exceeds the norm. He is also fated to meet Kulgan. The fact that he is chosen by the magician as an apprentice when Kulgan has never had one is an act that establishes a far greater destiny for the orphan boy. Pug is the first Midkemian to be able to tap into both forms of magic – greater and lesser. He, then, is much like ‘wily’ Odysseus in *The Odyssey* (2003), in that his greatest strength is his intellect and keen understanding (even at the time) of the principles of magic, and is reminiscent of the “tragic hero” who “explores the meaning of pain and defeat, plumbing depths of thought and feeling typically beyond those that epic warriors express” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 23).

Tomas, on the other hand, serves as counterbalance to a hero whose primary ‘strength’ resides not in the physical, but rather the mental and intellectual aspects of heroism. When Tomas inherits the dragon armour he acquires prodigious military and magical prowess and becomes the reincarnation of Ashen-Shugar. His powers, however, are not innate and so he is perhaps less impressive as a heroic figure than his childhood companion, Pug. He, in turn,

is depicted as akin to ‘man-killing Achilles’, rather than ‘wily Odysseus’, whom Pug resembles.³² Tomas, however, is in possession of the requisite charisma of a born leader.

He was a tall boy, with sandy hair and bright blue eyes. With his quick smile, he was well liked in the keep, in spite of a boyish tendency to find trouble. He was Pug’s closest friend, more brother than friend, and for that reason Pug earned some measure of acceptance from the other boys, for they all regarded Tomas as their unofficial leader. (Feist, 2009: 16-17)

The boys’ regard of Tomas “as their unofficial leader” serves to signify his heroic potential. Thomas Covenant, on the other hand, represents (as has been mentioned before) a departure from the traditional fantasy hero, but is also in possession of remarkable powers that serve to establish his heroic stature (in fact, as the quote above demonstrates, just as Pug is segregated in terms of his society, so too is Covenant). His white gold ring, perceived in the ‘real’ world to be merely indicative of his marital status, is perceived in the context of the Land to be a considerable source of power.³³ His role in the new world in which he finds himself is akin to that of a diviner in that he can sense, with pinpoint accuracy, the exact location of ‘wrongness’ in the Land and its earth, since the earth is strongly correlated to magical fertility and directly linked to the Land’s ability to thrive. This means that he is affiliated to the

³²There is a remarkable similarity between Tomas’s awe-inspiring armour and that belonging to Homer’s Achilles in *The Iliad*. Achilles (or Achilleus) is described as “swift-footed”, “godlike” (and these two adjectives are then united, making him “swift-footed godlike Achilleus”), “great-hearted” and “mighty” (Homer 2000: 3, 4, 6 & 321). His heroic status is augmented by his armour, which was crafted by lame Hephaistos, an immortal. When he dons his armour, a “fearful trembling came over every Trojan’s body, in terror at the sight of the swift-footed son of Peleus blazing in his armour like Ares, the curse of men” (Homer 2000: 323). The discovery (or, occasionally, bequeathing) of a gift is a significant part of the heroic narrative. In a documentary entitled *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed* (2007), the narrator (Robert Clotworthy) explains that “the mentor [of a hero] performs another important duty early in the hero’s journey. [...] He must present him with a special gift”. Jonathon Young (founding curator of the Joseph Campbell archives) states that “[t]he moment is crucial, and in the stories, it is [...] often something useful in the struggles to come” (Documentary: *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed*, 2007: n.p.). Admittedly, the armour is not bequeathed to Tomas, but it nonetheless serves an important function in establishing his heroic stature. While Tomas’s discovery is ‘accidental’, I have already discussed the way in which Feist utilises serendipity as a means of illustrating the hero’s elect status.

³³ He is divorced and yet wears the ring for sentimental reasons. It does, however, serve as remarkable coincidence that this becomes a symbol of his heroic stature when he finds himself in the Land (coincidences such as these serve, as far as he is concerned, to discredit the veracity of the Land). The symbolic associations serve, once again, to emphasise the contextual realities of the two worlds as conceptually linked.

elemental ‘divinities’ of the earth and gives him their assistance in times of need, thus giving him, like Pug and Tomas, the advantage of having powers beyond himself to call upon.

Despite these powers (whether they be inherent, great boons bestowed upon the heroic figure, or even symbols of power), the heroic personage is usually modest. Heroes who fight under the banner of all that is good in their respective worlds do not become guilty of hubris, passivity,³⁴ or greed. On one of the rare afternoons when Pug and Tomas are given leave from their duties (Pug, as assistant to Crydee Castle’s resident magician, and Tomas as a young guard in training) due to an important council between Lord Borric, Crydee’s Duke, and the Elf queen, Aglaranna, we find the following exchange between the two boys. Tomas is smitten with the ethereal beauty of Aglaranna and Pug teases him, but in the midst of their conversation, Feist reveals the fates of the two:

Tomas looked far away, and Pug turned toward him. “What is it?”
Tomas said softly, “I wish I could see Elvandar [the tree-top ancestral home of the elves], someday.”
Pug understood. “Maybe you will.” Then he added, in lighter tones, “But I doubt it. For I will be a magician, and you will be a soldier, and the Queen will reign in Elvandar long after we are dead.”
Tomas playfully jumped atop his friend, wrestling him down in the straw. “Oh! Is that so. Well, I will too go to Elvandar someday.” [...] “And when I do, I’ll be a great hero, with victories over the Tsurani by the score. She’ll welcome me as an honored [*sic*] guest. What do you think of that?”
Pug laughed, trying to push his friend off. “And I’ll be the greatest magician in the land.” (Feist, 2009: 103)

While Pug may express the childish desire for greatness in his chosen field, he does not demand renown. Similarly, Tomas will indeed become a “great hero” by virtue of the fact that his own sense of self is so strongly developed that he does not permit it to become

³⁴ Donaldson’s hero does not remain passive, although he is initially portrayed thus, and it is precisely this ability to eventually choose the heroic path (choose to act) that serves as his personal enabler.

subservient to the memories and inherited powers of Ashen-Shugar. He does not, however, possess the same narcissistic need to dominate as Ashen-Shugar once did, and it is this humility that will save him from destruction at the hands of his fellow Midkemians later in the novel. Pug's self-doubt is also in keeping with heroic traditions, where the hero must frequently conquer his own doubts before he may succeed in his quest. Campbell tells us that

the first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case (i.e., give battle to the nursery demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called "the archetypal images."
(Campbell, 1973: 17-18)

[E]very failure to cope with a life situation must be laid, in the end, to a restriction of consciousness. [...] The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale. Therefore it is formulated in the broadest terms. The individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it then assist him past his restricting walls. Who and where are his ogres? Those are the reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity. What are his ideals? Those are the symptoms of his grasp of life.
(Campbell, 1973: 121)

Campbell's remarks make it abundantly clear that the hero's journey is not merely a physical endeavour, but also an inner one, leading him to a point of confrontation in which he encounters and overcomes his own psychological "difficulties" (Campbell, 1973: 17), growing in maturity and personal stature. Campbell's observations are true of Feist's initially uncertain hero in particular. Whilst Pug may doubt his own role in the events surrounding his life, readers are aware of the fact that he is destined for heroism. He is, after all, the central protagonist of the novel, and we read simply to discover *how* it is that Pug comes to realise his full potential. Tomas, too, is destined for the spectacular. His childhood daydream does

come to fruition later in the book, and, notably, Tomas does not seem to share his friend's sense of existential angst. In fact, he will one day rule Elvandar as the Queen's consort.³⁵

A side-effect of the hero's trajectory is the acquisition of honour, glory and excellence. In the traditional epics, Greek heroic action is dominated and motivated by *arête*. Debra Hawhee defines this concept as interchangeable with that of virtuosity:

Since *aretê* is so complex and difficult to render in English, I will often simply render it as *aretê*; my use of the term virtuosity, however – rather than the typical translation of “virtue” – signal this complexity and marks the way in which *aretê* was an ethical (not a moral) concept, and as such was associated with bodily appearance and action as much as it was conceived of as an abstracted “guide” for such actions. (Hawhee, 2002: 205)

Aretê, thus, not only denotes excellence and virtuosity, but also appearance (the significant factor which prompts Achilles to attain an even better suit of armour than that which is claimed by Hector in book seventeen of *The Iliad* (Homer, 2000: 307-310)) and action, as well as a guiding principle for action. It is, in other words, an informal acknowledgement and guiding principle of the Greek conceptualisation of the heroic code, and it lays the foundation for the code governing heroic qualities.

Aretê was associated with the goodness, courage, and prowess of a warrior. One of the best examples of early agonistic manifestations of *aretê* can be found in Homer's Achilles, who is referred to as “strong,” “swift,” and “godlike” (1.129; 1.140); “the great runner” (1.224), and “the best of the Achaeans” (16.279). His *aretê* in the *Iliad* has a double force, for not only is he a brave and brilliant warrior, but from the outset, he is destined to die in battle at Troy (1.536), with the utmost glory, a guarantor of *aretê*. Conceptually, *aretê* was tightly bound with *agathos* (good), *kleos* (glory), *timê* (honor [*sic*]), and *philotimia* (love of honor [*sic*]).

³⁵ Pug is certainly mentioned more frequently in later novels, and this implies a greater level of involvement in the narratives to come. Tomas – because he does not share Ashen-Shugar's need for dominance – chooses to take the proverbial back seat. This emphasises Pug's pre-eminence. (This aspect of Tomas's trajectory is further discussed in the next chapter.)

As David Cohen points out, the norms and practices of Athenian virtuosity “operate within the politics of reputation, whose normative poles are honor and shame” [...]. As such, *aretê* functions as an external phenomenon, depending on outside reception and acknowledgment for its instantiation.³⁶ *Aretê* thus operated within an economy of actions, wherein certain acts, such as dying in battle, or securing a victory at the Olympic games, were considered *agathos* and hence deserving of honor [*sic*], and certain acts were not. In other words, one cannot just *be* virtuous, one must *become* virtuosity by performing and hence embodying virtuous actions in public. In addition to depending on acknowledgement, then, *aretê* also had a performative dimension, which is to say that it must be enacted, embodied. *Aretê* was thus not a *telos*, but rather a constant call to action that produced particular habits. As a repeated/repeatable style of living, *arête* was therefore a performative, bodily phenomenon, depending on visibility—on making manifest qualities associated with virtuosity. As such, it was produced through observation, imitation, and learning. For ancient Athenians, identities did not precede actions, as this movement of *aretê* demonstrates. (Hawhee, 2002: 187)

This prescriptive element of *aretê* has to some extent been displayed among authors of contemporary fantasy work (especially in their emphasis on the process of becoming heroic rather than simply being a hero). The important distinction, here, is that while a hero should be in possession of *agathos* (good) and *timê* (honour), the self-orientated elements of *kleos* (glory) and *philotimia* (love of honour) fall away in many contemporary works of fantasy.

In a series of lectures on the nature of the epic in literature, Timothy Shutt argues that Virgil’s *Aeneid* saw the rise of the Roman hero in a portrayal of a conceptual movement away from self-centredness. There is, according to Shutt, a fundamental notion of selfishness in Greek *aretê* and the portrayal of Greek heroes. The Romans perceived the self-aggrandising aspects of Greek *aretê* as flaws, and instead promoted cooperation as a means of achieving goals, and a sense of communal ethics in order to best serve the greater good. For them, the glory and success of Rome was of greater importance than the prestige and reputation of any one individual. Most notable in the Virgilian epic are the personal sacrifices made by his hero,

³⁶ This particular aspect is vital to Steven Erikson’s work, and will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Aeneas, so that Rome may be founded, and his people may benefit. “Virgil,” according to Shutt, “sets up a model in his work of responding to, addressing, and re-thinking the values of preceding epics”, and this is significant in that

every epic that we read afterwards, every epic that we talk about afterwards [...] is written by somebody who has read and who is, with greater or lesser degree of explicitness, responding to Virgil not only in terms of the structure that Virgil sets up for the epic, but also in terms of Virgil’s epic themes.

(Shutt, 2004: disc 3, lecture 6, track 11)

Contemporary fantasy – much like the Roman epic – favours the notion of glory and honour for the greater good, rather than an individualistic pursuit. Self-aggrandisement is generally scorned and frowned upon, unlike in the Greek epics. Unlike Homer’s portrayal of heroic machismo exhibited by a character such as Achilles, contemporary fantasy expects heroes to be self-sacrificing and to pursue the goals of the greater good (they are, in that sense, much like Aeneas in *The Aeneid*, which exults in Aeneas’s sacrifices of personal happiness and glory). Notions of self-aggrandisement and *philotimia* are often symbolically attached to a need to dominate and control, and ultimately culminate in the pursuit of individual power. In Tolkien’s work, this is evinced by the character of Saruman, who embodies the self-centredness that is shunned and ultimately punished in many contemporary fantasies.³⁷ Indeed, Saruman possesses a degree of *hubris* that is comparable to Milton’s Satan, whose “[p]ride / Had cast him out from heav’n” (Bush, 1966: 213).³⁸ Tolkien’s villain, Sauron, seeks dominion over Middle-earth, while Saruman seeks to challenge Sauron’s dominion and to seize it for himself and is, in fact, corrupted by the need to attain personal power.

³⁷ Boromir, in *The Lord of the Rings*, is a figure who is in keeping with ancient epics where “both Archaic and Classical myth emphasize a distinctly Greek focus on competitiveness and individual achievement” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 23). While Boromir may argue that he wishes to restore Gondor to its former glory through the power of the One Ring, there are definite allusions to a pursuit of self-orientated glory (which is the reason his father favours him over his brother Faramir), and he is thus a figure inspiring both pity and condemnation.

³⁸ Satan’s assertion that it is “[b]etter to reign in hell than serve in heav’n” (Bush, 1966: 218) is a further elaboration on the leitmotif of the dangers of self-serving pride.

Before his fall from grace, however, Saruman is a noteworthy and commendable exemplar of wisdom in Gandalf's estimation. As one of the Order of the Istari (Tolkien's wizards) Saruman's *aretê* lies not in strength, but in his possession of intellect, wisdom and knowledge. Corrupted by his own sense of pride, Saruman becomes increasingly withdrawn. Speaking of this withdrawal, Gandalf says:

He is the chief of my order and the head of the Council. His knowledge is deep, but his pride has grown with it, and he takes ill any meddling. The lore of the Elven rings [of which the One Ring is one], great and small, is his province. He has long studied it, seeking the lost secrets of their making; but when the Rings were debated in Council, all that he would reveal to us of his ring-lore told against my fears. (Tolkien, 2001: 47)

Saruman the White is, in fact, described by Gandalf as "the greatest of my order" (Tolkien, 2001: 250) and he is credited with the initial driving away of Sauron, making Saruman's fall from grace that much more devastating to those fighting against evil. It is his pursuit of power that leads to this downfall. This quality is evident when he says:

"A new Power is rising. Against it the old allies and policies will not avail us at all. There is no hope left in the Elves or dying Númenor. This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be a rich reward for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means." (Tolkien, 2001: 253)

Saruman, like Boromir, seeks the Ring so that he may impose "Order" upon the world – but his fanaticism forces readers to question his motives. The repetition of the word "Power"

seems indicative of an increasing obsession, as well as a need to assert control and dominion over the world.

Saruman's, Sauron's, and – to a lesser extent – Boromir's desire to possess the Ring (while rationalised in terms of noble goals, in the case of Boromir) is contrasted with the task of the Ring-bearer, Frodo, in that Frodo's task is to *resist* the call of the Ring. One could even go so far as to say that Gollum, who succeeds in keeping the Ring of Power hidden for approximately five hundred years, does not seek to possess or wield the Ring in order to attain power and dominion, or even to initiate change upon the world. Rather, he seeks to keep it because it is 'precious' to him.³⁹

As early as the novel's prologue, the narrative voice provides readers with the impression that the Hobbits will be destined for great things:

Hobbits had, in fact, lived quietly in Middle-earth for many long years before other folk became even aware of them. And the world being after all full of strange creatures beyond count, these little people seemed of very little importance. But in the days of Bilbo, and of Frodo his heir, they suddenly became, by no wish of their own, both important and renowned, and troubled the counsels of the Wise and the Great. (Tolkien, 2001: 2)

The lack of "importance" on the part of the Hobbits changes the moment Frodo is designated as Ring-bearer in that Frodo's task is now linked to the continuation of peace in Middle-earth.

Since Samwise chooses to accompany his master on his journey, his *aretê* lies in his sense of

³⁹ This, paradoxically, places the deformed Gollum in a position of moral superiority. He desires to possess the Ring not to wield the power it promises, but merely because it is pretty and shiny. Frodo, by contrast, is merely tasked with the bearing of the Ring to Mount Doom (he is the *Ring-bearer*). His task is completed. Tolkien ingeniously does not task him explicitly with destroying the Ring. Gollum is, in fact, deliberately used as a foil. In his attainment of that which he most desperately desires (the Ring), lies his ultimate destruction. Tolkien may be moralising along the lines of 'be careful what you wish for'.

duty and loyalty towards Frodo and the quest. He does, however, harbour some notions of ultimate recognition and acknowledgement, and may, therefore, perhaps be considered less noble than Frodo.⁴⁰ Samwise acknowledges his role in the fellowship's quest by explaining that he cannot turn back, and that there is some unknown force that compels him to see the journey through to its end (Tolkien, 2001: 85). Readers are also made aware of Samwise's dreams of glory on the occasions when he expresses a desire to hear the story of the Hobbits' quest immortalised in song and tale. Arguably, these instances occur when Frodo has lost hope and may serve solely as an attempt on Samwise's part to distract his master from the unpleasant realities of their situation, since there are also occasions when Samwise cheers Frodo by regaling him with stories his father had told him or by reminiscing about the Shire. The times during which Samwise gives voice to his dreams of glory point to a need (on his part) to feel that what he and Frodo have accomplished, through their trials and tribulations, has not been for naught. The passage below suggests such a desire to see Hobbit-kind acknowledged and praised:

“I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards. And people will say: 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?' 'Yes, my boy, the famousest [*sic*] of the hobbits, and that's saying a lot.’⁴¹”

(Tolkien, 2001: 697)

⁴⁰ This is further implied when, on the occasion when he bears the Ring in Frodo's place, Samwise is “tempted” by the Ring, and “[w]ild fantasies arose in his mind; and he saw Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr” (Tolkien, 2001: 880). While he resists the temptation, the fact that it arose in the first place points to a lack of will on Samwise's part.

⁴¹ *The Lord of Rings* has, of course, attained fame far beyond Samwise's wildest dreams, and his words serve as a metatextual fulfilment of his search for renown. These words also imply a continuing tradition of Hobbit bravery which extends into the future.

Another such instance occurs when Frodo uses the Phial of Galadriel to drive away the many eyes he sees peering at him from the dark (the eyes, of course, belong to the nightmarish spider Shelob). When Samwise catches up to him, he exclaims “the Elves would make a song of that, if ever they heard it!” (Tolkien, 2001: 705).

Towards the end of the novel, after the Hobbits have succeeded in destroying the Ring of Power, with the unwilling help of Gollum⁴² (of whom Gandalf spoke to Frodo saying “*Even Gollum may have something yet to do?*” (Tolkien, 2001: 926; original emphasis)), Samwise again expresses a desire to hear of their story in tale:

“What a tale we have been in, Mr. Frodo, haven’t we?” he said. “I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they’ll say: *Now comes the story of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?* And then everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us the tale of Beren One-hand and the Great Jewel. I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part.”
(Tolkien, 2001: 929; original emphasis)

Samwise’s mention of “Nine-fingered Frodo” draws attention to the difficulties experienced by Frodo on the road he has travelled in an attempt to conquer the evil threatening Middle-earth – it serves to emphasise the difficulty of their task and make their accomplishment even more noteworthy, as indicated by the hoped-for “hush” that will descend once the tale commences.

When the Hobbits are rescued and taken to Gondor, they are given a few days’ rest, and are then requested to meet with the future king of Gondor, Aragorn. Upon emerging onto the street, the people of Gondor hail them as heroes:

⁴² It is interesting that, at the end of their journey, Frodo is reluctant to destroy the Ring, and its eradication comes about by accident. It is perhaps for this reason that Frodo’s part in the events is not as acclaimed by the Hobbits as the tales surrounding Pippin, Merry and Samwise (in this there is a certain amount of authorial condemnation of Frodo’s inability to fulfil his task).

'Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!
 [...]
Praise them with great praise, Frodo and Samwise!
 [...]
Praise them!
 [...]
Praise them!
 [...]
Praise them! The Ring-bearers, praise them with great praise!'
 (Tolkien, 2001: 932; original emphasis)

Here, Tolkien acknowledges Samwise as a Ring-bearer as well, and that specific honorific is not solely awarded to Frodo, despite the fact that the duration of Samwise's donning of the ring is far shorter than Frodo's guardianship of it. Samwise's response to the praise reveals his delight with the honour and tribute paid to their journey:

And when Sam heard that he laughed aloud for sheer delight, and he stood up and cried: "O great glory and splendour! And all my wishes have come true!" And then he wept. (Tolkien, 2001: 933)

Samwise's acknowledgement of this kind of praise being his greatest wish come true is indicative of the glory he seeks, and – of course – the Hobbits' tale is written down "in a great big book" (Tolkien, 2001: 929), and the Hobbits have since become stock terminology as signifiers in their own right.⁴³ In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who did not know the names Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee today.⁴⁴ In the same way as Frodo expresses his fear of being unable to complete the task of carrying and destroying the Ring (which occurs during the 'darkest' times for the two Hobbits), Donaldson's Covenant is also

⁴³ It is crucial to note that Frodo does not seem to share Samwise's need for acclaim, and this – again – seems to reinforce the fact that he is lesser hero than Frodo.

⁴⁴ Tolkien's invented signifier "Hobbit" has come to have real-world meaning in that diminutive primitive human remains discovered in Indonesia in 2004 have been nicknamed "hobbits". This indicates a further overlap between the world of consensus reality and that of a fictional Secondary World of fantasy. (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Hobbit>, Retrieved October 18, 2011).

haunted by the possibility that he cannot do that which is expected of him – that is, to save the Land, and thereby ultimately redeem himself.

CHAPTER THREE:
FROM POTENTIALITY TO POTENCY

The hero in fantasy must inevitably set forth upon a quest in order to realise his full potential and fulfil his own destiny. Often, a fantasy series extends well over three books. Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* (beginning with *The Eye of the World* (1991)) series consists of fourteen books, with authors like David E. Eddings and Raymond E. Feist extending their works to well over twenty books, making fantasy epic not only in content, but length as well (once again, these narrative epics share a common element with their ancient predecessors in terms of the fact that sheer length is a noted criterion of the epic genre). Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series consists of ten published books, and a few books on the sidelines that deal with the Malazan world and characters, but are not considered a part of the series. The focus of these mammoth tomes is predominantly on the heroic journey or quest, although, as I shall demonstrate, Erikson's technique of representing the hero is significantly different from the other authors I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

Harris and Platzner argue that the successful completion of a journey is an intrinsic part of heroic status:

The hero [...] often demonstrates prodigious powers, even in childhood. On reaching adulthood, he craves adventure and, seeking to test his own powers, embarks on a quest or series of quests: a journey of discovery during which he will learn about himself, his society, and his universe.

(Harris & Platzner, 2008: 312)

While most fantasy does not traditionally have the hero set forth upon a quest or journey without some sort of external stimulus, the journey does teach the hero about "himself, his

society, and his universe” (the latter being particularly true of Pug in Raymond E. Feist’s *The Magician*) and self-discovery is, in most cases, the main focus of the quest.

The way in which fantasy writers represent their characters is closely related to the locale and setting from which the heroic figure emerges. Locale becomes, for the fantasy writer, the site of the ‘zero to hero’ theme. The setting denotes the hero’s ability to rise above his humble origins and become great in spite of them (a Christian allusion is found, for example, to the stories of David and Christ). The setting of many contemporary fantasy works is important in terms not only of establishing the general tone of the novel, but also in positioning the hero with regard to the world in which he finds himself.

The works of Tolkien, Feist and Donaldson begin with a world currently at peace, and then an interruption to this peace occurs. The interruption and unsettling of the ‘natural order’ of things constitutes the hero’s call, and the beginning of the heroic quest. The largest threat to Crydee (the place at which Feist’s series starts), for instance, is the occasional skirmish or encounter with dark elves and goblins (the peace, here, is disrupted by the discovery of Tsurani on Midkemia). The Shire, in Tolkien’s work, is pastoral, and seems to have remained unchanged for an unspecified, yet lengthy, amount of time (in fact, *Hobbits* – by their very nature – are resistant to any form of change which may threaten their current mode of being). Admittedly, there are areas in Middle-earth that seem to suffer from a relative amount of unrest (such as Gondor), but these are small in comparison with previous wars upon the continent. It is only when Bilbo’s ring is positively identified as the One Ring of power that the threat posed by the re-emergence of Sauron comes within range of the races of Hobbits, Men, Dwarves and Elves, and counter-measures must be devised, inaugurating the

entire quest. Likewise, it is largely due to the arrival of Thomas Covenant in Donaldson's fantasy that an upheaval of the natural order occurs.

Thomas Covenant is taken from the 'real' world, in which he is a leper, and is transported to a strange and magical land where he is claimed by Lord Foul the Despiser. The great evil, which previously threatened the Land, has returned once more, and Covenant's arrival seems to be symbolically linked to this return. Foul refers to Covenant as his "prize" (Donaldson, 1993: 39) and says to Covenant:

"I have a task for you. You will bear a message for me to Revelstone – to the Council of Lords.

"Say to the Council of Lords, and to High Lord Prothall son of Dwillian, that the uttermost limit of their span of days upon the Land is seven time [*sic*] seven years from the present time. Before the end of those days are numbered, I will have the command of life and death in my hand. And as a token that what I say is the one word of truth, tell them this: Drool Rockworm, Cavewight of Mount Thunder, has found the Staff of Law ... Say to them that the task appointed to their generation is to regain the Staff. Without it, they will not be able to resist me for seven years, and my complete victory will be achieved six times seven years earlier than it would be else.

[...]

"One word more," Foul said, "a final caution. Do not forget whom to fear at the last. I have had to be content with killing and torment. But now my plans are laid, and I have begun. I shall not rest until I have eradicated hope from the Earth. Think on that, and be dismayed!"

(Donaldson, 1993: 41-42)

Foul informs Covenant that the "war" that will erupt as a result of Drool's possession of the Staff "is not the worst peril" (Donaldson, 1993: 42). Drool's search for and mastery over the Illearth Stone, should he find it, would result in "woe for low and high alike until Time itself falls", and yet he is ultimately the one to be feared, since he shall be the one to "[eradicate] hope from the Earth" (Donaldson, 1993: 42).

This upheaval and disturbance to the relative peacefulness of the Land signals Covenant's materialisation on the path to fulfilling his destiny. Tolkien is far less subtle in his approach. The symbolism of his journey or quest is the "Road" (Tolkien, 2001: 72; original emphasis). The fact that the word "Road" is capitalised in the text is significant in that it is symbolic of the heroic journey as well as indicative of the specific road the Hobbits must take. The proper noun "Road" becomes a metaphor for spiritual introspection, and the path the aspiring hero must take in order to achieve self-knowledge and realise his full potential, while also signifying the actual, physical path the Fellowship of the Ring must travel in order to complete its task of destroying the Ring (a path that leads its members from the safety of their homes in the Shire into the dangerous heart of Mordor, Mount Doom or Orodruin). Elrond the Elf says:

"The road must be trod, but it will be very hard.² And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere."
(Tolkien, 2001: 262)

Elrond's words imply that the events that might change the course of history are executed by those who are small in stature – both literally and metaphorically, since a seemingly Christian allusion to "faith the size of a mustard seed" (Matthew 17: 20) capable of moving mountains is evident here. Frodo also acknowledges the road's symbolic and literal significance when he recites a poem he recalls as he and Samwise begin their journey:

*The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with weary feet,*

² Here, the word "road" denotes the physical path, rather than the metaphorical context.

*Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.* (Tolkien 2001: 72; original emphasis)

When Samwise asks whether the poem is one taught to him by Bilbo, Frodo explains that

“It came to me then, as if I was making it up; but I may have heard it long ago. Certainly it reminds me very much of Bilbo in the last years, before he went away [Bilbo, too, had followed an unspecified road]. He used often to say there was only one Road; that it was like a great river: its springs were at every doorstep, and every path was its tributary. ‘It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,’ he used to say. ‘You step into the Road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.’”
(Tolkien, 2001: 72)

These words seem particularly significant, since Frodo must always “keep [his] feet” (Tolkien, 2001: 72) and engage in a constant, conscious battle in order to fully resist sublimation by the power of the One Ring. Like the Hobbits, Aragorn (“*by some called Strider*” (Tolkien, 2001: 166; original emphasis) – a name that implies an action of walking at a steady and regular pace) also has a road to self-fulfilment, which he must travel.

The crux of Tolkien’s tale is neatly summarised by Elrond’s reference to “small hands” (Tolkien, 2001: 262): a hero born from divine, or even quasi-divine, parentage and possessing supernatural powers and/or abilities accomplishes the mammoth tasks he is given with relative ease, and yet the Hobbits are neither descended from gods nor in possession of outstanding abilities. The deeds of the Hobbits, then, are made more extraordinary and marvellous through sheer dint of the fact that they neither possess remarkable strength nor wisdom (in fact, their intellect and wisdom, in so far as it applies to the world, is centred largely upon the domestic concerns of the Shire). Elrond’s mention of the “small hands” is a pointer to someone who originates from relatively humble origin, inauspicious beginnings, and is dialectically opposed to the “eyes of the great” – “great”, here, denoting stature as well

as status (within the context of Tolkien's world, the "eyes of the great" may also be interpreted as a reference to the disembodied Eye of Sauron, which watches over his gathering armies) (Tolkien, 2001: 262).

At the Council of Elrond, Boromir recites a prophecy he had dreamt, which reveals the role of the Hobbits in the events that will unfold:

*Seek for the Sword that was broken:
In Imladris it dwells;
There shall be counsels taken
Stronger than Morgul-spells.
There shall be shown a token
That Doom is near at hand,
For Isildur's Bane shall be woken,
And the Halfling forth shall stand.* (Tolkien, 2001: 240; original emphasis)

The dream guides him to the council of Elrond, and the role of the Hobbits (or Halflings, as they are familiarly known) is thus revealed, and established as predestined. Aragorn is chosen (both by the Council and by his predestined birthright) to lead the Hobbits to Rivendell where, it is hoped, a solution to the problem presented by the Ring will present itself. At the culmination of the ordeal, the implication exists that Aragorn returns to Gondor enriched and fit to assume the royal mantle and take up his position as rightful king. Frodo's metaphoric and literal journey is measured by the great distance he travels in order to destroy the Ring and liberate Middle-earth. In keeping with this quest motif, Covenant travels across the Land in order to gain knowledge of his enemies and gather support for his cause.

The metaphorical significance of physical distance travelled is inherently tied to the psychological development of the hero figure. The same is true of Pug. His journey takes him across two worlds, and he must find his way home. "Home", here, is symbolic of the

place of inner peace and the site of reconciliation, and represents his rapprochement of two disparate forms of magic. His counterpart, Tomas, however, does not undergo a physical quest, but experiences a mental struggle and serves as an example of the fact that the heroic figure is an initiator of change (in his world) as a culmination of the journey he undergoes.

Another factor that contributes to the hero realising his full potential is isolation, which results in the hero taking full and sole responsibility for both his quest and the consequences of it, as illustrated by Harris and Platzner:

In the course of that quest, [the hero] is eventually isolated from his fellow humans and, all alone, must do battle with nightmarish creatures or monsters, usually including some in serpent or dragon form [...].
(Harris & Platzner, 2008: 312)

While this is particularly true of Tolkien's *Hobbits*, in that Frodo and Samwise will be separated from their companions (as will Peregrin and Meriadoc), and will do battle against "nightmarish creatures or monsters", most notably the gargantuan spider Shelob (and, ultimately, Sauron himself, albeit indirectly), Tomas is also isolated from (and thought lost by) his travel companions. Interestingly, Tomas does not do battle with the dragon, but benefits from its power. If, as Harris and Platzner suggest, "the guardian serpent [...] was once associated with the worship of a prehistoric goddess, before she was dethroned by male sky gods" (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 85-86), then Feist seems more sympathetic to the feminine divine than Tolkien – since Bilbo Baggins, in *The Hobbit*, is able to overcome the dragon Smaug through perceiving and then exploiting its Achilles' heel and slaying it. In *The Magician*, however, the entity with which the young hero, Tomas, will do battle (not at the exact time at which he acquires the suit of armour, but for an unspecified amount of time in the future as he battles to exert his own persona and will) is the alien entity of Ashen-Shugar.

In order to keep himself focused while travelling lost and alone through the dwarven mines after being separated from his party, Tomas

[f]ighting down what he recognised as budding panic [...] continued to walk. He kept his mind on pleasant memories of home, and dreams of the future. He would find a way out, and he would become a great hero in the coming war. And most cherished dream of all, he would journey to Elvandar and see the beautiful lady of the elves again. (Feist, 2009: 168)

Inside these mines, Tomas comes upon a dying dragon, and since the boy elects to stay with the dragon until its final moments have passed, the dragon gifts him with a suit of armour which – unbeknown to any at the time – once belonged to the dragon-rider Ashen-Shugar, a member of a race known as the Valheru, rulers of Midkemia's elder races. This gift results in Tomas inheriting much of Ashen-Shugar's memories, physical traits and powers, and his inner struggle involves reconciling the Valheru's natural instinct to dominate with his own personality.

Since donning the dragon's gift armor [*sic*], Tomas had become a fighter of legendary capabilities. And the boy ... no, the young man, was taking on weight, even though food was often scarce. It was as if something were acting to bring him to a growth sufficient to fit the cut of the armor [*sic*]. And his features were gaining a strange cast. His nose had taken on a slightly more angular shape, more finely chiselled than before. His brows had become more arched, his eyes deeper set. He was still Tomas, but Tomas with a slight change in appearance, as if wearing someone else's expression.

Dolgan [a dwarven chieftain] pulled long on his pipe and looked at the white tabard Tomas wore. Seven times in battle, and free from stain. Dirt, blood, and all other manner of contamination were refused purchase in its fabric. And the device of the golden dragon gleamed as brightly as when they had first found it. So it was also with the shield he wore in battle. Many times struck, still it was free of any scar. The dwarves were circumspect in this matter, for their race had long ago used magic in the fashioning of weapons of power. But this was something else. They would wait and see what it brought before they would judge. (Feist, 2009: 257)

Tomas, then, is representative of the return of the ancient power of the Valheru, but – significantly – not their dominance. Pug, on the other hand, will change the nature of magic on the face of two worlds and will be instrumental in ending many of the wars that disrupt Midkemia subsequent to (and including) the Riftwar and the invasion of the Tsurani. At long last, after being abducted by the Tsurani invaders into Midkemia, and being taken to their home world, where his potential as a Great One (a Tsurani magician) is discovered, Pug (now known as Milamber, and a member of the council of Great Ones) sets foot on the path that will see him become one of the greatest magicians the two worlds have ever seen. He does this by standing up to the injustices he perceives on the Tsurani world, and asserting his right to don the mantle of power:

Milamber tensed, suffused with anger. Twice before in his life, when attacked by the trolls and when fighting with Roland, he had reached into hidden reservoirs of power and drawn upon them. Now he tore aside the last barriers between his conscious mind and those hidden reserves. They were no longer a mystery to him but the wellspring from which all his power stemmed. For the first time in his experience, Milamber came to understand fully what he was, who he was: not a Black Robe [a Tsurani magician], limited by the ancient teachings of one world, but an adept of the Greater Art, a master in full possession of all the energy provided by two worlds.

The Warlord's magician regarded him in fear. Here was more than a curiosity, a barbarian magician. Here stood a figure to awe, arms stretched upward, body trembling with rage, eyes seemingly aglow with strength.

(Feist, 2009: 578)

The moment of Pug's action indicates the realisation of his magical potency and potentiality. Finally, Pug fulfils the destiny Kulgan predicted so long ago, and thereby realises the latent potential that existed within him from the very beginning of Feist's tale. This is the symbolic acceptance of his role as hero, and represents the hero's sense of self-awareness realised. Similarly, Covenant is able to settle the Land back into its happy and fertile status quo by defeating the threat. Campbell summarises the hero's battle with his antagonist(s) as follows:

the mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the keeper of the past. From obscurity the hero emerges, but the enemy is great and conspicuous in the seat of power [...].

(Campbell, 1973: 337)

Campbell's premise of the hero initiating a change to the status quo is particularly true of Tolkien's Hobbits. Originally of humble origins, once their task is completed, the Hobbits are hailed by the people of Gondor and praised "with great praise!" (Tolkien, 2001: 933), and when they seek to return to the Shire, Aragorn says the following: "though your people have had little fame in the legends of the great, they will now have more renown than any wide realms that are no more" (Tolkien, 2001: 952). The Hobbits not only succeed in establishing their presence in the lands of Middle-earth, but the task they accomplish heralds a change in the status quo of the world. When addressing Aragorn towards the end of the novel, Gandalf says:

"This is your realm, and the heart of the greater realm that shall be. The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round them, shall be dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart." (Tolkien, 2001: 949-950)

Gandalf's words serve as a fitting end to the stewardship of the Elder races (such as the Elves and Dwarves) over Middle-earth, and emphasise that the rule of Men has begun.

Significantly, at the head of this new dominion is Aragorn, who heralds the dawn of the Age of Men, which he will lead as their king.³ Aragorn's narrative arc in Tolkien's masterpiece is

³ This, Tolkien seems to imply, is Aragorn's true purpose. He may have played a minor role in the actual destruction of the Ring, but he has fulfilled his destiny of assuming the throne of Gondor.

centred on his developing to realise his own potential, and Tolkien prepares him for precisely this role of leadership. Ford and Reid maintain that

[b]efore being crowned, Aragorn must demonstrate that he is worthy of being king by showing not only that he has the favor [*sic*] of the gods through his possession of luck, especially through victory in battle, but also that his divine inheritance is active, a quality shown through supernatural abilities, such as the ability to heal. (Ford & Reid, 2009: 74-75)

The Hobbits, too, act as initiators of localized change; their role is to destroy the Ring and they thus enable the new Age of Men. The most significant change, however, is wrought in their very own Shire. After the Hobbits have returned from their wanderings, they come to a much-diminished Shire. Their fellow Hobbits are subservient to the will of the mysterious Sharkey (who is none other than a disgruntled and deposed Saruman seeking revenge) and his men. Upon discovering the source of the other Hobbits' fear, the remaining four of the Fellowship (Pippin, Merry, Samwise and – of course – Frodo) set about rallying the Hobbits and marshalling troops in order to remove Sharkey from the Shire. This factor alone is perhaps the most telling when it comes to revealing the changes the journey to Mt Doom has wrought in the Hobbits. Samwise returns wearing what the Gaffer calls “ironmongery” (Tolkien, 2001: 991), but, like Merry and Pippin, he is able to reinsert himself smoothly back into the Hobbit way of life. Samwise will end the novel with the words “[w]ell, I’m back” (Tolkien, 2001: 1008) and will return to his hobbit home where his wife Rosie is waiting with his dinner and child.⁴ He is also elected as mayor of the Shire seven times before riding out from Bag End, never to be seen again, sixty-one years after his initial return to it. Pippin “becomes the Took and Thain”, and “Meriadoc, called the Magnificent, becomes Master of

⁴ The fact that the last words of the series are “[w]ell, I’m back” (Tolkien, 2001: 1008) serve as a thematic link between the precursor to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy being named *There and Back Again: A Hobbit's Tale* (which is more familiarly referred to as *The Hobbit*). It also emphasises the motif of restoration of the natural order and signals that the heroic figure has finally realised his potential and has ultimately reconciled with his destiny. He is, thus, at the culmination of his quest, represented as a unified heroic whole who has come full circle in his development to psychological maturity and potency.

Buckland” (Tolkien, 2001: 1071). The latter two young Hobbits are much changed after their encounters with the world outside the Shire and continue to wear their armour when they set out. In spite of this, however, their general acceptance by the Hobbits of the Shire is noteworthy:

The two young Travellers⁵ cut a great dash in the Shire with their songs and their tales and their finery, and their wonderful parties. ‘Lordly’ folk called them, meaning nothing but good; for it warmed all hearts to see them go riding by with their mail-shirts so bright and their shields so splendid, laughing and singing songs of far away; *and if they were now large and magnificent, they were unchanged otherwise*, unless they were indeed more fairspoken [*sic*] and more jovial and full of merriment than ever before.

(Tolkien, 2001: 1002; emphasis added)

The noun “traveller” has here been transformed into a proper noun, indicating an honorific as well as carrying the connotation of one who has undergone a journey. The symbolic significance further serves to elaborate upon the notion that the two Hobbits have returned much changed from their sojourns and signifies their being set apart or differentiated from the other Shire Hobbits. Of the four, only Frodo is unable to resign himself to life in the Shire upon his return, and describes it as feeling if he were “falling asleep again” (Tolkien, 2001: 974), and the allusion to the state of being asleep indicates removal from the context of his surroundings. Upon him, the change from who he had been before his journey is most clearly marked (and it is perhaps this change that causes Hobbits to shy away from his company). Readers are informed that

Frodo dropped quietly out of all the doings of the Shire, and Sam was pained to notice how little honour he had in his own country. Few people knew or

⁵ Interestingly, the noun “traveller” in Sindarin (the commonly spoken version of Elvish in Tolkien’s world) means “wandering man, pilgrim” or “wanderer” (<http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Randir>, Retrieved October 17, 2011), and has particular significance as a naming convention, as can be seen in Gandalf’s Elven name, Mithrandir (“mith” meaning “grey”). It would seem that Tolkien, thus, accords great significance to the identification of Merry and Pippin as “Travellers” (Tolkien, 2001: 1002), and this implies equal status to such figures as Gandalf.

wanted to know about his deeds and adventures; their admiration and respect were given mostly to Mr. Meriadoc and Mr. Peregrin and (if Sam had known it) to himself. (Tolkien, 2001: 1002)

So disparate are his feelings with that of the Hobbits that, instead of remaining in the Shire, Frodo chooses to journey with the last of the Elves, as well as Bilbo and Gandalf, to the Grey Havens, never to return. It is a great honour for Frodo, as a non-Elf, to be invited to join their renunciation of Middle-earth, but it still implies a symbolic death for those who depart. This exit from the world scene of Middle-earth is significant in that it signals not only the Elves' elevation of Frodo (along with Bilbo and Gandalf) to equal status, but also a complete and utter withdrawal from events. The Grey Havens is the seaport from which the Elves journey to Valinor, the Land of the Valar and Elves. Since this continent is magically removed from Middle-earth, it signals a journey to a symbolic afterlife, and thus serves to emphasise Frodo's departure from Middle-earth as a metaphorical death.

This withdrawal from the world is in keeping with the tradition that a hero must depart from his world – whether through death or, in this case, a journey away from the world – a hero must undergo transformation or transmutation.

The hero [...] after his death is still a synthesizing image: like Charlemagne, he sleeps only and will arise in the hour of destiny, or he is among us under another form. (Campbell, 1973: 358)

In the case of Tolkien's fiction, however, the Elves (along with Frodo, Bilbo and Gandalf) will not return, since the Age of the Elves has ended, and so too has their role in the development of Middle-earth come to an end. The great hero of Donaldson's Land, however, returns in the hour of need, and while Covenant may resist his role as hero, he is predestined and elect nonetheless. Thomas Covenant vanishes (a symbolic death) in an epic battle with

Lord Foul, enabling his beloved Linden to create a new Staff of Law and return it to the giants, ultimately renewing and healing the Land. This, in keeping with Donaldson's central premise of self-renewal, enables her symbolically to heal herself.

At the moment of his death, Aragorn is beatified and restored to his youthful glory. Since he is the only remaining member of the Númenoreans (a race of High Men who "were long-lived but mortal" (Tolkien, 2001: 1011)), Aragorn is able to choose the moment of his death:

I am the last of the Númenoreans and the latest King of the Elder Days; and to me has been given not only a span thrice that of Men of Middle-earth, but also the grace to go at my will, and give back the gift.

(Tolkien, 2001: 1037)

After bidding his farewells to Arwen, Aragorn simply falls asleep, and the nature of his passing only becomes truly dramatic when, in death, he is transformed:

Then a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who after came there looked on him in wonder; for they saw that the grace of his youth, and the valour of his manhood, and the wisdom and majesty of his age were blended together. And long there he lay, *an image of the splendour of the Kings of Men in glory undimmed before the breaking of the world.*

(Tolkien, 2001: 1038; emphasis added)

Even in death, then, Aragorn remains symbolic of the great Age of Man and serves as a glorious reminder of his heroic status and the role he played in that age. He does, in fact, become a statue and thus represents a memorial to his race. The same cannot be said for Feist's heroes, since, twenty books later, Pug and Tomas are still alive. Tomas is – by this time – serving as consort to the Queen in Elvandar and Pug's destiny is to witness the deaths of those he loves most (Pug, it must be remembered, has struck a bargain with Lims-Kragma, the goddess of Death, that he shall witness the deaths of all those he loves before his own

death eventually comes to him and the possibility of his own death, therefore, still exists as a perpetually deferred occasion). There is something to be said for creating such powerful characters in a narrative that they are rendered incapable of action and the author is forced to devise limitations to their powers throughout the course of the narrative. Both Pug and Tomas seldom unveil the true extent of their abilities, and since they have been created to be ultimately powerful, there is perhaps an element of uncertainty on the part of Feist when it comes to finally laying his heroes to rest – after all, how does one go about eradicating the two most powerful figures in the known worlds?

In *The Name of the Wind* (2007), Patrick Rothfuss details the exploits of Kvothe, born the son of a notable Edema Ruh – a group of travelling troubadours and actors. His parents are killed when he is a young child, and he travels to Imre to attend the illustrious University where he can obtain magical training and emerge as an arcanist – a licensed practitioner of magic. From the onset of our introduction to Kvothe, we see that he is exceptionally gifted. And while Rothfuss's *The Kingkiller Chronicles* are not yet complete, he alludes to the fact that Kvothe attains great glory. The first book in the series deals with Kvothe narrating his story to the Chronicler (who is Devan Lochees, a notable academic) after much persuasion. The way in which he convinces Kvothe to tell his story is by postulating that Kvothe's pseudo-mythological status may result in a corruption of the truth.

“[P]eople say you're a myth.”

“I am a myth,” Kote said easily, making an extravagant gesture [he has assumed the name Kote, while running an inn]. “A very special kind of myth that creates itself. The best lies about me are the ones *I* told.” [Original emphasis].

“They say you never existed,” Chronicler corrected gently.

Kote shrugged nonchalantly, his smile fading an imperceptible amount. Sensing weakness, Chronicler continued. “Some stories paint you as little more than a red-handed killer.”

“I’m that too.” Kote turned to polish the counter behind the bar. He shrugged again, not as easily as before. “I’ve killed men and things that were more than men. Every one of them deserved it.”

Chronicler shook his head slowly. “The stories are saying ‘assassin’ not ‘hero’. Kvothe the Arcane and Kvothe the Kingkiller are two very different men.”

Kote stopped polishing the bar and turned his back to the room. He nodded once without looking up.

“Some are even saying that there is a new Chandrian. A fresh terror in the night. His hair as red as the blood he spills.” [Chronicler here is referring to the mysterious killers who are called Chandrian in the folk tales of Rothfuss’ world, and the red hair is a reference to Kvothe’s legendary flaming hair].

“The important people know the difference,” Kote said as if he were trying to convince himself, but his voice was weary and despairing, without conviction.

Chronicler gave a small laugh. “Certainly. For now. But you of all people should realise how thin the line is between the truth and a compelling lie. *Between history and an entertaining story.*” Chronicler gave his words a minute to sink in. “*You know which will win, given time.*”

(Rothfuss, 2007: 45; emphasis added)

Here Rothfuss indicates an awareness of a literary problem: the true account of the life of a particular figure deemed to be legendary or heroic – whether historical or imagined – is of secondary importance to the *story* of that individual. The story is constructed by – as Campbell calls them – “the builders of his legend” (Campbell, 1973: 321), and often grows beyond the historical scope of the individual himself. The heroic figure is built up – that is to say, he is assembled piece by piece, so that the sum of his parts exceeds human proportions. In Erikson’s fantasy, this is not done by the author or even a narrative voice, but by the characters who surround the heroic figure. This strategy will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four.

It is interesting to consider the amount of detail Erikson invests in his characters. The redux copy of his first novel in *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* series, *Gardens of the Moon* (2007), contains an introduction by the author where he speaks of the difficulty of getting his

work published (works which, incidentally, had their inception as a feature film script), and mentions the following:

When life took Cam [Ian C. Esselmont, co-creator of the Malazan world] in one direction and me in another, we both carried with us the notes for an entire created world. Constructed through hours upon hours of gaming. We had an enormous history all worked out – the raw material for twenty novels, twice as many films. And we each had copies of a script nobody wanted. The Malazan world was there in hundreds of hand-drawn maps, in pages upon pages of raw notes, in GURPS (Steve Jackson’s Generic Universal Role Playing System – an alternative to AD&D) character sheets, building floor-plans, sketches, you name it. (Erikson, 2007: xiii-xiv)

Worth noting, here, is the construction of individualised characters through tabletop Role Playing means. Role Playing accords great attention to the process of individualisation – each character possesses a unique persona and speaks with a highly individualised voice, since the character sheets include information pertaining to temperament (or alignment), physical details, skills, professions, and proficiencies in languages, weapons and armour. The attention to detail that is involved in constructing characters in Role Playing has a clear influence on Erikson’s extraordinarily detailed and nuanced portrayals of his characters in *The Malazan Book of the Fallen* series.

In the series, Erikson examines the way in which heroes are *not* – as with writers like Tolkien, Feist and Eddings – already preconstructed heroic wholes, but rather become heroic through their deeds (a common enough fantasy trait, as has been demonstrated by the coming of age, so to speak, of a hero like Feist’s Pug of Crydee) as well as the way in which these deeds are *perceived* by the various characters of the books. Erikson’s treatment of the fantasy genre considers *how* a hero becomes heroic through the eyes of those around him. Heroic status, therefore, is achieved through social reception, rather than being a set of innate

qualities.⁶ It is part of the traditional hero's status that he is destined to fill a need in society, and in so doing discovers or acquires heroic qualities. Interestingly, it is through the survivors of the events surrounding the Chain of Dogs (as Coltaine's entourage becomes known) that Coltaine attains legendary status. He does not live on to become heroic, but is made heroic through his death and through the journey that culminates in his death.

⁶ It is important, however, to observe that even though Erikson's heroes are essentially products of a process of construction on the part of the witnesses to their passing, they are still heroic and do conform to certain heroic traits and patterns.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BARKING MAD: COLTAINE OF THE CROW CLAN

In an article entitled “Evolutions of the Fantasy Hero in Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Lois McMaster Bujold’s *The Curse of Chalion*”, Sylvia Kelso avers that

[i]n fantasy [...] the hero has been, if not evolving, at least changing slightly. [...] [T]he idea of a “fantasy hero” still draws heavily on the sword-and-sorcery tradition, and on figures like Conan the Barbarian – male, brawny, physically victorious, sexually potent and socially just above retard level. [...] Joanna Russ describes this Real He-Man as “invulnerable ... super-potent ... absolutely self-sufficient ... never frightened [or] indecisive” and “he always wins.” In short, she concluded, “an alien monster”. (Kelso, 2006: 247)

Russ refers to the traditional fantasy hero as an “alien monster” because he is apparently infallible and devoid of discernible flaws. This form of fantasy hero is rapidly falling out of favour with some of the genre’s better-known – and more contemporary – fantasy writers. George R. R. Martin’s as yet unfinished *A Song of Fire and Ice* series (which began with *A Game of Thrones* (1996)) is one in which readers are disconcerted when they discover that those characters that they had considered to be central protagonists are systematically killed. This occurs so frequently, in fact, that one is wary of becoming too attached to Martin’s heroic figures.

Martin’s characters are multi-faceted, each with surprisingly intricate pasts, inspirations, and ambitions. *Publisher’s Weekly* writes of his ongoing epic fantasy *A Song of Ice and Fire*, “The complexity of characters such as Daenerys [*sic*], Arya and the Kingslayer will keep readers turning even the vast number of pages contained in this volume, for the author, like Tolkien or Jordan, makes us care about their fates.” No one is given an unrealistic string of luck, however; so misfortune, injury, and death (and even false death) can befall *any*

character, major or minor, no matter how attached the reader has become. Martin has described his penchant for killing off important characters as being necessary for the story's depth: "... when my characters are in danger, I want you to be afraid to turn the page, (so) you need to show right from the beginning that you're playing for keeps."

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_R._R._Martin#Themes, Retrieved July 15, 2010)

Recent developments in the fantasy genre have witnessed the surfacing of Steven Erikson's ambitious *Malazan Book of the Fallen* (1999) series from the depths of the genre's seemingly endless imaginative pool. In my view, this series heralds the dawn of a new era for the typically cut-and-dried fantasy hero, and serves to re-envision an age-old conceptualisation of an epic tale that centres on the hero's trials and tribulations. Here, as with Martin, the hero is neither "socially just above retard level" nor does he "always win" (Kelso, 2006: 247). What readers are presented with, instead, is a heroic figure who is often ultimately fallible, and – by extension – painfully mortal. In *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), Mark Currie discusses the characteristics of postmodern narrative and its relationship with readers in terms that are remarkably reminiscent of Erikson's representational strategies. He claims that realistic fiction relies on "sympathetic bonds between reader and particular characters by making that position one of intimacy and mental access" (1998: 27-28). This kind of fiction

calls on a reader not only to sympathise but to identify with and therefore occupy certain subject positions and social roles. Interpellation is the name Althusser gives to this process. Like subjectivity in general, it is a process which is controlled by the text, yet the reader is under the illusion that identification is freely entered into. [...] Sympathy amounts to little more than a feeling of goodwill towards a character. Identification suggests self-recognition.

(Currie, 1978: 28)

Extending Currie's analysis, I argue that Erikson's insistence on Coltaine's mortality creates a deeper level of imaginative identification on the part of the reader than is possible in relation to traditional 'superhuman' heroes such as those mentioned in the preceding chapters (Aragorn, Pug and Covenant). Identification is premised on the hero's *not* being an infallible or "alien monster" (Russ in Kelso, 2006: 247).

The mould which sees an unquestionably heroic central protagonist step forth to do battle with the forces of evil and emerge victorious in the end (which was discussed in the preceding chapter) is broken. In Neil Walsh's interview with Steven Erikson (2000), Erikson states:

I'm not a fan of blindingly Good heroes versus insipidly stupid Evil bad-guys. The notion of evil for its own sake strikes me as boring – all these Dark Lords intent on creating wastelands packed with enslaved victims ... for what? Granted, the tradition asserts an archetypal juxtaposition and so illuminates the human condition – I'll swallow that, and even acknowledge that as the source of the genre's universal appeal. But my personal fascination as a writer is with ambivalence and ambiguity. My anthropological back get raised hackles with simple worlds and simple conflicts. Nothing's simple. Nothing ever was. [...] Good guys do bad things and bad guys do good things and sometimes things that look good are actually bad. With luck every character comes across as genuine in their uncertainties ...

(<http://www.sfsite.com/06a/se82.htm>, Retrieved July 6, 2011)

In this interview Erikson explicitly deconstructs the binary opposition between 'Good' and 'Evil', which dominates traditional fantasy. Instead of an absolute boundary between these two forms of behaviour and moral values, Erikson's fiction demonstrates repeatedly that this border is permeable and susceptible to deconstructive subversion. This breakage results in the conceptual framework of the genre's tropes being re-imagined and re-constructed in innovative and intriguing ways.

In Jennifer Fallon's *Warlord*, one of the characters makes an observation (that the hero is "some poor sod in the wrong place at the wrong time who gets left with no other option than to be a hero" (Fallon, 2008: 162)) that is conceptually akin to Erikson's portrayal of the heroic figure. Fallon's comment also demonstrates an ironic awareness of the inevitability of the heroic endeavour, implying that a fantasy hero arises only when the occasion demands, and then exists solely to do what is required of him (or, less frequently, her). Her view of the heroic figure is directly opposed to the Greek epics, in which heroes are predestined and unquestionably heroic. Her ideas regarding the heroic figure (and, by extension, those of Erikson) are contrasted with the Greek conceptualisation of *aretê* as "a kind of virtuosity that in its own way drove agonistic encounters, as Greeks sought after the esteem of others through competitive engagement and display of their abilities" (Hawhee, 2002: 187).

Debra Hawhee avers that

in ancient Greece, one *is* what one *does* – or better, what one is perceived as doing. [...] A person's identity is thus based on interactions with others, and perceptions by others.

(Hawhee, 2002: 190; original emphasis)

The focus in ancient Greece was on the direct correlation between action and social reception. This view is simultaneously in accordance with both Fallon's character's refutation of inherent heroism and with Erikson's writings, where heroism is not predestined – a gift from the gods, so to speak – but something that is achievable through social reception when a specific goal is reached, or a task completed.

Through his use of a heroic figure who is not in keeping with the expectations of the genre, Erikson succeeds, I believe, in creating the next step in fantasy's evolutionary chain.

While traditional fantasy heroes possess traits that brand them as heroic (and thus set them apart from their fellow men) and arrive almost *in medias res* into the conflict (as is the case with Aragorn), Steven Erikson has chosen, instead, to develop his characters gradually and often traces that development through the eyes of those who witness their actions. As a result, considerable attention should be devoted to the way in which Erikson constructs his characters. My use of the word “constructs” is deliberate since – for Erikson – the figures are steadily built up through the perceptions of those who surround them rather than arriving both fully-fledged and fully-formed *in medias res*, as they do in some other fantasy works. Instead of having preferential treatment given to the hero (as in traditional fantasy) as perfect in character and action, Erikson’s characters are all flawed from the beginning (in some vital way) and are presented as such; this leads to a more realistic and complex portrayal of character development. They are put together piece by piece, and this is particularly notable in terms of the author’s treatment of Coltaine of the Crow Clan, who is the special focus of my dissertation. Campbell, too, speaks about the construction of a heroic figure as a process:

If the deeds of an actual historical figure proclaim him to have been a hero, *the builders of his legend*¹ will invent for him appropriate adventures in depth. These will be pictured as journeys into miraculous realms, and are to be interpreted as symbolic, on the one hand, of descents into the night-sea of the psyche, and on the other, of the realms or aspects of man’s destiny that are made manifest in the respective lives. (Campbell, 1973: 321; emphasis added)

The *Empire* trilogy (2010), co-written by Raymond E. Feist and Janny Wurtz, utilises a similar perspectival approach to constructing the hero. The series portrays a complex political society (not unlike feudal Japan), and this method is therefore

¹ The word “builders” here emphasises a process of gradual construction (Campbell, 1973: 321).

appropriate. Karen Miller's *Godspeaker* series attempts a similar approach. In the first book of the series, *Empress* (2007), we are presented with her portrayal of a desert empire, Mijak. In book two, *The Riven Kingdom* (2008), the story degenerates once again into the stereotypical notions of 'Good' versus 'Bad', 'Hero' versus 'Villain', and the book ends with Ethrea under threat of invasion by Mijak, advancing under the banner of a 'false' god.² In book three, *Hammer of God* (2009), the Mijaki Empire is defeated, and withdraws, leaving Ethrea triumphant and peaceful once more.³ Thus, the illusion of a heroic figure constructed from the perspectives of the book's liminal characters is created, and later collapses. Once more, the heroic figure is unquestionably heroic – a unified whole. It is precisely this status that has been maintained by traditional fantasy and is undermined by writers such as Erikson. Erikson's writing, which preceded Miller's, also offers a world which comprises a complex political society, in which the complexity of multiple perspectives is more successfully executed than in other fantasy fiction.⁴ This degree of complexity is most clearly demonstrated in Erikson's depiction of Coltaine of the Crow Clan.

Campbell's emphasis on "the builders of [the hero's] legend" (1973: 321), as I mentioned in the previous chapter, portrays the man (or woman) who constitutes the focus of the myth as but a small part in a much greater scheme. Heroic deeds are escalated and developed until the heroic protagonist *becomes* a myth. All that is required for this process to be initiated is the label 'Hero'.

² The god is 'false' as far as the Ethreans are concerned, and here the Christian allusions and undertones are unavoidable.

³ As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, restoration of order and peace as the culmination of the heroic journey is a common fantasy trope.

⁴ It should be noted that Miller may have been influenced by writers such as Martin and Erikson, since her books occur later chronologically. Unlike Miller, though, Erikson maintains the complexity of his characterisation and does not resort to oversimplified binarisms when concluding his fiction, thus allowing all narrative and hermeneutic complications to persist throughout the series.

Erikson's world (by contrast with traditional fantasy worlds in which a sudden, potentially catastrophic event serves as the catalyst for heroic action) is at war before the commencement of the narrative events – an uneasy realm in which survival depends on one's ability either to fight or manipulate the situation to one's own advantage. In the novels by Feist, Donaldson and Tolkien (which I am using here for the purposes of contrast, and on which I have elaborated in preceding chapters), there is a sense of unexpected impending conflict, which necessitates the rise of a heroic figure to restore the balance between good and evil, whereas in Erikson's world, the conflict is more or less constant and prolonged, and the larger event (conflict and unrest in the realms of the gods) is reaching a point of culmination. The reader gradually gains a sense of a prolonged series of events, which are only now drawing to a close. Contrary to much 'realistic' fiction, these events never culminate in a moment of closure or a 'happy ending'. Rather, the epithets, poems and songs contained within the books allude to the events being merely a part of a larger socio-political history of the world, and that the world (much like our own) continues to exist in spite of the events that transpire. Erikson's resistance to the traditional fantasy convention of teleology demonstrates a querying of the finality of events, and seems to mirror the real world with wry self-awareness – in which single events may have far-reaching consequences.

Apart from the fact that the demarcation between 'good' and 'evil' is constantly blurred in Erikson's world, the way in which the hero arises in his novels is markedly different from the other fantasy works I have examined in the preceding chapter. Typically, the hero of fantasy works accomplishes great deeds in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In this vein, Coltaine leads the Chain of Dogs

and ensures the safety of “tens of thousands” of refugees at the cost of his own soldiers (Erikson, 2001: 389) and thus maintains this particular leitmotif. Within Erikson’s fiction, however, there is a movement away from the self-orientation of the *bildungsroman* to development and construction of a broader sense of self from the perspective of surrounding characters.

As a tribal chieftain of the Wickans, Coltaine is placed in a compromised position: when Kellanved (then Emperor of the Malazan Empire) seeks to subjugate the Wickan people, Coltaine must either assimilate into this fierce fighting force, or face annihilation at its hands. He chooses the former, and becomes one of its most prominent leaders. This decision is largely based upon the need for preservation of his own tribe – if he resists inevitable conquer by the Malazans, his tribe will be subject to the slow and inexorable decay of a conquered people, forced to eke out a living in Malazan territory, if they survive the impending conflict at all. With the decision to join the Malazans, comes – ironically – a sense of independence and the proud preservation of all that he holds dear.⁵ The Wickan tribesmen are integrated into the Malazan Empire, but still retain their unique fighting skills and position. Coltaine thus conforms to the heroic mould of a character who possesses greatness solely because of his position as a capable and competent military leader.

This military prowess is the reason for his appointment as a Fist in the first place (his potential is recognised by the previous emperor Kellanved – a man known for gathering those of prodigious talent around him, and aiding their further

⁵ The irony lies in the fact that most of the Wickan fighting force is decimated outside Aren, the city that marks the end-point of the journey. Shocked by the events that culminate in Coltaine’s death, the remaining Wickans will begin a slow process of recovery. In this way, Erikson demonstrates that ‘heroic’ deeds and actions may not have the desired outcomes.

development). Coltaine's most outstanding characteristic is perseverance in the face of adversity and he is the driving force behind the Chain of Dogs. His military decisions and strategies affect the Malazans to such an extent that even in the face of "the impossible" they strive to meet his expectations:

Nine days to the River P'atha. We stretch to meet each minor goal, there's a genius in this. Coltaine offers the marginally possible to fool us into achieving the impossible. All the way to Aren. But for all his ambition, we shall fail. Fail in the flesh and the bone.

[...]

[The decision to kill an opposing Warleader in the hopes that his replacement would be wise enough not to demonstrate any talent, should the Malazans kill him as well] *rings of Coltaine. His well-aimed arrows of fear and uncertainty. He's yet to miss the mark. So long as he does not fail, he cannot fail. The day he slips up, shows imperfection, is the day our heads will roll. Nine days to fresh water. Kill the Tithansi warleader and we'll get there. Make them reel with every victory, let them draw breath with every loss – Coltaine trains them as he would beasts, and they don't even realize it.*

(Erikson, 2001: 484)⁶

Coltaine's martial prowess is further accentuated by his being simultaneously resilient and adaptable in the face of the skirmishes and other obstacles he encounters. He is, more specifically, aware of the challenges that face him since (according to Duiker) "he once rode as a renegade chieftain, once harried a retreating Imperial army across the Wickan plains" (Erikson, 2001: 269; original emphasis). In the localised, or microcosmic, context of his world, Coltaine is an awe-inspiring figure, but in the macrocosmic context, he is a subordinate. Erikson thus pits the reality of Coltaine's chieftaincy (and superiority in the microcosmic, localised context) against his position as a servant of the Empire and extension of the Empress's will against one another. Here, a parallel may be drawn between Coltaine and Thomas Covenant in that both

⁶ Italics appear in the original since these words reflect Duiker's own interior monologue.

‘heroes’ occupy radically different roles in their different contexts: Covenant is an outcast in the world of consensus reality, but a predestined hero in Donaldson’s Land.

Ideologically, Coltaine’s formidable reputation is augmented by the rumours surrounding him (such as the view that he cannot be killed). While he may not possess any magical abilities (in direct contrast with some of the fantastical heroes mentioned in the preceding chapter), Coltaine is capable of delegating those tasks to the mages who serve under his command (such as Sormo E’nath or the twins, Nil and Nether). Unlike the more hands-on approach of prodigious – and often unrealistic – fantasy heroes, Erikson’s figures are delegators as well as being fully capable of carrying out certain tasks (which lie within their individual capabilities) in their own capacities as fictional characters. Here Coltaine demonstrates his own prowess as well as the ability to work in a team as a ‘real’ leader would. The emphasis, then, is not on individualised endeavours, but on the entity of an army that cooperates in order to reach a particular goal. This is contrasted with the ‘go-it-alone’ approach of heroes such as Aragorn, who stand out as individuals rather than as managers. Tolkien’s Aragorn, while part of the Fellowship, stands as one who is separated from it. He seldom consults the other members about the choice of their path or any other decision. Ford and Reid explain that the film adaptation of Tolkien’s literary masterpiece

shift[s] the portrayal from an epic hero who, while knowing he must prove himself to others, has no doubt about his ability to do so, to a more contemporary hero who doubts himself and must deal with those doubts over the course of the film. (Ford & Reid, 2009: 83)

In Tolkien's novel, Aragorn's personal development from potentiality to potency thus resides in proving to others that he is fit to assume the mantle of leadership. Feist's Pug is similarly independent and acts only on his own impulses and motives.

The narcissism inherent in characters such as Aragorn is not present in Erikson's depiction of figures such as Coltaine, whose most considerable virtue is his modesty. Erikson juxtaposes this with the arrogant self-awareness often encountered in the central protagonists of the fantasy genre. Heroes traditionally have an almost inherent awareness of their own superiority (and this is most particularly true of the heroes of Greek epics). As has been demonstrated, both Tomas and Pug share this trait, and Thomas Covenant (whose very resistance of his role is premised on this notion) will become similarly self-aware, and thus possesses the same heroic bombastic nature in the end. The same is true of Tolkien's Aragorn, although here, too, the hero's arrogance is abated (but not eradicated) by his inherent modesty:

Tolkien's Aragorn may suffer aspersions from the ignorant, but though he sometimes makes wrong choices, and admits them, he never doubts either himself or his ancestry. (Kelso, 2010: 249)

Erikson's characters demonstrate a distinct sense of self-doubt. His fiction stands in direct contrast to the heroic figures of the ancient epics (and those of the earlier writers in the fantasy genre) in that Coltaine is generally unmindful of reputation, believing, instead, that people should be "judged by their actions":

Mallick Rel straightened. "High Fist Pormqual welcomes Fist Coltaine to Seven Cities, and wishes him well in his new command. The Seventh Army remains as one of the three original armies of the Malazan Empire, and the High Fist is confident that Fist Coltaine will honour their commendable history."

“I care nothing for reputations,” Coltaine said. “They shall be judged by their actions.”
(Erikson, 2001: 78)

Where reputation is closely associated with *aretê*, Coltaine’s *aretê* (which includes virtue, courage, prowess and goodness) is demonstrated as being tempered by a sense of self that does not lean towards the narcissism inherent in many of the Greek heroes (such as Achilles and Odysseus). Here again, the portrayal of a heroic figure is far closer to the Roman model than the Greek, and Coltaine thus resembles Aeneas. For the Greeks, *aretê* “included glory, honor [*sic*], courage, and bodily strength and swiftness to succeed in battle” (Hawhee, 2002: 191). Thus, while the culmination of Coltaine’s journey may result in the creation of a legend, it is neither glorious (this is never one of Coltaine’s goals, and Erikson goes to great lengths to point out the hardships endured and losses resulting from the march), nor is it swift. Coltaine does, however, possess the requisite “bodily strength” as well as his own form of “honor [*sic*]” to which Hawhee refers. Coltaine’s realism and self-awareness are remarkably similar to Tolkien’s Aragorn in that he possesses a firmly established sense of who he is, and what his role in the unfolding events will be. He considers himself a competent military commander and strategist, but does not evince hubris or pride. His goal is always at the forefront of his considerations and is the motivating force in the execution of his actions. Speaking to the Malazan cadre mage, Kulp, Coltaine says: “If [the soldiers] obey my commands I in turn will serve them. If they do not, I will tear their hearts from their chests” (Erikson, 2001: 77). While these sentiments may be interpreted as tyrannical and potentially threatening, Coltaine does that which is necessary in order to maintain the strictest discipline over his troops, since he

knows that the army faces virtually insurmountable odds. Coltaine thus possesses not only *aretê*, but also *sisu*.⁷

Like all fantasy heroes, Coltaine undertakes a quest. This is, of course, synonymous with the motif of the journey and is self-evident in *Deadhouse Gates* (2001) by virtue of the fact that Coltaine journeys from Hissar to Aren. The important distinguishing feature in Erikson's writing, however, is that this journey is doomed to futility from the outset. It is a task that will result in the virtual annihilation of the majority of the Wickans' fighting force, and Coltaine and the Seventh army are deliberately set up to fail (the more logical tactic would have been to make use of the military fleet stationed at Hissar).

“The High Fist Pormqual has asked me to convey his orders to High Fist Coltaine. Admiral Nok is to leave Hissar Harbour and proceed to Aren as soon as his ships are resupplied. High Fist Coltaine is to begin preparations for marching the Seventh overland ... to Aren. It is the High Fist's desire to review the Seventh prior to its final stationing.” The priest produced a sealed scroll from his robes and set it on the tabletop. “Such are the High Fist's commands.”

A look of disgust darkened Coltaine's features. He crossed his arms and deliberately turned his back on Mallick Rel.

Bult laughed without humour. “The High Fist wishes to review the army. Presumably the High Fist has an attendant High Mage, perhaps a Hand of the Claw as well? If he wishes to review Coltaine's troops he can come here by Warren. The Fist has no intention of outfitting this army to march four hundred leagues so Pormqual can frown at the dust on their boots. Such a move will leave the eastern provinces of Seven Cities without an occupying army. At this time of unrest it would be viewed as a retreat, especially when accompanied by the withdrawal of the Sahul Fleet. This land cannot be governed from behind the walls of Aren.” (Erikson, 2001: 78)

⁷ *Sisu* is a Finnish term not dissimilar to *aretê*, but also denotes those who continue to fight, despite overwhelming odds, and a dogged determination that is not entirely encapsulated by *aretê* (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=sisu>, Retrieved June 3, 2010).

Coltaine rescues the refugees from slaughter at the hands of the soldiers of the Whirlwind rebellion (representing a good humanitarian goal, like those achieved by all heroes), but he does not achieve anything for himself or for his tribe (the Wickans are virtually decimated and do not – at the conclusion of the novel – seem capable of regaining cohesion or strength, be it physical or even mental, since Sormo E'nath is dead, and only the twins – Nil and Nether – are left of his Wickan mage cadre). Coltaine is betrayed by the Empire he serves and his death is used as an ideological weapon against his surviving tribesmen when Laseen (the usurper of the imperial throne) condones (and contributes to) the spreading of rumours depicting Coltaine as a rebel and traitor in order to seize much-needed land resources for her expansionist empire. In *The Bonehunters* (2006), this event becomes known as the Wickan Pogrom:

“I am greatly relieved,” the Empress said, with a faint smile, “that you now comprehend the necessity of what will occur this night. In the broader scheme of things, Tavore, the sacrifice is modest. It is also clear that the Wickans have outlived their usefulness – the old covenants with the tribes must be dispensed with, now that Seven Cities and its harvest have become so thoroughly disrupted. In other words, we need the Wickan Plains. The herds must be slaughtered and the earth broken, crops planted. Seven Cities has provided us a harsh lesson when it comes to relying upon distant lands for the resources the empire consumes.”
(Erikson, 2006: 807)

In this fictional act, Erikson comments on the nature of history and the way memory is elided by the prevailing propaganda.⁸ Speaking to Captain Rynag aboard the Malazan vessel, the *Frost Wolf*, Keneb declaims the handing over of the remaining Wickans to an angry mob in Malaz City in terms that emphasise the difference between ‘the truth’ and the ‘official version’ of events:

⁸ History, Erikson seems to imply, is not a fact, but merely a tool used to demonstrate the prevailing ideology.

“Coltaine was pinned spreadeagled [*sic*] to a cross outside Aren. While Pormqual’s army hid behind the city’s walls. I am sorely tempted, Captain, to nail you to something similar, right here and now. A gift for the unbelievers out there, just to remind them that some of us remember the truth.”
(Erikson, 2006: 798)

Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that Coltaine’s story is not ‘officially’ chronicled, rumours and stories regarding the Chain have spread via word of mouth and grown to legendary proportions in the popular imagination, even serving as a cautionary tale for those who seek to oppose the Malazan Empire. From the Fall, as it becomes known, an entire cult arises to pay homage to Coltaine, and Tadore’s much-beleaguered army finds potshards depicting his death along their own march (Erikson, 2006: 206). Elsewhere in the saga, characters also discover whole pots depicting Coltaine of the Crow Clan, most notably, at his moment of death. He emerges as a messianic figure in popular imagination. The Malazan Empire itself, however, has begun to twist these stories to suit its own purposes. Erikson, here, makes an important comment about re-narration and the use of historical events for political gain, since the twisting of the events involving and surrounding Coltaine and his Chain of Dogs by the Malazan Empire ultimately constitutes a betrayal of the members of the Malazan Empire. Whether this betrayal is intentional or simply part of an elaborate plot on the part of the Empress Laseen is not revealed, but it serves to emphasise the inherent cynicism in Erikson’s work, and reflects disillusionment with the political ramifications of Empires past and present.

In Erikson’s world, the Chain of Dogs – and the part played in it by Coltaine and the rest of the Wickan tribesmen – sparks a chain of events that stretches far into the Empire’s tenuous future. The official version of events is eventually superseded by

the political agenda of the Empire, which renders Coltaine's acts null and void, casting a deep shadow over the glory of his actions:

“Adjunct Tavore rarely emerges from an event – no matter how benign or fortuitous – untarnished. And no, I do not understand why this should be so.”

“The legacy of Coltaine.”

Pearl nodded in the darkness. Then, he frowned. *Ah, Empress, now I see ...* “And so the dead hero is ... unmanned. His name becomes a curse. His deeds, a lie.” *No, damn you, I was close enough to know otherwise. No.* “Empress, it will not work.”

“Will it not?”

“No. Instead, we all are tainted. Faith and loyalty vanish. All that gifts us with pride becomes stained. The Malazan Empire ceases to have heroes, and without heroes, Empress, we will self-destruct.”

(Erikson, 2006: 756; original emphasis)

Pearl's view of the betrayal as 'tainting' the Empire reveals Erikson's view that a society requires heroic figures to uphold ideas of virtue, courage, and determination in order to persist and prevail over the trials which individual members face on a daily basis. Heroic action thus serves as not only enforcing ideals, but also as a means of unifying a group or nation. The revisionist and nationalist impulse in Erikson's depiction of the 'use' of heroism is affiliated to Currie's view of New Historicism.

Currie writes:

it is characteristic for a New Historicist reading to declare its subjectivity as a kind of rewriting of history, as an active reinvention of the past which wears its political allegiances on its sleeve.

(Currie, 1998: 88)

Indeed, when the official take on the events culminating outside the gates of Aren is openly communicated, it signifies the end of an era for the Empire in the blood spilt for its sake:

Another moment of silence, in which so many things could have been said, in which the course of the Malazan Empire could have found firmer footing. Silence, and yet to Kalam it seemed he could hear the slamming of doors, the clatter and crunch of portcullis dropping, and he saw hallways, avenues, where the flickering light dimmed, then vanished. (Erikson, 2006: 807)

The prevailing silence indicates a metaphorical dismemberment of the golden age in which the Empire is unified through its heroes. This has interesting repercussions when one considers the Imperial historian, Duiker. The importance of his (finally) telling the tale of Coltaine lies in its becoming a means of not only contesting what Lyotard refers to as the “grand narrative” (Lyotard, 1987: 60) of official history, but also of keeping Coltaine’s legend alive. Erikson, then, subverts and interrogates the idea of self-actualisation at the culminating point of the journey motif through his use of a character who is fully-fledged in his own right, and whose quest culminates in his rather ignominious death.

All the same, this death does not negate the changes wrought in the world as a result of Coltaine’s journey. While the balance of power remains the same after the journey of the Chain of Dogs, Coltaine does achieve legendary status and it is precisely this status that interrogates the prevailing propaganda of the Empire. He is the last great hero of the Malazan Empire, and when his name and deeds are tarnished by the very people who should have upheld it as a triumph for the Empire, it signals the end of an era, and the ‘torchlight’ on the age of heroes dims and dies. It should be noted, however, that the Empress’ Adjunct (Tavore Paran) becomes the inheritor of both Coltaine’s legacy and the remnants of his battered army. One of her Fists, Gamet, realises the extent to which this is true when the army departs from Aren to do battle against the Whirlwind rebellion in *House of Chains* (2003) (Tavore, as the new

adjunct to the Empress, walks Coltaine's path almost in reverse – from Aren to, eventually, Malaz Island):

This – this is the path we now take. We must walk, step by step, the legacy. We? No. Tavore. Alone. 'This is no longer Coltaine's war!' she said to Temul. But it seems it remains just that. And she now realizes, down in the depths of her soul, that she will stride that man's shadow ... all the way to Raraku.

(Erikson, 2002: 490; original emphasis)

Significantly, Coltaine's "shadow" haunts Tavore, who feels ill-equipped to live up to his "legacy".⁹ Similarly, a tribe known as the Khundryl Burned Tears testifies to the honour that accrues to Coltaine's memory. In *Dust of Dreams* (2009), the ninth book in the series, a Grey Helm commander, Krughava, remarks:

"Sirs, I have known Warleader Gall of the Khundryl Burned Tears for some time now. In the course of a long ocean voyage, no duplicities of character remain hidden. You assert the uniqueness of the Grey Helms, and in this you clearly reveal to me your lack of understanding with respect to the Khundryl. The Burned Tears, sirs, are in fact a warrior cult. Devoted to the very heart of their souls to a legendary warleader. This warleader, Coltaine, was of such stature, such honour, that he earned worship not among his allies, but among his putative enemies. Such as the Khundryl Burned Tears."

(Erikson, 2009: 195)

This momentous act, which signifies the respect held for the Wickans and their chieftain, has its roots in *Deadhouse Gates*, where the Khundryl witness one of the skirmishes on the road to Aren.

"We have long awaited this day," the war chief said. He stood in his stirrups and gestured to the south hills. "Tregyn and Bhilard both, this day." He waved northward. "And Can'eld, and Semk, aye,

⁹ His death may have rendered him incapable of a physical manifestation, but his presence looms over Tavore Paran throughout her journey.

even Tithansi – what’s left that is. The great tribes of the south odhans, yet who among them all is the most powerful? The answer is with this day.”

[...]

With dusk an hour away, a lone Khundryl war chief rode up to them at a slow canter, and as he neared they saw that it was the spokesman. He’d been in a scrap and was smeared in blood, at least half of it his own, yet he rode straight in his saddle.

He reined in ten paces from Coltaine.

The Fist spoke. “You have your answer, it seems.”

“We have it, Blackwing.”

“The Khundryl.”

Surprise flitted on the warrior’s battered face. “You honour us, but no. We strove to break the one named Korbolo Dom, but failed. The answer is not the Khundryl.”

“Then you do honour to Korbolo Dom?”

[...] The war chief yanked free his tulwar from its leather sheath, revealing a blade snapped ten inches above the hilt. He raised it over his head and bellowed, “*The Wickans! The Wickans! The Wickans!*” (Erikson, 2001: 798 & 799-800; original emphasis)

In honour of Coltaine’s memory, the Khundryl paint black tear tracks on their faces, and refer to themselves (after the Fall) as the Khundryl Burned Tears to mark their honouring of a great hero’s passage and the impact on those who stood witness to it:

Struck to awe and then worship upon witnessing an enemy on the field of battle – an extraordinary notion, [Queen Abrastal – an ally of Tavore’s army] had trouble believing it. So ... foreign. In any case, whoever that commander was – who, in death, had found worshippers among his enemies – he must have possessed unusual virtues.

(Erikson, 2009: 471)

As a queen, and thus ‘higher’ in the social hierarchy than Coltaine, Abrastal’s views on his “unusual virtues” carry some persuasive power. Like most heroic figures, Coltaine’s departure from the narrative upon his death is dramatic. His crucifixion is paralleled with that of the Christ figure, and *Deadhouse Gates* culminates with an allusion to Coltaine’s rebirth. Even his death is not the simple and meaningless death of a common soldier upon the battlefield: he is crucified by the Whirlwind’s army,

which strives to delay his death by keeping away the thousands of crows flying above his crucified body, seeking to carry his soul forth into the after-life in order to be born again (a belief held by the Wickan tribesmen, which will be explored in the next chapter).

“They took many days to die,” Bult said. “Hung from spikes of iron until the crows came to collect their souls.”

[...]

“The crows that carried within them the greatest of the warlock souls returned to our people to await each new birth, and so the power of our elders returned to us.”
(Erikson, 2001: 75 & 76)

It is a common archer, a soldier upon Aren’s walls named Squint, who mercifully shoots an arrow that pierces Coltaine’s skull, and thus permits Coltaine’s delivery from this world into the afterlife. Here, the heroic allusions are unavoidable: the hero, like King Arthur in the Arthurian legends, will die and then return to the world when he is most needed “in the hour of destiny” (Campbell, 1973: 358). Pratchett and Simpson refer to this type of hero as

a Hero of another sort: the Sleeping King under the Mountain, the King who will come back from ‘another place’ to save his people and achieve heroic feats [...]. It is a powerful narrative pattern, widely scatted through the multiverse as a consolation and a source of inspiration and hope.
(Pratchett & Simpson, 2008: 266)

The book’s epilogue begins with the emergence of a young Wickan woman from the tent of a “horsewife” (a Wickan healer) (Erikson, 2001: 933). She is pregnant, and has been told that the child she carries within her womb is soulless, empty; to all intents and purposes dead. Thinking to abort the child, the woman is stopped by the horsewife who has given her an elixir that would return the child she carries “to the earth” (Erikson, 2001: 934). On the distant horizon, the horsewife espies “a swarm, a

seething mass of black, striding like a giant towards them, tendrils spinning off, then coming around again to rejoin the main body” (Erikson, 2001: 934). What the young woman initially perceives as flies become “[c]rows, so many crows” (Erikson, 2001: 935; original emphasis) and, in response to this sight, “[d]eep within her, the child stirred” (Erikson, 2001: 935). Thus, Coltaine’s return seems inevitable, according to the beliefs of his people. In fact, in *The Bonehunters*, Shadowthrone (now a god, previously the Emperor Kellanved before his Ascendance) speaks to the High Mage Tayschrenn about the Wickans and the pogrom instituted against them. Tayschrenn tells him:

“They are not as vulnerable as you fear, Emperor. They will have Nil and Nether. They will have Temul, and when Temul is old, decades from now, he will have a young warrior to teach, whose name shall be Coltaine.”
(Erikson, 2006: 882)

Coltaine’s return seems inevitable, and his future training by Temul (a surviving member of the Wickan army decimated outside Aren), implies a circular nature to his story. Thus, while he may begin the narrative as a soldier, Coltaine concludes it by becoming legendary:

“Where do you think Leoman has gone?”
“Where else? Into the Golden Age, Nil. The glory that was the Great Rebellion. He strides the mists of myth, now. They will say he breathed fire. They will say you could see the Apocalypse in his eyes. They will say he sailed from Y’Ghatan on a river of Malazan blood.”
“The locals believe Coltaine ascended,¹⁰ Nether. The new Patron of Crows –”

¹⁰ Erikson’s ascendants are either demi-gods or gods in their own right, in a question and answer session with the online Encyclopedia Malazica, Erikson said “are all gods ascendants? If you mean ascendant in the general sense of being very powerful, then yes. If you mean ascendant in terms of progression, then there are exceptions. Most of the animistic ones, for example (the totemic, tribal ones) derived from the act of worship, or the attribution of significance to a particular place.” (<http://encyclopediamalazica.pbworks.com/w/page/18881306/Ascendants-and-Religion>, Retrieved July 15, 2011).

“Fools. Wickans do not ascend. We just ... reiterate.”
(Erikson, 2006: 300)

The Wickans, here, seem well aware of the formation of the legends accruing to their former leader's name. The description, here, of Coltaine “strid[ing] the mists of myth” removes him from the world scene of the narrative, but implies that this is not an absence, but a presence of a different kind. That is to say, Coltaine may be dead (and thus physically absent), but his name conjures associations that emphasise his continued ‘presence’.

Through his use of heroic figures such as Coltaine of the Crow Clan, Erikson establishes a process of reception and construction as crucial to heroic status, rather than the traditional method of presenting the hero as already fully-fledged and fully developed by the time that they enter the narrative scene. This becomes the defining feature of Erikson's fantasy, and dramatically alters the standard for heroic figures previously encountered within the genre.

Coltaine's heroic journey is not epic only because of the fact that it deals with eleven separate skirmishes, which culminate right outside Aren's gates. It is epic because of the effect Coltaine's presence and persistence has on the psyche of those not only subservient to his command, but those to whom he is answerable as well as those whom he opposes. It is his capacity to lead and inspire awe and (at times, grudging) loyalty that makes him heroic and eventually contributes to his rise as a figure of legendary proportions, and this legendary status persists even after his death. *Dust of Dreams* refigures the way in which Coltaine is seen: his name is evoked by those such as the Khundryl Burned Tears as a means of threatening people with misfortune – an

act which may be considered sacrilegious by some of those presented in the narrative, yet which nonetheless serves to pay homage to his prodigious strength and power.

It is my contention that Erikson's fiction sees the dawn of a new age in fantasy portrayals of the heroic figure, in which the heroic figure is regarded with a certain amount of scepticism. Heroism, here, is located within the paradigm of a twentieth- and twenty-first-century context in which deeds, even great ones, are neither straightforwardly good or evil, but instead occupy the uncomfortable liminal space inherent in so much of our contemporary fiction, which plays to the strange inherent scepticism and tendency to scrutinise in the modern reader. This scepticism is made evident by the emergence of fantasy writers such as George R.R. Martin and Erikson, who do not permit the exultation of their heroic figures. At the epicentre of their construction lies an awareness of their humanity and – lurking beneath this – a tingling sense of their fallibility. By contrast, the heroes of classical epic poetry, such as *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, as well as conventional fantasy, have a pronounced tendency to superhuman infallibility.

Heroic deeds, in this new fantasy, do not have simple outcomes, either for good or evil. Erikson negotiates this complexity by illustrating that a great act, such as the Chain of Dogs, can have entirely negative consequences precisely because it takes place against the backdrop of a complex and ongoing battle for power, in which participants abound. It could, in fact, be argued that this discerning attitude towards heroic action is a more realistic approach than that encountered in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* where – as I have indicated – the dividing line between 'good' and 'evil' is unmistakably demarcated. The final result of the great quest to destroy the Ring

appears to have positive outcomes for all. Even the events in the Shire after the Hobbits' return home are a consequence of Saruman's thirst for revenge, rather than the quest itself.¹¹ In Erikson's fiction, all perspectives are included, and the classifications of 'good' versus 'bad' become so blurred as to be virtually indistinct. Every element in his narrative world is relative, and relies upon the perspective of the beholder. Erikson, it should be noted, does not deny the existence of heroic figures (or even their importance in terms of their effect on the morale of a nation), but his heroes are portrayed as mere mortals doing what needs to be done, not as untouchable demi-gods (such as Pug and Tomas, Aragorn, Paul Atreides and Thomas Covenant). It has been said that Feist's Pug, for example, is rendered impotent throughout the rest of his series precisely because he has become too powerful a figure to act:¹²

By the end of the Riftwar Saga Pug has become one of the most powerful individuals in Feist's fantasy mythos. He appears in one form or another in almost all of the novels written by Feist set in the world of Midkemia. Some of the novels include him as a minor character and instead focus on the exploits of other characters such as Jimmy the Hand or Arutha, Prince of Krondor. By necessity these novels have the characters facing less powerful obstacles and enemies than those in the novels Pug features prominently in. Because if he were allowed to use his full power Pug would quickly deal with most of the minor problems faced by Jimmy and Arutha such as the continuing trouble caused by the Nighthawks, Feist must constantly devise ways to limit Pug's power. His power is either weakened (such as in the Serpentwar Saga when he is lured into a trap by a demon, or in the Krondor series, when he is teleported to a world where his magic is useless), or he is explained as being "too busy with his own affairs" to aid the other characters.

¹¹ Also, now that Sauron has been defeated and the Hobbits have achieved heroic status in their own right, it is a comparatively simple matter to defeat Saruman.

¹² Due to the fact that Feist holds his heroes as sacrosanct, he is unwilling to 'finish' his tale through the demise of his heroic figures. Similarly, Terry Pratchett is as reticent when it comes to the inevitable demise of his heroic protagonists. Pratchett may not be writing epic or heroic fantasy, but his parody of the genre's tropes is prevalent in his *Discworld* series. Here, however, the hero is central to the structure of his narrative world. Sam Vimes, for example, is the balancing force in *Ankh-Morpork*, and Granny Weatherwax serves as the means of establishing particular rules and regulations for the witches. She is, thus, the figure against which all witches must be measured, just as Sam Vimes is the archetype of the guardsman, and protector since he is Commander of the Watch (he who watches, and imposes strictures and control).

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pug_%28fictional_character%29, Retrieved March 17, 2011)

Readers identify with heroic characters when they realise a commonality of heroic potential with them. The reader of traditional fantasy could never hope to aspire to the likes of Pug, Aragorn, Tomas Covenant (in his manifestation as the reincarnated Berek Halfhand, that is), and so admires them from afar, resulting in a process of dis-identification, which will always remain only sheer admiration and imaginative wish-fulfilment. With a figure such as Coltaine, however, readers are presented with a truly mortal man in a military system who is simultaneously subordinate and superior, and thus he elicits the reader's recognition of common humanity (and – as demonstrated earlier – “[i]dentification suggests self-recognition” (Currie, 1978: 28)), creating a closer relationship between reader and subject, as well as between the reader and the text into which they are thrown *in medias res*. Their entering of the text does not occur gradually: readers find themselves in the thick of things, so to speak, already participating in a fully-fledged world, as well as a war that has been underway for an unspecified amount of time. Rather than the pure escapism generally offered by many fantasy texts, readers undergo a process of wish-fulfilment when encountering Erikson's work.¹³ Erikson's characters gradually shift their perspective regarding Coltaine, and introduce the grudging yet unwavering loyalty he inspires. His sheer machismo (along with the associated virility and potency) results in the portrayal of a figure who is remarkably similar to the Camel Man portrayed in bygone smoking advertisements. Coltaine may rely on others, but he is never incapacitated when that support falls away (as is clearly demonstrated on the death of Sormo E'nath).

¹³ This is aided by Erikson's use of Ascendants. These are mortals who, through great deeds, become god-like and thus immortal.

Coltaine, like the mythical Sisyphus, possesses an almost resigned acceptance of the inevitability of his orders, and thus he possesses recognition and acceptance of his fate. While he may exhibit “disgust” (Erikson, 2001: 78), the fact that he does carry out his orders implies acceptance:

Coltaine spat on the floor once again. “That is all to say on the matter, Historian. Record the words that have been uttered here, if you do not find them too sour a taste.” He glanced over at a silent Sormo E’nath, frowning as he studied his warlock.

“Even if I choked on them,” Duiker replied, “I would recount them nonetheless. I could not call myself a historian if it were otherwise.”
(Erikson, 2001: 81)

Coltaine’s acceptance of his role is demonstrated in his commanding Duiker to “[r]ecord the words”. Duiker’s acceptance of his task is also significant here, and this duty will weigh heavily on him in later novels of the series. Coltaine could not, however, call himself a military leader if he did not carry out his orders, and the state he inhabits as a result is not unlike that encountered within the Absurd condition, where characters are ‘thrown’ into situations and have to move on from their starting point:

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. [...] At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments towards that lower world whence he will have to push it up again towards the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. [...] At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of

succeeding upheld him? [...] [I]t is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.

(Camus, 1983: 108-109; original emphasis)

Sisyphus's heroic consciousness, for Camus, implies a relative amount of happiness: "[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus, 1983: 111), and, in a similar way, one must imagine that while Coltaine is aware of the futility of his action, his decision to scorn that fate is what – in the end – makes him heroic; awards him his *sisu* and *aretê*. Coltaine displays the same "scorn of the gods" and "hatred of death", and achieves the same purpose at the end of his journey (Camus, 1983: 108). Coltaine's awareness of the inevitability of his fate is similar to Sisyphus, who pushes the rock up the hill and watches it tumble down, knowing it is going to do so.

Coltaine's ultimate ascendance to legendary status as a result of the culmination of his journey aligns him with the messianic figure of Christ (this process will be elaborated on in Chapter Five). That said, the reader's ability to identify with Coltaine is not undermined by his shared commonality with a messianic figure since, at his root, Coltaine remains a mortal man; he is neither a teacher nor a sentimental philanthropist. The imperial historian meant to capture and record these events, Duiker, never speaks of them for precisely *this* reason – his recognition of Coltaine's mortality renders him speechless.¹⁴ Duiker's silence is a by-product of his increasing cynicism towards the idea of chronicling history. He has begun to view the process as futile, and it is only in Book Eight of the series, *Toll the Hounds* (2008), that we find

¹⁴ We never read Duiker's account of the events surrounding the Chain of Dogs in the series, but the implication exists that he does speak of them at some indeterminate point in the narrative world's future.

him beginning to recognise a need for telling the tale of Coltaine and the Chain of Dogs. Duiker laments Coltaine's mortality in his unwillingness to speak due to what he perceives as a futile and meaningless waste of lives in war. This poignancy is depicted in the third book, *Memories of Ice* (2001), when Dujek commands the remaining members of the Bridgeburners (a notorious unit of the Malazan army) to journey to the free city of Darujhistan:

“The Trygalle has delivered someone. He's presently in the care of the High Alchemist, Baruk. The man's not well – he needs you, I think. Malazans. Soldiers. Do what you can for him when you're there, and when you decide that you can't do anything more, then walk away.”
(Erikson, 2001: 883)

The unnamed man turns out to be the resurrected Duiker (who was originally one of those killed by the betrayal when they rode out of Aren, and nailed to a tree along the Aren Way).

Picker could not pull her eyes from the man. He sat hunched over, on a chair that had yet to find a table, still clutching in his hands the small rag of tattered cloth on which something had been written.¹⁵ The alchemist had done all he could to return life to what had been a mostly destroyed, desiccated body, and Baruk's talents had been stretched to their limits – there was no doubt of that.

She knew of him, of course. They all did. They all knew, as well, where he had come from.

He spoke not a word. Had not since the resurrection. No physical flaw kept him from finding his voice, Baruk had insisted.

(Erikson, 2001: 890-891)

¹⁵ The “something” (Erikson, 2001: 890) mentioned here is the name of a woman who became Duiker's lover on the march, a name he did not know at the time, who offered him some small respite from the endless marching and deaths encountered along the way. She dies along with the Wickans in the last stand outside the gates of Aren. Her name is “Sa'yless Lorthal” (Erikson, 2001: 930) and there is a thematic link between her name and the silent agreement – which forms the basis of their relationship – proffered in a time of need (Sa'yless – say less).

Duiker, however, does speak for the first and – in the ten books – only time of the events surrounding the Chain of Dogs, which culminate in Coltaine’s death.

“All right,” Picker said in a loud voice, walking over. “So, this is it. Fine. The fire’s warm enough, we’ve drunk enough, and I for one am ready for some stories to be told – no, not you, Kruppe. We’ve heard yours. Now, Baruk here, and Coll and Murillio for that matter, might be interested in the tale of the final taking of Coral.”

[...]

“Sure,” Spindle snapped, “a story to break our hearts all over again! What’s the value in that?”

A rough, broken voice replied, “There is value.”

Everyone fell silent, turned to Duiker.

The Imperial Historian had looked up, was studying them with dark eyes. “Value. Yes. I think, much value. But not yours, soldiers. Not yet. Too soon for you. Too soon.”

“Perhaps,” Baruk muttered, “perhaps you are right in that. We ask too much –”

“Of them. Yes.” The old man looked down once more at the cloth in his hands.

The silence stretched.

Duiker made no move.

Picker began to turn back to her companions – when the man began speaking. “Very well, permit me, if you will, on this night. To break your hearts once more. This is the story of the Chain of Dogs. Of Coltaine of the Crow Clan, newly come Fist to the 7th Army ...”

(Erikson, 2001: 891-892)

In the ninth book of the series, *Toll the Hounds*, Duiker meets a famous bard, Fisher Kel Tath. While Fisher’s true nature is never entirely revealed, it is significant that it is he who finally convinces Duiker to capture the history of Coltaine and the Chain of Dogs (as a travelling bard, Fisher knows the importance of stories, and of recording history).

“It’s said you told the tale of the Chain of Dogs once, here in this very room.”

“Once.”

“And that you have been trying to write it down ever since.”

“And failing. What of it?”

“It may be that expositional prose isn’t right for the telling of that story, Duiker.”

“Oh?”

The bard set the tankard to one side and slowly leaned forward, fixing the historian with grey eyes. “Because, sir, you see their faces.”

Anguish welled up inside Duiker and he looked away, hiding his suddenly trembling hands. “You don’t know me well enough for such matters,” he said in a rasp.

“Rubbish. This isn’t a personal theme here, historian. It’s two professionals discussing their craft. It’s me, a humble bard, offering my skills to unlock your soul and all it contains – everything that’s killing it, moment by moment. You can’t find your voice for this. Use mine.”

“Is that why you’re here?” Duiker asked. “Like some vulture eager to lap up my tears?”

Brows lifted. “You are an accident. My reasons for being here lie ... elsewhere. Even if I could explain more, I would not. I cannot. In the meantime, Duiker, *let us fashion an epic to crush the hearts of a thousand generations.*” [Emphasis added]

And now, yes, tears rolled down the lined tracks of the historian’s face. And it took all the courage he still possessed to then nod.

The bard leaned back, retrieving his tankard. “It begins with you,” he said. “And it ends with you. Your eyes to witness, your thoughts alone. Tell me of no one’s mind, presume nothing of their workings. You and I, we tell nothing, but we *show.*” [Original emphasis] (Erikson, 2008: 241-242)

Duiker is employed by the Malazan Empire as a chronicler of events, and thus his official task is to record the ‘grand narrative’ of the Malazans’ greatness and victory. The above discussion with Fisher Kel Tath, though, stresses the subjectivity and emotional content of Duiker’s tale. In this way Erikson lends support to the notion of the “little narrative [*petit récit*] [which] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention” (Lyotard, 1987: 60). “[T]he grand narratives — [...] the dialectic of Spirit [and] the emancipation of humanity” (1987: 60), in Lyotard’s terms, are no longer valid in Erikson’s fantasy.

In the conversation between Duiker and Fisher Kel Tath, Erikson also metatextually reveals the narrative form of his epic: there is no interiority from Coltaine, and the

views presented are those of the one who witnesses – Duiker. The distinction between ‘telling’ and ‘showing’ is highly significant here. The advice given to new writers is always to ‘show’ rather than ‘tell’,¹⁶ and this distinction also appears in narrative theory. The underlying idea is that ‘showing’ is more effective than ‘telling’. The bard, then, is here articulating Erikson’s own views on narrative presentation. Most importantly, Erikson reveals an awareness of the notion that myth is developed – layer by layer – on the foundation of a heroic man. Fisher appeals to Duiker to capture the events, not from an objective historicist’s point of view, but to *relate* to the myth on a humanistic level.

Readers of *Lord of The Rings* have no choice but to admire and even like Aragorn, and yet a choice is implicit in the construction of Coltaine. Early depictions of him are as “a cold-blooded lizard” (Erikson, 2001: 422), but as the perceptions of him by Malazan soldiers under his command change, so too do the readers’ initial summations of Coltaine undergo a similar metamorphosis. The construction of Erikson’s myriad protagonists is largely centred on a process of individualisation rather than individuation or self-realisation (what I have called “pre-constructed heroic wholes” who have only to grow into a full acceptance of their heroic stature).

When Duiker first sees the Wickans, he regards them with “more than a little scepticism, and with growing trepidation” (Erikson, 2001: 48). He is dubious of Coltaine’s new appointment:

¹⁶ (http://www.floggingthequill.com/flogging_the_quill/2006/week6/index.html, Retrieved October 18, 2011).

Duiker suspected that the new Fist would understand little of veiled gestures of contempt, lacking as he did the more civilized nuances of the Empire's tamed citizens. The question that remained for the historian, then, was how long Coltaine of the Crow Clan would survive his new appointment. (Erikson, 2001: 49)

Erikson's use of the words "tamed citizens" here is telling. From the outset, Coltaine (as well as his Wickan tribesmen) is juxtaposed with the thin veneer of civilisation under which the Empire's citizens huddle. As a tribesman, Coltaine is associated with the wilds of the plains they roam. This association, however, is precisely that which brands him as Other. Coltaine's appointment is considered "an odd choice" (Erikson, 2001: 51). It is Duiker who forms the conceptual framework for the initial opinions of those who meet Coltaine for the first time. His first glimpse of the already controversial Fist is portrayed as follows:¹⁷

Duiker saw half a dozen tulwars flash, watched the Wickans recoil and then unsheathe their own long-knives. They seemed to have found a leader, a tall, fierce-looking warrior with fetishes in his long braids, who now bellowed encouragement, waving his weapon over his head. "Hood!" the Historian swore. "Where on earth is Coltaine?"

The captain laughed. "The tall one with the lone long-knife."

Duiker's eyes widened. *That madman is Coltaine? The Seventh's new Fist?* [Original emphasis]

"Ain't changed at all, I see," the captain continued. "If you're going to keep your head as leader of all the clans, you'd better be nastier than all the rest put together. Why'd you think the old Emperor liked him so much?"

"Beru fend," Duiker whispered, *appalled*. [Emphasis added]

(Erikson, 2001: 52)

Duiker's emotive response here is part of his initial view of Coltaine as "lacking [...] civilized nuances" (Erikson, 2001: 49), and is not unlike the views of the other

¹⁷ The reader's response to Coltaine is mirrored by Duiker's first encounter with the chieftain. When Duiker sees him for the first time, the readers do as well. This portrayal, then, establishes the associative link between Duiker and Coltaine in the reader's mind. It emphasises the fact that Duiker is inextricably connected to Coltaine on the level of the narrative. As Duiker's views of Coltaine change, so do the reader's.

Malazans. The implicit judgement and summary dismissal of Coltaine as ‘mad’ furthermore implies that he follows a different cognitive logic from the Malazans’, or no recognisable logic at all. To label him as ‘mad’ means that he is to be despised, and that he is set apart from his social context. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (2003), Michel Foucault traces the developing views of madness, and refers to the fact that during the Renaissance, specifically, madness was closely associated with animals, and always considered in these terms.

In the Renaissance, madness was present everywhere and mingled with every experience by its images or its dangers. During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of a reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with *strange mechanisms*, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed. “I can easily conceive of a man without hands, feet, head (for it is only experience which teaches us that the head is more necessary than the feet). But I cannot conceive of a man without thought; that would be a stone or a brute.” (Foucault, 2003: 66; emphasis added)

In light of such sentiments the Malazans’ view of Coltaine as animalistic becomes significant. If he is disparaged and degraded, Coltaine remains as an outsider. Moreover, the animalistic descriptions signal him as one who does not belong within the embrace of civilisation, but resides outside of it as that which is unknown and – significantly – *unknowable* (he thus occupies a liminal space as outsider). Coltaine is most often described in distinctly canine terminology. By using this imagery, however, Erikson further complicates the notion of perspective: for a Wickan, the dog is a noble animal, with important functions in their nomadic society (a dog would not only herd the cattle, but would also guard it, and provide extra security measures for

the tribe by alerting them to possible dangers). It is not without reason that one of the Wickans clans is the Foolish Dog Clan; the Wickans are often conceptually linked to dogs, and are represented by the cattle-dog Bent, in particular, not only because they are nomadic¹⁸ (and thus dependent on their herds for survival), but also because of the connection between animals and that which is uncivilised in the Malazan (and the modifier ‘civilised’, here, is implied) view. For the Malazans, animals do not serve the same function as they do for the nomadic tribes, and so are viewed as primitive creatures and chattel. The cadre mage, Kulp, is representative of this view.

Kulp shut and locked the door, then faced Duiker, his eyes savage. “[Coltaine’s] not a man at all – he’s an animal and he sees things like an animal. And Bult – Bult reads his master’s snarling and raised hackles and puts it all into words – I’ve never heard such a talkative Wickan as that mangled old man.” (Erikson, 2001: 82)

Later, Kulp refers to Coltaine as “[a] cunning dog” (Erikson, 2001: 130).

Ideologically, Coltaine is closely associated with a crow as well. He is the leader of the Crow Clan, and as such is depicted adorned in crow feathers. Duiker describes him as follows:

Up close, he could see that the warleader of the Crow Clan showed the weathering of forty years on the north Wickan Plains of Quon Tali. His lean, expressionless face was lined, deep brackets around the thin, wide mouth, and squint tracks at the corners of his dark, deep-set eyes. Oiled braids hung down past his shoulders, knotted with crow-feather fetishes. He was tall, wearing a battered vest of chain over a hide shirt, a crow-feather cloak hanging from his broad shoulders down to the backs of his knees. He wore a rider’s leggings, laced with gut up the

¹⁸ Erikson has one of his characters, Hetan (<http://encyclopediamalazica.pbworks.com/w/page/18881715/Hetan>, Retrieved October 18, 2011), describe cats as creatures with teeth and claws and very little brains perhaps because of the fact that the Barghast, like the Wickans, are nomadic and so favour dogs. In nomadic tribes, dogs would serve a far greater function than cats. Cats, historically, only became important when humans began to build cities and require storage places, which is when their rat-hunting abilities became prized.

outer sides to his hips. A single horn-handled long-knife jutted out from under his left arm. (Erikson, 2001: 73)

Coltaine is obviously no green soldier, and his years depict hard-earned experience in hostile circumstances; his is not the face of civilisation. One may draw comparisons between this depiction of Coltaine and Tolkien's depiction of Aragorn, when the Hobbits first meet him:

Suddenly Frodo noticed that a strange-looking weather-beaten man, sitting in the shadows near a wall, was also listening intently to the hobbit-talk. He had a tall tankard in front of him, and was smoking a long-stemmed pipe curiously carved. His legs were stretched out before him, showing high boots of supple leather that fitted him well, but had seen much wear and were now caked with mud. A travel-stained cloak of heavy dark-green cloth was drawn close about him, and in spite of the heat of the room he wore a hood that overshadowed his face; but the gleam of his eyes could be seen as he watched the hobbits. (Tolkien, 2001: 153)

Both Coltaine and Aragorn are described as weather-worn, indicative of time spent outdoors (Aragorn's chosen role is as a ranger – with the associations of one who travels, and does not settle down in one place). In fantasy writing, leather is not only a type of armour and therefore valued for its protective properties, but it also prized for its durable nature, and can be worn for extended amounts of time (indicative of someone who does not return home at the end of the day). The fact that Coltaine wields a knife (which has connotations of a rugged, rustic frontiersman) indicates battle-readiness. This makes him potentially threatening. This, coupled with his unreadable expression, augments the fact that he is an unknown and unknowable element, and a potential threat to not only the Empire, but to the concepts of civilisation of which it is representative. Neither Aragorn nor Coltaine resides within

the boundaries of civilisation.¹⁹ Aragorn may wish to live to a simple lifestyle, but his birth and lineage denies that desire. The fact that the last of Tolkien's trilogy is called the *Return of the King* heralds a *return* to civilisation and an eventual embrace of all it signifies. With Aragorn's acceptance of the crown of Gondor (and his implied rejection of his role as *uncivilised* ranger), civilisation (as the prevailing ideology) remains firmly intact. Coltaine, on the other hand, does not return to the fold of civilisation. He is, ultimately, embraced by the Malazan soldiery as one of their own, but he does not reconcile with the prevailing ideology of civilisation, and this is emphasised by the fact the he perishes *outside* the gates of Aren.

Coltaine's distinction from civilisation also resides in a tribal differentiation. The beliefs of his people are that crows are the carriers of the souls of the dead. This belief is located firmly within the bounds of myth, superstition, and unreason, as opposed to the structured reason of civilisation. Here again, his people are denigrated to the superstitious, barbaric and primitive. In the Orbala Odhan, Kalam (once a Seven Cities resident, and now a member of the Bridgeburners – a Malazan unit) encounters a rebel who mentions Coltaine, and indicates the growing admiration and fear associated with that name: "It's said he is winged like a crow, and finds much to laugh about amidst of slaughter" (Erikson, 2001: 355). When considered in the light of the description of Coltaine, Erikson's use of rumours and their dissemination becomes apparent. Coltaine is depicted as wearing a crow-feather cloak, which – from a distance – would appear as wings. Again, here, there are references to the

¹⁹ It should be noted that Erikson is overtly critical of the notions and trappings of civilisation and this is particularly evident in *Toll the Hounds*, where Kallor considers "[j]ust how many rules of civil behaviour were designed to perpetuate [...] egregious schemes of power and control of the few over the many" (2008: 193).

totem animal of the Wickans, and here, again, Coltaine is described in distinctly animalistic terminology.

Duiker refers collectively to Coltaine's army as a "wounded beast" (Erikson, 2001: 265). The Malazans initially view him as "a snake" (Erikson, 2001: 53): "Coltaine's expression did not change. Duiker was reminded of a cobra slowly rising before him, unblinking, cold" (Erikson, 2001: 75), and the tone here is once again threatening, and representative of the untamed danger of a wild creature. The underlying threat, it should be noted, is not only to the Malazan Empire. As rumours of Coltaine's army and the march spread, the enemy's views of Coltaine and his soldiers encounter a dramatic shift as well. According to Foucault, madness and its animal associations also carry the sense of animalistic violence and represent that which cannot be controlled by reason – a strangeness all of its own that stands singularly apart from reason:

Those chained to the cell walls were no longer men whose minds had wandered, but beasts preyed upon by a natural frenzy: as if madness, at its extreme point, freed from that moral unreason in which its most attenuated forms are enclosed, managed to rejoin, by a paroxysm of strength, the immediate violence of animality.

[...]

But what is most important is that it is conceived in terms of animal freedom. The negative fact that "the madman is not treated like a human being" has a very positive content: this inhuman indifference actually has an obsessional value: it is rooted in the old fears which since antiquity, and especially since the Middle Ages, has given the animal world its familiar strangeness, its menacing marvels, its entire weight of dumb anxiety. Yet this animal fear which accompanies, with all its imaginary landscape, the perception of madness, no longer has the same meaning it had two or three centuries earlier: animal metamorphosis is no longer the visible sign of infernal powers, nor the result of a diabolic alchemy of unreason. The animal in man no longer has any value as the sign of a Beyond; it has become his madness, without relation to anything but itself: his madness in the state of nature. *The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what*

is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature. For classicism, madness in its ultimate form is man in immediate relation to his animality, without other reference, without any recourse.

The day would come when from an evolutionary perspective this presence of animality in madness would be considered as the sign – indeed, as the very essence – of disease.

(Foucault, 2003: 68 & 69; emphasis added)

Erikson's portrayal of Coltaine at this point has striking affinities with Foucault's account of the treatment of madness in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe. Coltaine's animalistic portrayals fall within the paradigm of that which is constructed as distinct from civilisation, that which occupies a liminal space as product of civilisation (in the form of an expansionist Empire). He is simultaneously integrated *into* that civilisation (through his appointment as a Malazan military commander), yet ultimately beyond its control and ken.

[T]he seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [...] locates madness in *an area of unforeseeable freedom* where frenzy is unchained; if determinism can have any effect on it, it is in the form of constraint, punishment, or discipline. Through animality, madness does not join the great laws of nature and of life, but rather the thousand forms of a bestiary. [Original emphasis]

[...]

In fact, on close examination, it becomes evident that the animal belongs rather to an anti-nature, to a negativity that *threatens order* and by its frenzy endangers the positive wisdom of nature. [Emphasis added]

(Foucault, 2003: 71-72)

As the novel develops, however, the animalistic imagery begins to take on different connotations, and there is a marked shift in perspectives. The canine association undergoes a paradigm shift in that it is transposed from Coltaine on to the noblemen from Hissar; Coltaine's troublesome aristocratic refugees become collectively known as the Chain of Dogs.

Someone stumbled onto the bank, breath ragged. Footsteps dragged closer, then a gauntleted hand fell heavily on the historian's shoulder. A voice that Duiker struggled to identify spoke. "They mock our nobleborn, did you know that, old man? They've a name for us in Dhebral.²⁰ You know what it translates into? The Chain of Dogs. Coltaine's Chain of Dogs. He leads, yet is led, he strains forward, yet is held back, he bares his fangs, yet what nips at his heels if not those he is sworn to protect? Ah, there's profundity in such names, don't you think?" (Erikson, 2001: 565-566)

Tavore's army, The Bonehunters, pay homage to Coltaine's difficulties in a marching song entitled "Coltaine":

Coltaine rattles slow
across the burning land.
The wind howls through the bones
of his hate-ridden command.
Coltaine leads a chain of dogs
ever snapping at his hand.

Coltaine's fist bleeds the journey home
along rivers of red-soaked sand.
His train howls through his bones
in spiteful reprimand.
Coltaine leads a chain of dogs
ever snapping at his hand. (Erikson, 2001: 606)

While the fact that The Bonehunters are a Malazan unit who bemoan Coltaine's treatment at the hands of the noblemen is telling, it is still vital to keep in mind that there is a mutual recognition from fellow soldiers at play here. As soldiers, they can sympathise with Coltaine. That said, however, their emotive descriptive of the noblemen's actions as "snapping", "spiteful reprimand" and Coltaine's command as "hate-ridden" plays a significant part in the shifting portrayals of Coltaine from animalistic, and negative, to animalistic, yet positive. In fact, in *The Bonehunters* this

²⁰ The word is "Anabar Thy'lend. Chain of Dogs in the Malazan tongue" (Erikson, 2001: 344).

same army will defend the remaining Wickans from extermination at the hands of angry citizens of Malaz island (thereby opposing the Wickan Pogrom), even unto death. That Coltaine becomes the proverbial leader of the pack (and alpha male) is further emphasised when “Coltaine’s laughter set the dogs to wild howling, the animals suddenly close and swarming about like pallid ghosts” (Erikson, 2001: 672). In the light of Renaissance sensibilities in which madness is considered in terms of animalistic behaviour, where animal nature denotes the furthest point from reason and civilisation, Coltaine represents a threat to the established order of the Malazan Empire.²¹ As an outsider who is initially described in animalistic terms, he resides largely beyond the borders of Laseen’s control and so must be eradicated in a manner which, in the end, offers not only salvation and the continuation of aforementioned order and structure, but also serves the ‘greater good’ by enabling the Empire to gain resources.²² According to Foucault,

madness threatens modern man only with that return to the bleak world of beasts and things, to their fettered freedom. It is not on this horizon of *nature* that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recognized madness, but against a background of *Unreason*; madness did not disclose a mechanism, but revealed a liberty raging in the monstrous forms of animality. (Foucault, 2003: 78; original emphasis)

Rendered as animalistic, Coltaine is freed from the constraints of ‘civilised’ society. It is, however, also for this reason that he is put down, as one would a rabid dog. Otherness is always either elevated or denigrated. Thus, Coltaine moves from being ‘other but lesser’ (less human, less Malazan) to being ‘other but elevated’ after his

²¹ This, incidentally, is also in keeping with the depiction of Greek and Roman heroes: “Though required for his martial skill and willingness to serve in times of war or other threat, the hero often becomes, in times of peace, a danger to the civilization he is charged with protecting” (Harris & Platzner, 2008: 315).

²² Laseen’s choice to portray Coltaine as a rebel is an act that, in Role Playing terminology, would be described as Chaotic Good (whereby the ‘greater good’ is served to the exclusion of all else) alignment – where alignment is indicative of moral imperative.

death (embraced by the Malazan soldiery as one of their own, and elevated to godlike status through myth). Death is crucial here. The next chapter will discuss the way in which Coltaine's death serves the needs of the Empire, and will examine Coltaine's deviation from and conformation with the expectations of a fantasy hero.

CHAPTER FIVE:

“WE JUST REITERATE”: THE FALL

When a hero passes from his world, he undergoes not only a spiritual and physical metamorphosis but a conceptual one as well. He gains greater signification and his imprint on the world he inhabits is – after death – felt most keenly, and only then truly begins to manifest. Any hero *must* die for it is his prerogative to do so, and it is, paradoxically, in this absence constituted by death that a hero’s true presence is established.¹ It should be noted, however, that heroic death is seldom mundane. The elevated natures of heroes’ deaths once again serve as testimony to the heroic life, and their renown lives on after their passing. In this chapter, I will be examining the way in which Erikson utilises this leitmotif with particular reference to Coltaine of the Crow Clan.

It is significant that Coltaine’s heroism is gradually developed through the eyes of those fighting alongside him or even against him. This is dialectically opposed to the practice of presenting the hero’s status and fate as something predetermined and preordained. Traditionally, much like Tolkien’s Aragorn, the fantasy and mythological hero is someone who is destined to be heroic. Coltaine, however, does not have the same heroic status awarded him from the beginning. The respect he eventually wins is earned, not part and parcel of his role as hero (indeed, the Malazan troops under his command are initially resentful of being commanded by a mere tribesman). This grudging respect does not, however, only pertain to those who share allegiance with Coltaine. Sha’ik, leader of the Whirlwind rebellion against the

¹ Not only heroes die, of course: mortality is the defining factor of the human condition. It is the manner of death that is special for heroes.

Empire, holds Coltaine in high regard because of his capacity to lead and to inspire those who serve under him. Even her emissary admits to this regard when he confronts Coltaine: ““our own warriors sing to honour your prowess. You are truly an army worthy of challenging our goddess”” (Erikson, 2001: 674).

Upon seeing Coltaine for the first time, Duiker thinks to himself “*[t]hat madman is Coltaine? The Seventh’s new fist?*” (Erikson, 2001: 52; original emphasis). A captain of the Malazan Seventh describes him as “a snake ... If the High Command at Aren thinks they can dance around him, they’re in for a nasty surprise” (Erikson, 2001: 53). I have already commented in the previous chapter on the animalistic resonances of this description, but this feature is worth exploring further, since it implies that while Coltaine may be willing to serve the Empire, he will not usually bow to unreasonable demands, nor does he seem willing to play political games. Interestingly, Coltaine later demonstrates an awareness of this description, and ascribes the sentiment to Kulp, the Seventh’s cadre mage:

“The mage who yearns to lean against walls of stone views me as an adder in his bedroll. His fear of me speaks for every soldier in the Seventh Army.” [...] “I care nothing for their sentiments. If they obey my commands I in turn will serve them. If they do not, I will tear their hearts from their chest.”
(Erikson, 2001: 77)

The fact that Coltaine leads an army that seems to resist his leadership goes without saying, and the significance of this is profound when considered in the context of the genre. This manifest resistance to the hero, of course, is not an obstacle that would present itself in the case of a heroic figure such as Aragorn, son of Arathorn. In fact, from the outset, the Hobbits – while wary, since it is in their nature to be somewhat cautious of things and people who are not of the Shire – seem willing to accept

Aragorn's guidance and help. Arguably, Aragorn comes recommended by Gandalf, who has integrated himself into Shire society to such an extent that the Hobbits have not only accepted him, but trust his counsel. Aragorn's acceptance by Frodo's company points to more than this: the heroic figure is seldom mistrusted by those whom he seeks to guide, and his leadership is not often questioned. Coltaine, however, encounters mistrust from the outset, and he has to *earn* the trust of his Malazan troops. Erikson here seems to point to an obvious cultural gap between the Malazan soldiers (those of Malaz Island) and the conquered nations who now serve under the will of the Malazan Empress, and the world he creates is rife with this socio-political unease.

Heboric Light-Touch (once High Priest of Fener, the boar god of war) hears about the events surrounding Coltaine and the Seventh's withdrawal from Hissar and the beginning of a journey of four hundred leagues to Aren, and – when Kulp expresses the opinion that Coltaine and his army are dead – says “Ah, *that* Coltaine. [...] Coltaine's alive, Mage. You don't kill men like that easily” (Erikson, 2001: 318; original emphasis). Having previous knowledge of Coltaine, Heboric seems to recognise a figure of great importance when he hears of one, and expresses the view that certain people seem to defy the gods – most notably, Hood, the god of Death. Yet, the sheer impossibility of the task is never far from anyone's mind, and neither is the inevitable conclusion:

Duiker was well past astonishment at anything he saw. Like the Tithansi tribesmen he'd occasionally exchanged words with, he'd begun to believe that Coltaine was *something other than human*, that he had carved his soldiers and every refugee into unyielding avatars of the impossible. Yet for all that, there was no hope for victory. Kamist Reloe's Apocalypse consisted of the armies of four cities and a dozen

towns, countless tribes and a peasant horde as vast as an inland sea.
And it was closing in, content for the moment simply to escort
Coltaine to the Sekala River. Every current was drawing to that place.
A battle was taking shape, an annihilation.

(Erikson, 2001: 385; emphasis added)

Duiker's regard for Coltaine as "something other than human" is initially disparaging. Still, his elevated register here bears (possibly unconscious) testimony to Coltaine's dramatic destiny: a word such as "annihilation" is not used for ordinary events, and even the sonorous tone present in the description of the soldiers as "unyielding avatars of the impossible" indicates the magnitude of the situation. Like the other Malazans, he initially views Coltaine as barbaric. As Duiker witnesses various events on the journey to Aren, however, his regard for Coltaine changes, and his subsequent summations of Coltaine's character reflect his growing admiration for the Wickan chieftain. Owing to the way in which Erikson constructs his narrative, readers are conditioned into being wary of relying too heavily on Duiker's opinion, since Erikson has already illustrated that the Malazan Empire is rife with its own inaccurate judgements of character and flaws. While readers are later given many positive judgements of Coltaine's behaviour and character, the novels are constructed in a way that makes simplistic belief in any one perspective impossible, since unreliability and partiality are pervasive. The reader of Erikson's works is deliberately unsettled, and reader positioning is constantly re-negotiated in the light of emerging events and information.

By this time, rumours of Coltaine's battle prowess have spread, and while most believe that he will fail at his task, we are made aware of the way the people begin to view Coltaine. Amid growing fear, hyperbole pertaining to the Wickans runs rampant, and they become "demons" in the eyes of the Seven City rebels:

They breathed fire. Their arrows magically multiplied in mid-air. Their horses fought with uncanny intelligence. A Mezla Ascendant had been conjured and sent to Seven Cities, and now faced the Whirlwind goddess. The Wickans could not be killed. There would never come another dawn. (Erikson, 2001: 304)

The hyperbolic descriptions of Coltaine's soldiers bear witness to the 'larger-than-life' qualities of Coltaine and his entourage. Initially, no one possesses much faith in his ability to lead, and yet – as his train of refugees inches slowly towards Aren, and his soldiers fight on – a grudging admiration is wrung from even those who seek to conquer Coltaine.

[Sha'ik] said to Leoman, "You've told me there is a man to the south. A man leading a battered remnant of an army and refugees numbering tens of thousands. They do as he bids, their trust is absolute – how has that man managed that?"

Leoman shook his head.

"Have you ever followed such a leader, Leoman?"

"No."

"So you truly do not know."

"I do not know, Seer."

(Erikson, 2001: 731)

As the physical embodiment of the Whirlwind goddess and figurehead of the rebellion, Sha'ik struggles to gain the trust of her followers, and her words serve as an indication of the fact that, despite overwhelming odds, Coltaine has managed to earn the trust of *his*. Within the paradigms of Classical epics, the hero is sacrosanct, and is usually trusted by his subordinates and followed without question. Fantasy such as the works of Tolkien demonstrates an awareness of this convention, even while portraying the heroic figure as "the most unlikely person imaginable" (Tolkien, 2001: 54). There is evidence to suggest that the Wickan tribesmen serve Coltaine without reserve, although Erikson does question their motives for obedience:

“The clans do as he commands and say nothing. It is not shared certainty or mutual understanding that breeds our silence. It is awe.”
(Erikson, 2001: 670)

This suggests a degree of ambivalence in Coltaine’s relationship with his subordinates. Coltaine, it should be noted, commands an army not only of Malazan soldiery, but also of many of the Wickan tribes, and only a part of those consist of members from his own clan. The tribes do not swear fealty out of a sense of shared history with the Wickan leader, but as a consequence of the respect accorded to him by his fellow tribesmen. Interestingly, the reader is never explicitly told what it is that the Wickans admire. Readers are, instead, meant to infer these qualities from what *is* told, and to frame their responses accordingly. This is in striking contrast to the unswerving (and uncomplicated) loyalty that Aragorn inspires, as illustrated by the conversation between Aragorn and Éowyn when the diminished remnants of the fellowship set out upon the Path of the Dead, where she illustrates her awareness of his capacity as a born leader:

“Therefore I say to you, lady: Stay! For you have no errand to the South.”

“Neither have those others who go with thee. They go only because they would not be parted from thee – because they love thee.”
(Tolkien, 2001: 767)

Coltaine *earns* loyalty from the Malazans (who were once the foes of his tribe) and, I believe, this is the most telling factor in his wearing the mantle of the hero. The Malazan soldiers’ response to Coltaine at the end of the Chain of Dogs is encapsulated in the following incident:

“The standard was challenged, I see. You lost a friend defending it.”

The man blinked, then glanced around until he focused on the Seventh's standard. [...] "Hood's breath," the man growled. "Think we'd fight to save a piece of cloth on a pole?" He gestured at the body his friends knelt around. "Nordo took two arrows. We held off a squad of Semk so he could die in his own time. Those bastard tribesmen snatch wounded enemies and keep 'em alive so's they can torture 'em. Nordo wasn't gettin' none of that."

Duiker was silent for a long moment. "Is that how you want the tale told, soldier?"

The man squinted some more, then he nodded. "Just like that, Historian. We ain't just a Malazan army any more. We're Coltaine's."

"But he's a Fist."

"He's a cold-blooded lizard." The man then grinned. "But he's all ours."
(Erikson, 2001: 422)

The description of Coltaine as "a cold-blooded lizard" is conceptually tied to the description of him as an animal earlier (since both descriptions carry sub-human connotations, as explored in the previous chapter), but the qualification "he's all ours" bespeaks the admiration and identification he has won from the soldiers. It is here that the soldiers *claim* him as their own – he is, in their minds, no longer separate, but the banner that unites them and forces them to fight on. By serving as a unifying force, Coltaine presents a further threat to the Empire: the soldiers do not fight for the Empress, but for their commander. Here, Erikson deconstructs and critiques notions of blind and unwavering patriotism. Duiker questions why this is the case, since it would seem that Coltaine is not given to rousing speeches (this, too, is a departure from reader expectations of fantasy hero's since the rousing speech has become *de rigueur*):

Duiker could make no claim to know the man at his side. If the Fist was plagued by doubts he did not show it, nor, of course, would he. A commander could not reveal his flaws. With Coltaine, however, it was more than his rank dictating his recalcitrance. Even Bult had occasion to mutter that his nephew was a man who isolated himself to levels far beyond the natural Wickan stoicism.

Coltaine never made speeches to his troops, and while he was often seen by his soldiers, he did not make a point of it as many commanders did. Yet those soldiers belonged to him now, as if the Fist could fill every silent space with a physical assurance as solid as a gripping of forearms. (Erikson, 2001: 544-545)

As the Chain ponderously continues on its arduous journey across hostile territory, Duiker begins to realise other qualities in Coltaine. It should be noted, however, that the animalistic imagery does not fade, but gains new significance. One of the most indicative markers of a change in perspective occurs when one of the Malazan corporals begins to quote Coltaine:

“Do I see control on all sides, or the illusions of control?”
[Duike asked.]

List’s face twisted slightly. “Sometimes the two are one and the same. In terms of their effect, I mean. The only difference – or so Coltaine says – is that when you bloody the real thing, it absorbs the damage while the other shatter.”

Duiker shook his head. “Who would have imagined a Wickan warleader to think in such ... alchemical terms? And you, Corporal, has he made you his protégé?”

The young man looked dour. “I kept dying in the war games. Gave me lots of time to stand around and eavesdrop.”

(Erikson, 2001: 406)

This passage is quite telling in that it reveals the extent to which the Malazans have begun to appreciate Coltaine’s efforts and to pay homage to them.² Yet this is closely coupled with Coltaine’s offer of “*the marginally possible*” (Erikson, 2001: 484; original emphasis). Coltaine’s capacity to lead is often called into question, yet those under his command respect him for his “cold indifference” to every obstacle in his path (Erikson, 2001: 619). On another continent of the world, a Malazan commander

² The “war-games” are mock battles Coltaine stages using his own Wickans to engage the Malazans on opposite sides of the battle-lines (Erikson, 2001: 406). Initially perceived as meaningless endeavours to keep the soldiers occupied, the mock battles serve to develop an awareness of the unfamiliar fighting techniques that could be used by the desert tribesmen they would be facing. Gaming, here, serves a vital function in developing cognitive recognition and behaviour.

by the name of Dujek Onearm says that “[t]he Empress cannot lose such leaders as Coltaine of the Crow Clan” (Erikson, 2001: 793), and this is lofty praise indeed. Comments such as these imply that while Coltaine is not Malazan by birth, the military powers-that-be have recognised his usefulness to the Empire.

The drastic shift in perspective, from disgruntlement to admiration, is gradually developed, and the after-effects of the Chain of Dogs (as Coltaine’s train becomes known)³ are far-reaching – both for the expansionist Malazan Empire, and for the world Erikson creates as a whole.

This particular change begins, ironically, with Coltaine’s death, which sparks a series of events to rock the already fragile foundations upon which the Malazan Empire is built. Upon the gates of Aren, the refugees of the Chain of Dogs stand by and watch, powerless to prevent Coltaine’s death. The High Fist Pormqual does not send out the city’s garrison to aid the fighting remnants of the Chain of Dogs dying outside the city gates.

Duiker turned again to look out at the lone figure nailed to the cross. He still lived – they would not let him die, would not free his soul, and Kamist Reloe knew precisely what he was doing, knew the full horror of his crime, as he methodically destroyed the vessels for that soul [the crows, which have begun circling Coltaine’s crucified form]. On all sides, screaming warriors pressed close, seething on the barrow like insects.

³ The Encyclopedia Malazica refers to the Malazan Seventh as becoming known as the Chain of Dogs, but also lists the “running engagements” as the Chain of Dogs (<http://encyclopediamalazica.pbworks.com/w/page/18882389/The%20Chain%20of%20Dogs>, Retrieved October 24, 2011). I would certainly argue that the Chain of Dogs term represents both the people on the journey, and the journey itself (and, occasionally, the nobles who form part of Coltaine’s train).

Objects started striking the figure on the cross, leaving red stains. *Pieces of flesh, gods – pieces of flesh – what’s left of the army –* this was a level of cruelty that left Duiker cowering inside.

(Erikson, 2001: 856; original emphasis)

The archer, Squint, is called forward, and he fires the arrow that releases Coltaine to death’s welcoming embrace, upon which the crows descend upon his body with dramatic effect:

The crows shook the air with their eerie cries and plunged down towards the sagging figure on the cross, sweeping over the warriors crowding the slopes. The sorcery that battered at them was shunted aside, scattered by whatever force – *Coltaine’s soul?* – now rose to join the birds.

The cloud descended on Coltaine, swallowing him entire and covering the cross itself – at that distance they were to Duiker like flies swarming a piece of flesh.

And when they rose, expanding skyward, the warleader of the Crow Clan was gone. (Erikson, 2001: 858; original emphasis)

Coltaine’s soul being taken away by crows (along with his body) demonstrates an anthropological view of the inherent beliefs of ‘barbaric’ and ‘uncivilised’ tribes.⁴ It also serves in advancing Erikson’s cause of portraying events from the narrative perspectives of the characters in his books, since the nature myths upheld by people depend upon spectators in that the myths are later reconstructed and imbued with superstitious meaning by the witnesses.⁵ Erikson demonstrates his respect for the tribes’ beliefs in the powers of nature (and relativises them against other beliefs held in the Malazan Empire) by showing that these beliefs are not primitive, but possess validity within the context of his world. Thus, when the Chain of Dogs passes

⁴ When the crows are finally able to gain access to Coltaine’s body upon the crossbeams, they descend and enshroud his corpse. When they take flight a short while later, Coltaine is simply gone. Erikson caters to the magical imperative of fantasy fiction while depicting Coltaine’s death as a fitting end for a leader of the Crow Clan, and does so without patronising Coltaine’s tribal beliefs, which are here presented as simply one set of beliefs among many in the Malazan world.

⁵ A crow is a carrion bird which would feast upon the corpses left to rot on the battlefields.

through a forest in which there are no crows but only butterflies, it is only fitting that the warlock Sormo E'nath's body is covered with butterflies and – since he dies in the Vathar River in deep water – it is even possible to rationalise the disappearance of his corpse by arguing that it was drawn under by the currents of the river itself.

Sormo E'nath's death occurs in a river, and so there is a possible rational explanation for his disappearance. No such rationalisation, however, exists to explain away the disappearance of Coltaine's corpse from the crossbeams on which he is crucified.

This serves three distinct functions: first, it is in keeping with the fantastical imperative that permits the existence of magic and supernatural phenomenon in what is otherwise a perfectly 'real' world (described in terms of what we can understand as 'real'). Second, since Erikson's *modus operandi* is to construct his narrative from the perspective of the characters, it is difficult to consider this a factual account of events (the bard, Fisher, later instructs Duiker to tell a story that will make future generations weep, thus implying a certain fictionalising of events) and one is tempted to write the experience off as a fanciful embellishment of the truth. To do so, however, would be to deny the pre-eminent element that gives fantasy its appeal: the presence of magic and sorcery. Thirdly, in "free[ing Coltaine's] soul" (Erikson, 2001: 856), the hero's spirit is permitted to take flight, and death serves as the enabler for greater processes of signification. I use the term "signification" here to refer to the process by which the signifier "Coltaine" comes to mean, not only Coltaine the man, but Coltaine the legend: all his actions, quirks and reputation are attached to the proper noun denoting him. In fact, Coltaine acquires not only superhuman, but quasi-religious status through the suggestion of his impending rebirth. Coltaine is no longer the Seventh's Fist: he is now "Blackwing" (Erikson, 2001: 799) and has undergone a

metamorphosis that supersedes the signifier “Coltaine” and enables it to take on a different, and expanded, meaning. It should be noted here that the process of accruing renown and meaning in excess of mere human status is a stock-in-trade of the construction of the hero.

As the heroic story spreads, so it exceeds the sum of its parts and the legend grows. It also becomes difficult to determine at what point the embellishment ends and the facts remain. It would seem that before Duiker chronicles the events of the Chain of Dogs, the story begins to spread. However, it is only when Duiker is physically present amongst the Chain of Dogs that the narrative point of view shifts in order to detail the events surrounding the Chain’s journey, thus implying that he does (eventually) chronicle the tale, and that the narrative perspective on the Chain of Dogs and its march is his. At the same time, the reader never entirely trusts Duiker. Duiker is rendered incapable of remaining analytical and ‘objective’ by his involvement in events and his cynicism towards them. This calls into question the ideal of neutral reportage and merely reporting events. Duiker is encouraged by Fisher Kel Tath to invest emotionally in the endeavour of telling the story of Coltaine and the Chain of Dogs when Fisher tells him: “You can’t find your voice for this. Use mine” (Erikson, 2008: 242). This imbues the events with subjectivity, and if Erikson calls into question the whole idea of subjectivity and perspective, it implies that the reader cannot rely on the narrative as a factual account of the Chain of Dogs. In this way, Erikson’s narrative is aligned with poststructuralist notions of H/history: Currie notes that “[b]oth Foucault and Derrida [...] reject the idea that history is knowable through any single narrative account that would inevitably reduce an irreducible difference to a single centre” (1998: 87). Since Erikson interrogates and problematises the

possibility of historical objectivity, there can be no “single narrative account” of the Chain of Dogs.

Coltaine’s death is called “the Fall of Coltaine” (Erikson, 2001: 873). Conceptually, there is a connection with the Passion of Christ, which entails the trials and tribulations of the Christ figure and culminates in his momentous death. Christian allusions are unavoidable since, of his remaining army, Coltaine is the only figure to be crucified upon the crossbeams. Erikson, however, also displays an awareness of crucifixion as demonstration of ultimate victory over one’s enemies, as well as a tool serving to lower the morale of the remainder of an opposing army. This becomes evident when Korbolo Dom nails the ten thousand soldiers who marched out of Aren with Pormqual onto the trees lining the three-league path of the Aren Way (2001: 887-889) as a sign of their definitive defeat and humiliation. The Romans used crucifixion as a means of disincentivising and demoralising rebels, criminals and foreigners. It was considered to be the lowest form of punishment, and used as a means of degradation. The emphasis in crucifixion was always on the public display and the witnessing of the actual act.⁶

Coltaine’s death becomes the event that finally unites the Wickans and the Malazans under a common banner of loss. As I demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Coltaine is aware of the futility of his action, and yet he does not shy away from the task set before him. According to Campbell:

⁶ Crucifixion seems to go hand in hand with public displays, as do most death penalties. There is a very public element to seeing justice done (<http://www.errantskeptics.org/CrucifixionNotes.htm>, Retrieved 25 October, 2011). Here, however, the function is not to enforce justice, but to display victory.

The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave.

(Campbell, 1973: 356)

Coltaine is an example of that “composite hero of the monomyth” who is “disdained” by his society (Campbell, 1973: 37). And yet, it is his death that unifies his army, and even serves this function beyond death (Tavore uses Coltaine’s memory to keep her own army together as they traverse Coltaine’s path in reverse – from Aren to Raraku).

Subsequent to the death of Coltaine (or The Fall, as it becomes known), various cults emerge to pay homage to the fallen hero. The captain of the ship *Undying Gratitude*, Shurq Elalle, finds an amphora on an abandoned vessel at sea. Removed from the original context, she cannot identify the images depicted on it:

The amphora itself was a gorgeous piece of work, Shurq observed. Foreign, the glaze cream in colour down to the inverted beehive base, where the coils were delineated in black geometric patterns on gleaming white. But it was the image painted on the shoulder and belly that captured her interest. Down low on the one side there was a figure, nailed to an X-shaped cross. Whirling out from the figure’s upturned head, there were crows. Hundreds, each one profoundly intricate, every detail etched – crows, flooding outward – or perhaps inward – to mass on the amphora’s broad shoulders, encircling the entire object. Converging to feed on the hapless man? Fleeing him like his last, dying thoughts?

(Erikson, 2007: 82)

The discovery of this depiction of Coltaine on a ship far beyond the Seven Cities continent on which he died indicates that the legend is – at this point in the narrative – beginning to spread, even to such distant lands as the Lether. Shurq’s misinterpretation regarding the depiction is understandable, considering that whispers of Coltaine and his Chain of Dogs have only begun to be heard on distant winds, and

readers are given the impression that such a misinterpretation would be corrected once people begin to talk of the new designs on pots and amphorae that have reached them from foreign shores.

As the remnants of Tadore's army camp outside the city of Y'Ghatan, one of the soldiers explores the ruins and discovers another depiction of Coltaine:

The local style, Bottle had seen from the villages they had passed through, was much more elegant, elongated with cream or white glazing on the necks and rims and faded red on the body, adorned with full-toned and realistic images. Bottle paused at seeing one such shard, a body-piece, on which had been painted the Chain of Dogs. He picked it up, wiped dust from the illustrated scene. Part of Coltaine was visible, affixed to the cross of wood, overhead a wild flurry of black crows. Beneath him, dead Wickans and Malazans, and a cattle-dog impaled on a spear. A chill whispered along his spine and he let the shard drop. (Erikson, 2006: 206)

The scene depicted is much the same as the one on the amphora found by Shurq, and yet here Bottle understands the significance of the depiction, since he is one of the Malazans.⁷ His discovery, like Shurq's, demonstrates that the legend of Coltaine is being depicted, not by Malazans, but by the people of the Seven Cities against whose rebellion Coltaine was fighting. That is to say, the very people who had risen up in rebellion against the Malazan Empire now embrace one of Malaz's heroes, and make him their own. This process mirrors Coltaine's acceptance on the part of the Malazans on a grand scale, and yet – from their perspective – this is an insult to Coltaine since the very people whom he once fought against are those who now claim him as their own. The process of constructing celebrity is relativised here by Erikson,

⁷ Since Bottle resides in the same cultural context as the events depicted on the shards, these have a great significance for him.

who reveals its dependence on a network of shifting socio-political relationships rather than being a matter of merely giving honour where it is due.

This is further reinforced when, while awaiting the arrival of their transport fleet, Keneb recalls walking through the marketplaces of a Seven Cities town.

Broad-bellied pots crowding market stalls, their flanks a mass of intricately painted yellow butterflies, swarming barely seen figures and all sweeping down the currents of a silt-laden river. Scabbards bearing black feathers. A painted line of dogs along a city wall, each beast linked to the next by a chain of bones. Bazaars selling reliquaries purportedly containing remnants of great heroes of the Seventh Army. Bult, Lull, Chenned and Duiker.⁸ And, of course, Coltaine himself.

When one's enemy embraces the heroes on one's own side, one feels strangely ... cheated, as if the theft of life was but the beginning, and now the legends themselves have been stolen away, transformed in ways beyond control. *But Coltaine belongs to us. How dare you do this?* Such sentiments, sprung free from the dark knot in his soul, made no real sense. Even voicing them felt awkward, absurd. The dead are ever refashioned, for they have no defence against those who would use or abuse them – who they were, what their deeds meant. And this was the anguish ... this ... *injustice*.

These new cults with their grisly icons, they did nothing to honour the Chain of Dogs. They were never intended to. Instead, they seemed to Keneb pathetic efforts to force a link with past greatness, with a time and a place of momentous significance.

(Erikson, 2006: 483; original emphasis)

Keneb's act of laying claim to Coltaine is also ironic, since Keneb never directly served under Coltaine, and was in Aren when the Chain of Dogs arrived outside the city's gates. He acknowledges Coltaine by virtue of the fact that they both serve the Malazan Empire, and this is directly contrasted with the initial attitude of the Malazans to Coltaine, detailed in the previous chapter. Here, once again, readers are presented with yet another instance of the Malazans claiming Coltaine as their own,

⁸ Here, again, we find a sardonic commentary on the nature of human civilisation on the part of Erikson, since readers know that Duiker is alive and well, and living in Darujhistan. The allusion here pokes fun at the human tendency to collect relics pertaining to great historical figures, in much the same way as our own world contains numerous relics of, for example, John the Baptist's head.

and Keneb's thoughts "*Coltaine belongs to us*" (Erikson, 2006: 483) is an echo of the soldier's words in *Deadhouse Gates*: "[h]e's a cold-blooded lizard. [...] But he's all ours" (Erikson, 2001: 422).

As becomes evident, Coltaine and the Chain of Dogs spur a new age in the design of pottery and amphorae. This is, however, not to trivialise Coltaine's journey 'down' to the level of common household objects, but rather to demonstrate the ubiquity of his legend, as well as the use of the objects as means to memorialise his journey and death. The amphora, here, represents a process of glorification, rather than a descent to the banal. In this incident, Erikson makes a pertinent comment on the contemporary obsession with and exaltation of celebrity status, and also deconstructs the opposition between the 'high culture' of the heroic narrative and the 'low culture' of consumer commodities in the marketplace. The events surrounding Coltaine also give birth to various cults, and the Malazans are similarly highly critical of these.⁹ This criticism serves to emphasise their complete acceptance of Coltaine as one of their own. The cults themselves, however, are also tools used by the Empress Laseen to further the Wickan pogrom. In an epigraph¹⁰ entitled *The Year of Ten Thousand Lies*, which details the events of the Wickan pogrom, the writer (identified only as Kayessian) states the following:

⁹In *The Bonehunters*, readers are presented with another such shrine: "A low mound of stones was visible to one side of the rough track – another sad victim of this pilgrimage – and from this one rose a shaft bedecked in crow feathers" (Erikson, 2006: 689).

¹⁰ Erikson's novels are rife with passages such as these, which indicate that the events detailed in the series are but minor parts of a larger whole in the history of his world. Moreover, they point to a strange anomaly, whereby readers are given the impression that – in a chronological sequence of linear time progression – the world in which Erikson writes continues beyond the point at which his narrative ends. That is to say that the events of his narrative occur, for example, somewhere in the middle, and throughout the narration of these events are found references to treatises, poetry, and allusions to texts that are written long *after* the series culminates in the tenth book, and even long *before* the narrative begins in the first book of the series. It is, thus, an attempt to portray a much broader history of the world than that which is contained within the pages of his ten-book series. Incidents such as these indicate a metanarrative at play in Erikson's own works, by which historians in the world comment on events. Erikson's world thus – in a sense – gains a life of its own, and he is not the creator of the world, but merely someone compiling the writings that narrate the key events of its history.

Who will deny that it is our nature to believe the very worst in our fellow kind? Even as cults rose and indeed coalesced into a patronomic [*sic*] worship – not just of Coltaine, the Winged One, the Black Feather, but too of the Chain of Dogs itself – throughout Seven Cities, with shrines seeming to grow from the very wastes along that ill-fated trail, shrines in propitiation to one dead hero after another: Bult, Lull, Mincer, Sormo E'nath, even Baria and Mesker Setral of the Red Blades; and to the Foolish Dog clan, the Weasel clan and of course the Crow and the Seventh Army itself; while at Gelor Ridge, in an ancient monastery overlooking the old battle site, a new cult centred on horses was born – even as this vast fever of veneration gripped Seven Cities, so certain agents in the heart of the Malazan Empire set loose, among the commonry, tales purporting the very opposite: that Coltaine had betrayed the empire; that he had been a renegade, secretly allied with Sha'ik. After all, had the countless refugees simply stayed in their cities, accepting the rebellion's dominion; had they not been dragged out by Coltaine and his blood-thirsty Wickans; and had the Seventh's Mage Cadre leader, Kulp, not so mysteriously disappeared, thus leaving the Malazan Army vulnerable to sorcerous machinations and indeed manipulations of the Wickan witches and warlocks – had not all this occurred, there would have been no slaughter, no terrible ordeal of crossing half a continent exposed to every predating half-wild tribe in the wastes. And, most heinous of all, Coltaine had then, in league with the traitorous Imperial Historian, Duiker, connived to effect the subsequent betrayal and annihilation of the Aren Army, led by the naïve High Fist Pormqual who was the first victim of that dread betrayal. Why else, after all, would those very rebels of Seven Cities take to the worship of such figures, if not seeing in Coltaine and the rest heroic allies ...

... In any case, whether officially approved or otherwise, the persecution of Wickans within the empire flared hot and all-consuming, given such ample fuel ... (Erikson, 2006: 596)

The sequence of “shrines in propitiation to one dead hero after another” in this passage emphasises the transitory and fleeting nature of heroes and heroic action. The future historian's summation of events has particular significance when considered alongside Erikson's imperative to portray the history of a world, in which events are narrated, re-narrated and twisted to suit the prevailing propaganda of the time. In *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1987), Hayden White articulates a similarly revisionist view of history when he states that

there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are; verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences. (White, 1987: 82; original emphasis)

In *Reaper's Gale*, Corabb (formerly a soldier in service to Leomen of the Flails and the Whirlwind Rebellion) considers the nature of truth:

Gesler ain't convinced, so the truth is, no-one knows the truth. About Aren. Just like, I suppose, pretty soon no-one will know the truth about Coltaine and the Chain of Dogs, or – spirits below – the Adjunct and the Bonehunters at Y'Ghatan, and at Malaz City.

He felt a chill whisper through him then, as if he'd stumbled onto something profound. About history. As it was remembered, as it was told and retold. As it was lost to lies when the truth proved too unpleasant. (Erikson, 2007: 560; original emphasis)

Erikson's pessimistic view of human history and the impossibility of portraying it objectively is conceptually linked to the notion of the hero and his ultimate fate. For Erikson, the hero is merely a tool in the hands of those who wield power, and his true destiny is to die. "Heroic stands", Gesler tells us in *The Bonehunters*, "usually end up with not a single hero left standing. Held out longer than expected, but the end was the same anyway. The end's always the same" (Erikson, 2006: 237). Harris and Platzner come to a similar conclusion:

For the hero, the final burden of his humanity is the necessity of confronting his own mortality. In the polarities of the hero's experiences, nature and culture, and the human and the divine, converge to produce a being who is contradictory in his very essence.

Protesting this condition, the ancient Sumerian hero Gilgamesh asks of the sun god, "If this quest is not to be achieved, why did you create in me the irresistible urge to attempt it?" The hero of Greek mythology, from Heracles to Achilles and Odysseus, is similarly trapped by his very nature into undertaking, and usually achieving, the impossible – paradoxically pursuing death in order to achieve

immortality, a potentially tragic endeavor [*sic*].
(Harris & Platzner, 2008: 313-314)

Erikson demonstrates an awareness of the inevitability of the hero's demise: "*heroes die [...] it is their fate*" (Erikson, 2007: 609; original emphasis). This destiny applies not only to Coltaine of the Crow Clan, but to many of the other heroes featured in Erikson's works. With the same cynicism he has demonstrated throughout the series, Erikson's character demonstrates a wry awareness of the traditions associated with story-telling:

The quest was drawing to a close. Just as well. Nothing worse, as far as [Udinaas] was concerned, than those legends of old when the stalwart, noble adventurers simply went on and on, through one absurd episode after another, with each one serving some arcane function for at least one of the wide-eyed fools, as befitted the shining serrated back of mortality that ran the length of the story, from head to tip of that long, sinuous tail. *Legends that bite. Yes, they all do. That's the point of them.*

But not this one, not this glorious quest of ours. No thunderous message driving home like a spike of lightning between the eyes. No tumbling cascade of fraught scenes ascending like some damned stairs to the magical tower perched on the mountain's summit, where all truths were forged into the simple contest of hero against villain.

Look at us! What heroes? We're all villains, and that tower doesn't even exist. (Erikson, 2007: 613; original emphasis)

Coltaine, along with the veritable plethora of other heroic characters found within the pages of Erikson's fiction, experiences death as the final stage of heroic development. Here, as with many of the Greek heroes, death serves as a means of enabling rebirth. The way in which Coltaine dies is already reminiscent of Christian allegory, and the fact that Coltaine will be reborn and will one day become a great warrior once again alludes to the element of prophecy associated with the heroic return. After his death, the myriad cults give credence to Coltaine's status as newly emerged messiah, and – as in the Christ mythos – Coltaine is vilified as well. There are – as per the Christ

figure in Christian allegory – distinctly polarised views regarding Coltaine: opinion is divided as to whether he be messiah or pariah, maniac or marvel, and this, too, is a feature (and indeed function) of his heroic status (as well as Erikson’s particular revisioning of the mantle of the hero). No mere mortal would attract such intense devotion or contempt, and the binarisms, here, function to emphasise the extraordinary nature of his personae.

In keeping with the mythos of a messianic figure, Coltaine displays the same capacity for martyrdom of self in order to serve the greater good. His selfless act – and subsequent death – brings about the salvation of his followers. In the unusual nature of his death and the prophetic allusions to his rebirth (as well as the mentioning of crows descending upon the figure of a Wickan woman), Coltaine conforms to the convention of the heroic figure. True to the conventions of the heroic tradition, Erikson permits his hero a form of longevity that manifests, with delightful irony, in the hero’s death, and the legends that spring up around Coltaine’s name after his death are typical of the heroic figure even though the strategies of his representation diverge significantly from received traditions of heroism.

CHAPTER SIX:

“REMEMBER US”

*And now the page before us blurs.
An age is done. The book must close.
We are abandoned to history.
Raise high one more time the tattered standard
of the Fallen. See through the drifting smoke
to the dark stains upon the fabric.
This is the blood of our lives, this is the
payment of our deed, all soon to be
forgotten.
We were never what people could be.
We were only what we were.*

Remember us

The above poem is found on the last page of *The Crippled God* (Erikson, 2011: n.p.; original emphasis), book ten of Erikson’s mammoth series. It is striking that Erikson ends his series with these words from an unnamed collective (“*us*”). It thus represents a view from the Other, but whether this is the Malazan soldiers, citizens of the Empire, or even the denizens of the world at large is never made clear. This deliberate obfuscation allows for speculation, but the poem’s use of the pronoun draws the reader’s attention and implies a certain level of complicity in their fate. The collective form, here, draws attention to the fact that they are “*abandoned to history*”, implying a state of being forgotten, yet urges for the opposite – for remembrance and acknowledgement. The implication is that being acknowledged by history entails an element of polite forgetfulness. The speaking “*us*”, however, calls not only for acknowledgement, but also for remembrance, and, thus, for continuation rather than finality. This, it should be noted, is not accomplished through a demand for acknowledgement and exaltation, but for a recognition of shared humanity. The poem places people at the centre stage of the narrative, as though people and their concepts of themselves (as well as others’ perceptions of them) are the most important feature of the entire war and upheaval which

Erikson has written about in the past ten books. No more fitting last words could have been written, since the lines “[w]e were never what people could be. / We were only what we were” pay homage to the task which Erikson undertakes in his series: to write a piece of fiction in which fantasy heroes are portrayed not as exceedingly good representations of what man should aspire to, but as characters who do what is asked of them, regardless of the odds.

The poem’s centring of the human, observing self in relation to a historical context is also evident when, in *Toll the Hounds*, Samar Dev considers the nature of one of Erikson’s ‘heroes’, Karsa Orlong, and notes:

Karsa Orlong [...] thrived on an audience. *Witness*, he would say, in full expectation of just that. He wanted his every deed observed, as if each set of eyes existed solely to mark Karsa Orlong, and the minds behind them served, to the exclusion of all else, to recount to all what he had done, what he had said, what he had begun and what he had ended. *He makes us his history. Every witness contributes to the narrative – the life, the deeds of Toblakai – a narrative to which we are, each of us, bound.*

(Erikson, 2008: 352; original emphasis)

Erikson’s characters are either thrust, all unwillingly, into the limelight of heroism, or stride boldly forward to assume their place and are unvaryingly subjected to the observations or witness of others. Throughout his fiction, the leitmotif of witness to historical events sings its refrain over and over. Each character within the pages of the series stands as witness to another. Duiker, especially, serves as a means to explore notions of historical empiricism and narrative subjective perspective.¹ For such, Erikson would seem to imply, is the true nature of history: not that it stands alone, but that it comprises myriad views. Likewise, Fiddler serves as a critique of the Empire’s ruthless assimilation and sublimation of conquered cultures in his scathing

¹ This becomes most evident when his method of chronicling is critiqued by the bard, Fisher Kel Tath. As a bard, Fisher’s concerns lie with the emphasis of the human deeds, experiences and accomplishments, rather than, say, a chronicling of the wider socio-political ramifications.

condemnation of cultural imperialism. Throughout the course of the narrative, Fiddler serves as the means of ‘tracing’ the development of the Bridgeburners into the fighting force that becomes known as the Bonehunters. He is, thus, the voice representing an evolving history as it pertains to the soldiers who served under the previous regime, and their fealty to the new one. The voice of the disillusioned and disgruntled veteran belongs, largely, to Fiddler, while Coltaine is the focus of Duiker’s failed attempt to chronicle the events surrounding the Chain of Dogs, and, as such, he represents that which cannot be chronicled without regard for the human dimension.

In a fictional social canvas featuring many players, Coltaine is pre-eminent by virtue of his actions and the way in which he is perceived. This dissertation has explored whether his stature qualifies for him for the mantle of the hero according to the conventional heroic representation in fantasy as a whole. In the course of my dissertation, I have examined the way in which Coltaine simultaneously conforms to the imperative governing the construction of the fantasy hero (through a comparison between Coltaine, Aragorn, Pug, Thomas Covenant, and Frodo), and I have also highlighted areas of dissonance.

There are marked differences between the way in which traditional fantasy conceives of the heroic figure and how Erikson has chosen to portray this particular hero. As with fantasists like Tolkien and Feist, the heroic figure undertakes a psychological journey towards maturity, potency and deeper insight. Erikson’s construction of Coltaine, however, is as an individual who is already fully competent, and does not truly change much, although others’ perceptions of him do. This process of re-evaluation has been extensively discussed in the fourth chapter of my dissertation. In most fantasy, specifically Tolkien’s work, the heroic quest is clearly defined as the most important event in the narrative, and the parameters for the story are set.

In Erikson's world, though, no quest exists as outstanding; Coltaine's journey is part of a wider historical context, and merely sets the stage for later events. When Coltaine is eventually reborn, the novel alludes to his future training by one of the Wickans who survived the Chain of Dogs, thus ensuring the continuation of his tribe, clan, and cultural beliefs. Another way in which Coltaine impacts on future events is the rejection of the Wickan Pogrom on the part of Tavore's army, which, in turn, leads to Tavore separating from the Empire and conducting her own military campaign. Like many other fantasy heroes, Coltaine possesses macho qualities, and his prowess as a military leader does set him apart, but Erikson does not leave the mammoth task of leading an army solely up to his much-beleaguered hero, and does permit him a council with which to discuss tactics and strategies. Generally speaking, in fantasy (as well as the much older epics, such as *The Odyssey*, and *The Iliad*) heroism inheres in the successful completion of a heroic quest, but in Erikson's fiction heroism inheres in others' perceptions, and the hero is constructed not as a function of his success, but as a product of testimony, witness and chronicle.

Traditional fantasy utilises heroism as a value, and value judgements are explicit from the perspective of a strong authorial presence; the events are narrated and focus on the act of heroism involving personal sacrifice for the greater good. The end of this type of narrative results in some kind of apocalypse or rebirth for both the hero and the world in which he resides. Erikson toys with these traditions and turns them upon their head. Heroism, in his writing, is more contingent than inherent and arises as a result of circumstances. Value judgements are inferred and situational, and Coltaine's sacrifice of himself for the soldiers and refugees seems, as seen through the eyes of the historian Duiker, futile and unnecessary. In fact, the vast majority of the Wickan tribe is wiped out in Coltaine's last stand, and the remnants are battered and disheartened, so that his accomplishment in rescuing the refugees

is counterbalanced by the loss of his comrades. The authorial voice in Erikson's work is masked by the use of multiple perspectives, dialogue and conversation. The events here are focalised (and presented through various characters' perceptions), rather than narrated. There is no truly apocalyptic outcome, and the flow of history continues unabated. While there is evidence that the hero is reborn, according to Erikson, the *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series will not see Coltaine again.² This particular fact can be contrasted with the link between Middle-earth's destiny and Aragorn's existence as the prime representative of dawning of the Age of Man, as explained by Saruman: "The Elder Days are gone. The Middle Days are passing. The Younger Days are beginning. The time of the Elves is over, but our time is at hand: the world of Men, which We must rule" (Tolkien, 2001: 252). It is my argument that, in his treatment of the hero, Erikson revises the traditional fantasy hero and the genre as a whole.

The figure of the hero is crucial in fantasy narrative, and Pratchett displays a keen awareness of this with his usual sardonic wit when considering the figure of Rincewind in *The Last Continent* (1999):

"You know what to do," said the old man.
"Him? What a wonga," said the bird. "I've been lookin' at him. He's not even heroic. He's just in the right place at the right time."
The old man indicated that this was maybe the definition of a hero.
"All right, but why not go and get the thing yerself [*sic*]?" said the bird.
"You've gotta have heroes," said the old man.
(Pratchett, 1999: 71-72)

Erikson's portrayal of Coltaine would appear to concur with Pratchett's account of the hero's *raison d'être*, but his method of presenting his chosen hero demonstrates considerable

² (<http://encyclopediamalazica.pbworks.com/w/page/18881782/Is%20Coltaine%20coming%20back>, Retrieved November 12, 2011).

innovation. By re-constructing and re-presenting the hero as he does, Erikson changes the way in which the hero is represented within the context of contemporary fantasy.

Specifically, the construction of the hero figures within Erikson's series of books from several perspectives (none of them omniscient and all of them partial) lends new depth and insight to fantasy characterisation previously unexplored by many of the fantasy genre's writers. Erikson constructs his world through the liminal characters encountered throughout the narrative, and this process allows readers the freedom to choose and engage with the text on a level that is not predicated on dictatorial authorial presence. Characters in his works are constructed from far more realistic perspectives, and seem more human than godlike superhumans. The emphasis, here, remains distinctly on heroes as people who do what needs to be done, rather than being the product of divine intervention and destiny. Erikson's approach to heroes is focused on their distinctly human and fallible nature, and this, in turn, allows for a far greater level of empathy and identification on the part of the reader.

There are, however, numerous other means with which to engage with Erikson's fiction, other than focusing on the portrayal of the heroic figure, as I have done. In a review of *Gardens of the Moon*, Charles de Lint raises the prominent bone of contention among feminist readers of fantasy texts. He states that one of the flaws in Erikson's work is

[t]he lack of any believable female characters. There are certainly women present, but they are either stoic warriors, assassins, and mages (basically men in women's bodies), courtesans, or in one case, a young girl possessed by gods and turned into a killing machine. Except for one strong female lead, the mage Tattersail, there's no distinct female perspective to set the female characters apart from their male counterparts. (De Lint, 2000: 31)

I would counter that Erikson has chosen to set most of his fantasy in the ranks of the military, where a female soldier is forced to be "masculine", since the realities of life on the march do

not cater for physical inferiority, concerns with personal hygiene, or child-bearing. Within these constraints, Erikson treats his female soldiers with the same respect accorded to the males: they carry their own packs and supplies, and they can give as good as they get when it comes to the trading of insults and injuries as a means of establishing camaraderie. I fail to understand the way in which De Lint would wish to see female soldiers portrayed, other than as “stoic warriors”. By contrast, Karen Miller is much more directly concerned with the precise re-conceptualisation of the feminine in the fantasy mode. In the first book of her *Godspeaker* trilogy, *Empress*, her main character (who names herself Hekat) defaces herself by shredding her once-beautiful face in order to avoid recognition and re-capture by slavers. This is a distinct re-evaluation of the stereotypes of fantasy femininity (in which female warriors are often displayed wearing little more than chain-mail bikinis).

I have also not discussed the possibilities of a historically based reading of the series, and yet there is a clear indication of the potential for research into the development of the fantasy genre, and the writers’ treatment of their subjects within the particular cultural paradigms of their times. I have but alluded to the ways in which fantasy exists as a distinctly marginalised genre, but there is still much to be said on this particular subject. Furthermore, Erikson’s emphasis on the ‘working class’ of the military ranks, rather than, say, the privileged upper class, is yet another factor to consider with regard to New Historicism and the ways in which literature reflects social paradigms. One could, however, argue that Tolkien’s influence has played a large part in depicting the plight of the underdog, rather than privileging the sons of kings, when it comes to the fantasy realm, and that the genre as a whole has diverged from the ancient epics in this regard.

There is also much to be said about Jungian archetypes within the context, not only of Erikson's fantasy, but the genre as a whole. Fantasy and archetypes have become so closely aligned that current gaming utilises these archetypes in the construction of each character class.

While my approach has been primarily intertextual, I have limited it to an intertextual dialogue between Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series and a small number of other fantasy works. The purpose of this dissertation was not to provide a definitive comparison of heroic traits across the entire corpus of fantasy – a project, clearly, that is beyond the scope of a study of this sort. Constraints of space aside, I have been selective in my choices because, while many (if not all) fantasy texts focus on the hero, Feist's use of Pug is particularly intriguing by virtue of the fact that Pug represents the cognitive aspect of the hero. This conforms to most other depictions of mage heroes in fantasy, owing to the fact that magic-centred heroes specialise in engaging their adversaries on a ratiocinative rather than physical level. Tomas, by contrast, embodies the physical attributes of the fantasy hero. The two heroic figures in Tolkien's work, Aragorn and Frodo, are both representative of different aspects of the hero. Aragorn is an embodiment of the 'fearless leader' leitmotif in fantasy, whereas Frodo represents the 'unlikely hero' archetype. Similarly, Donaldson utilises the 'unlikely hero' in a different way, but his use is tainted by the notion of rebirth when it comes to the leprous Thomas Covenant. Each of these aspects of heroism is, to some extent, present in Erikson's work, with particular reference to the way in which he chooses to construct his heroic figures. Given that these individuals are the composite parts of multiple perspectives, characterisation possesses a distinctly layered aspect, lending new depth to fantasy fiction writing techniques.

As I have shown, there is plenty of scope for development of the research adumbrated in this study, and it is my wish that the genre be explored within the context of the contemporary fantasy writers emerging on to the market, newly hatched and waiting for a discerning reader who will take up the banner and venture forth into unexplored and potentially dangerous territory, armed not with a sword, but a primed and ready keyboard.

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